

Submission to the State Government Inquiry into unconventional gas industry in Victoria

Submission by Ms Eve Stocker

I am making this submission as an individual person and not on behalf of an organisation.
The submission is not confidential.

I am an Australian citizen. I am a resident of Victoria since 1976. Before that I lived in Sydney and Canberra.

It is my firm and considered view that the state government should be putting its efforts, attentions and resources into research, development and investment in clean, renewable forms of energy and that all aspects of the unconventional gas industry in Victoria, including coal seam gas, tight gas and shale gas, should be permanently stopped before they begin.

Scientific information relating to climate change strongly indicates that exploration, mining, extraction and burning of all types of fossil fuels must be avoided if we want to escape increasingly intense and disastrous climate occurrences such as drought, bush fires, wild fires, rain and flooding, cyclones, hurricanes and typhoons, sea-level rise and coastal erosion.

Environmental effects of exploring for and extracting coal seam gas through the process of hydraulic fracturing are deadly and unacceptable for any human society. Evidence from overseas and Australia indicates the risks are too great to allow coal seam gas extraction to be carried out. Ground water contamination, spillages, contamination of the environment by the mixture of toxic and dangerous chemicals used in the process – the risk of all of these things happening is far too great. I doubt that anyone living in a regional area would want to take the risk of their water becoming too contaminated to drink or to use on crops, or farm paddocks or grazing land being degraded or ruined through chemical or oil spills, or by having drilling sites nearby.

Regional Victoria is known worldwide for its very high quality produce -- fruit, vegetables, nuts, meat, dairy products, wine – among other things, and this and all the related jobs would all be put at risk with the development of an unconventional gas industry in this state. The produce, and the livelihoods of all the farmers, orchardists, cheese makers, wine makers, bakers, etc., are much more valuable and durable than any unconventional gas industry could be. Fossil fuels are a declining part of the economy and very bad investments. There are no possible regulations that could make unconventional gas exploration and extraction acceptable and compatible with other productive uses of the land; they simply cannot co-exist, judging from evidence from overseas.

Tourism is also a significant part of the Victorian economy and there are many beautiful and wonderful places where visitors can stay and involve themselves in activities ranging from skiing and snow sports, to hiking, bicycling, swimming, fishing, enjoying the natural environment and the character and history of Victoria's regional towns and cities. All these activities and interests need to remain coal-seam-gas-free in order to provide tourist value and benefits into the future. An unconventional gas industry would put all these activities, environments and jobs at risk.

Dangers and health risks to people and animals living in areas near unconventional gas exploration and extraction are very high, with residents in surrounding areas experiencing respiratory problems, rashes, bad smells in the atmosphere, and chronic immune system problems, among other things.

The risks are too high and not worth taking. We do not have adequate information about the possible impacts on native flora and fauna, including bird life.

Permanently banning the development of an unconventional gas industry in Victoria would provide people and investors with a sense of certainty into the future; they would know that their work and environment would remain stable and have opportunities to grow.

I sincerely wish the government will not travel the declining fossil fuel path, but instead put its resources and trust in clean, renewable fuels and energy sources, as this is truly the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to put forward my views on unconventional gas industry in Victoria, and thank you to the Inquiry for considering them.

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