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The Secretary,
Environment & Planning Committee,
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SUBMISSION

From Kendall Lovett,
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To the INQUIRY INTO UNCONVENTIONAL GAS

Back in 2012 the then Minister for Resources & Energy, Martin Ferguson, was busy telling us that Australia's CSG reserves are found in different geology to that in the United States and only a minority of CSG wells in Australia require hydraulic fracturing (fracking). We were assured that here CSG development is managed in a way that meets environmental, safety and health regulations.

Then the Sydney Morning Herald (14 November 2012) informed us that an energy white paper was forecasting a massive expansion of Australian coal seam gas (CSG) drilling and has called for environmental objections to be removed to make large-scale gas extraction easier.

As well, the ABC's 7.30 Report at roughly the same time revealed that two Australian researchers from the Southern Cross University had uncovered some of the highest concentrations of methane, found anywhere, in the air leaking up from the ground in a CSG field in South East Queensland. For years the CSG industry has been telling Queenslanders and others in advertisements that "fugitive emissions" from fracking are negligible. 'It's cleaner. It's safer. It's jobs. It's the future.'

So the Minister was wrong and the industry was not to be trusted. Not enough research into CSG's chemical contamination of the atmosphere, ground water and the health risk to workers and the local farming community --and the white paper expected the removal of environmental objections to CSG drilling to make large scale gas extraction easier. And, obviously that's what has occurred.

I have been following some of the controversial fracking developments in the United States and wrote to Minister Ferguson at the time about 'Horizontal hydrofracking for natural gas in the Marcellus Shale region of New York State which has the potential to result in the production of large amounts of waste materials containing Radium-226 and Radium-228 in both solid and liquid mediums. This information was contained in a report for a New York organization where extensive fracking was being proposed. The report was by E. Ivan White for 30 years a staff scientist for the U.S. Congressionally-chartered National Council on Radiation Protection.

His reply included the following: "In regard to your concerns about hydraulic fracturing and potential radioactivity, I can assure you that Australian regulators monitor the United States' experience with unconventional gas on an ongoing basis. It is worth noting that Australia's CSG reserves are found in different geology and, unlike shale gas extraction in the U.S., only a minority of CSG wells in Australia require hydraulic fracturing."

That's all very well but that same report in the U.S. by E. Ivan White also examined a 1999 study done by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation "*assisted by representatives from 16 oil and gas companies*" on hydrofracking and radioactivity and also a 2011 Environmental Impact Statement the agency did on the issue. The White report said both the study and the impact statement presented a "*cavalier attitude toward human exposure to radioactive material.*"

I was pleased when I learned that Victoria had placed a ban on coal seam gas extraction until much more extensive research had been done. The ban should have been placed nationally by the federal government.

In March 2015, current information from the United States Obama Administration was the unveiling of Federal Fracking Regulations. However, the new rules will apply only to oil and gas wells drilled on public lands, even though the vast majority of fracking in the U.S. is done on private land.

Apart from the possibility of flawed research in Australia, all landholders should have had the right to refuse coal and gas mining on their land. It seems as though there has been a revolving door between the people who write the laws and the companies that benefit from them. That's not democracy to allow coal and gas companies to run rough-shod over our farmland, our rural communities and the rest of us. The secrecy of a Trans-Pacific Partnership deal is writ large over CSG.

Here are some good reasons for a permanent ban on unconventional gas in Victoria.

According to the Australian Energy Market Operator, there is no gas shortage in Victoria or anywhere else in Australia, so there is no need to risk the health of crucial farmland just to extract gas we don't need.

Protecting Victoria from CSG extracting and other unconventional gas will protect existing jobs –especially in agriculture and tourism.

Victoria needs to transition rapidly to zero net emissions. There is growing evidence of fugitive emissions (ie. leaking) from unconventional gas processes, showing that gas is not as clean as once thought, and there is no time left for fossil fuels to find an impossible cleaner dirty product. Gas therefore has no place in Victoria's future energy mix.

If Victoria is to be considered a leader on climate change, the government cannot allow a new gas industry to be established.

No amount of Victorian gas production will reduce prices that consumers have to pay. Gas prices have increased because LNG exports from the east coast have linked us to international markets where prices are higher.

A Victorian gas industry will not save consumers money. *The best solution for consumers to reduce gas bills is through energy efficiency initiatives. We have the sun, we have the wind and we have the inventors, the workers and the users.*

Signed: Kendall Lovett.