

Submission to the Victorian Legislative Council's inquiry into the possibility of an onshore unconventional gas industry in Victoria.

Addressing the Terms of Reference, point 3a

I submit that the Victorian Government should not allow exploration for nor extraction of unconventional gas in highly productive agricultural areas such as South Gippsland.

Because of the climate and fertile soil in South Gippsland a variety of foods such as vegetables, grapes and beef are produced, but the major industry is dairying. There are four dairy factories in South Gippsland alone, and the largest, Murray Goulburn Co-operative, processes around 400 million litres of milk annually, and supplies a variety of products for domestic and export markets.

Our main concern is the safety of our water supply. All agriculture relies on water, but use in dairying is very intensive, needing large amounts of drinking water for the cows, as well as maintenance of hygiene through washing of equipment and hosing yards twice daily. For this we rely on pumping water from the underground aquifers.

There are two main areas of concern. The first is that the vast amounts of water needed in the actual fracking process would be taken from the aquifers, leaving them greatly depleted. The second is that the remaining water could be contaminated by the chemical laden flowback water. The gas companies assure us that they could extract the gas quite safely, that there would be no diminishing of the aquifers nor pollution from residual chemicals. However there have been instances of leakage in other states and it would be unwise to risk this happening in fertile food-producing areas in Victoria.

Another major concern in South Gippsland is the periodic occurrence of moderate-strength seismic activity. Even if the process had been set up safely with regards to the above concerns and pipes with concrete casings were in place, a strong earth tremor could rupture the casings and allow leakage to occur.

For these reasons I ask that the Victorian Government not allow an unconventional gas industry to be developed in this area.

Wendy Evans