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### **Inquiry Into Unconventional Gas Mining in Victoria**

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am making a submission to the Inquiry into unconventional gas to express my deep concern about the possibility of gas mining in Victoria.

As a property owner in Western Victoria, the family property is currently surrounded by numerous PEPs. The property has been in the family for five generations, and I have spent much of my life there. We believe in the production of clean, healthy livestock, including lamb and beef, to supply our population with food. Unconventional gas mining is completely at odds with this aim, and indeed poses a grave threat not only to agriculture but also to the environment and public health. In the following submission I will speak directly to the relevant Terms of Reference.

#### Terms of Reference:

##### 1) the prospectivity of Victoria's geology for commercial sources of onshore unconventional gas;

There are two questions here. The first: is Victoria's geology is suitable for unconventional gas mining? The second, and far more important, is whether or not Victoria *should* be used for unconventional gas mining. The answer is a resounding NO. One need only consider the hundreds of acres of prime agricultural land, used to supply large amounts of produce to Australia and the world, to realise it is just not worth jeopardising this billion dollar industry. If additional reasons are needed, tourism is a growing industry in this area, and it will not be able to expand if gas mining goes ahead.

##### 2) the environmental, land productivity and public health risks, risk mitigations and residual risks of onshore unconventional gas activities;

Unconventional gas mining has already proven that is unsafe in many ways. Many countries and regions around the world are banning unconventional gas mining outright, including many parts of America and Europe. Potential damage to native wildlife and plants, water systems, surface water, land, and aquifers could be devastating and irreversible. Pollution of land and water systems would affect the viability of agriculture as well as public health. Information gathered in the US indicates that 6-7% of new shale gas wells were faulty and leaking gas. After 20 years the rate of failure increases to 50%. At some point, all wells will fail. It is irresponsible to create this problem for current and future generations.

##### 3) the coexistence of onshore unconventional gas activities with existing land and water uses, including -

###### a) agricultural production and domestic and export market requirements

It is abundantly clear that gas mining and agriculture cannot coexist. The noise and pollution alone would be enough to disturb any agricultural enterprise. Added to this, the infrastructure required for gas wells must be considered. The building and use of roads, well pads, compression stations and dams would ruin many agricultural practices - such as moving and monitoring stock, stock health and production, feeding and sowing crops, and land and fence maintenance.

If pollution were to occur - which it would, at some point - agricultural production would be severely damaged. It is not worth risking one of our best food sources, and economically viable industries, for such an unnecessary short-term venture.

b) the legal rights of property and the impact on property values:

The idea that a gas mining company may gain access to a landowner's property against their will, and that the government would support them in this breach of rights, is both disturbing and unbelievable. It is our government's responsibility to defend its people, not a transient industry that will permanently damage our environment, economy and food sources.

Recently there has been discussion, particularly in the VFF, of the farmer's right to 'veto'. This principal has been used in other areas, but the right to veto will not work in Victoria: it is far too densely populated. There are a lot of smaller properties under license, and if one was to allow gas mining, but their neighbours were to veto, it would be of no use. All such properties share boundaries, public roads and most importantly, water sources. Traffic, pollution and contamination of water sources would affect all surrounding properties.

Any land used for gas mining would become unusable for agricultural purposes. Any land surrounding a gas mining area would also be affected irreversibly. As such, land value would inevitably plummet.

c) any implications for local and regional development, investment and jobs:

As a property owner, the family business spends almost \$1 million in the local area per year. This does not include basic costs of living such as groceries and petrol. Our property is by no means the largest in Victoria. If farming is threatened around the state, it will damage not only the national economy, but also the local one. Some businesses may experience a short-term boom from FIFO workers, but once they are gone many local businesses will become unviable.

The use of FIFO workers will of course preclude the possibility of a local job boom. The skills required to run a gas mine are specialised, and local applicants will not be skilled in these areas.

The South West, and indeed the whole of Victoria, contains some of the finest tourist attractions in the world. The Great Ocean Road is one of a kind, and attracts 7.2 million visitors from around the world per year. That number is set to increase in years to come; whether it will, if gas mining goes ahead, is another question entirely. Another wonderful site of natural beauty is the Grampians mountain range. It is just not worth risking these sites environmentally, let alone risking the lucrative tourism industry that exists because of them. A lot of the area currently under PEP license is becoming more and more attractive to tourists, and there is nothing attractive about an industrialised gas wasteland.

In closing, unconventional gas mining is a destructive, short lived, and damaging industry. Any government that supports this industry not only fails to listen to its people: it treats them with contempt. Evidence aside, the mere *potential* for damage to our precious water supplies and environment should be enough to warn against this industry. Across Victoria, there should be a total ban on onshore and unconventional gas mining, to protect our environment, and agricultural and tourism industries. Any consideration of the alternative will be a short-term attempt to profit from an untenable industry, at the expense of the heart and soul of Australia: its land, its water, and its regional and farming communities.

Sincerely,

Emily Smith