

Submission to Inquiry on Unconventional Gas in Victoria

Thank you for the opportunity to inform the Parliamentary Committee about my opposition to unconventional gas mining. My name is Peter Millard and I am a retired project manager living in Bairnsdale, Victoria.

I am strongly opposed to the development of an unconventional gas extraction industry anywhere, and particularly in an agricultural area such as Victoria.

Any person with an understanding of the precautionary principle will be concerned about the potential impacts of the ever increasing CO2 concentration in the atmosphere, and will be aware of and supportive of moves to shift to a non-carbon based economy.

The world already has vastly too much readily accessible fossil fuels to be used without disastrous consequences to humanity, so adding to that excessive reserve is irresponsible. CSG or other non-conventional gases have been shown to be only marginally lower in CO2 emissions than existing sources because of the energy expending in extracting them and due to emissions of methane, so there is minimal environmental benefit in substituting CSG for coal or other existing sources.

In the case of Victoria, we have proven gas reserves in Bass Strait to last for another 50-60 years and within that timeframe the world will have to have shifted to a non-carbon based economy. Even if it has not, there are sound grounds for retaining any CSG reserve for Victorians, for use if critical energy shortages should arise when Bass Strait gas is exhausted. There are no grounds for extracting and exporting this gas.

My specific objections are as follows:

1. There is no shortage of gas in Victoria and thus no reason to access these reserves.
2. Any reserves we do have should be left in the ground forever, or at absolute minimum held for future generations should a critical energy situation ever arise.
3. The current pressure to source gas in Australia is driven by illogical decisions to build uneconomic gas liquefaction plants in Queensland for exports, and there is no way the Victorian environment should be sacrificed to the greed of those companies and the Queensland Government.
4. The nature of unconventional gas extraction is like no other industry, it relies on huge numbers of wells each extracting from a relatively small area, and many of these wells penetrate the underground aquifers, turning them into pin-cushions – simple statistics implies that with this vast number of wells some will fail and pollute our aquifers, and once an aquifer is polluted there is no way to recover it.
5. The industry provides little benefit to local communities, the drilling is done by outside contractors, the materials are provided from outside of the community, there is minimal employment once the wells are in production, and the rural landscape is industrialised forever.
6. The past history of the oil and gas industry in Victoria and South Australia indicates that they have no capacity for decommissioning and rehabilitation, and it has been shown many times that Governments do not have the power or capacity to ensure corporations properly remediate the damage caused by their activities, especially when dealing with so many individual wells dispersed across the landscape.
7. Unlike earlier oil and gas exploration in Australia which has primarily been in remote sparsely inhabited regions, the unconventional gas industry seeks to destroy productive rural landscapes in areas with significant population bases and tourism attributes. These areas should be strictly quarantined.
8. Perhaps a minimum 20 kilometre exclusion zone around any grazing or cropping property might be considered, but even then the potential to pollute the underlying aquifer still puts these farms at risk.
9. The Victorian position should be that accessing of unconventional gas deposits is banned permanently. Our minimum position should be that of the Victorian Farmers' Federation, i.e. that the current moratorium should be extended by five years, by which time many of the current uncertainties and claims about the industry will be resolved.

Yours faithfully,

Peter Millard

