

Jim Walker sub to Victorian Unconventional Gas Inquiry

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I have lived in inner and middle suburbs of Melbourne for about 45 years, and over that time have noticed the very increased traffic congestion and, correspondingly, the length of time it takes to travel around the city, particularly by car. The costs of this congestion are economic, environmental and social. Wasted time, dirty air and water, and social friction e.g. ‘road rage’ and distraction.

Need for “unconventional” gas?

So long as business/governments insist on cramming more and more people into cities, it would be wise to get rid of car use as much as possible, by putting more emphasis on alternative transport e.g. better train and tram systems; and redesigning cities so that people do not need to drive cars for most purposes, but especially to and from work.

If buildings, as well as transport systems, are designed to be energy efficient, the rationale for using so-called “unconventional” fossil fuels – or indeed any fossil fuels – will drop away, potentially, to almost zero. Sustainable electric energy systems can replace fossil fuels.

The oil and gas industry appears to be a massive humbug altogether, but particularly the “unconventional” part of it. Why are we even contemplating such an economically dubious, environmentally destructive and socially divisive industry when there are millions of cubic metres of unexploited “conventional” gas offshore in Bass Strait? Why is gas from Bass Strait going to Sydney when we are told we need more gas here? Why are gas prices being forced up on the domestic market when we produce gas at extremely low prices? Have our governments sold us to oil companies?

Costs of “unconventional” gas?

Our economy comes entirely from the natural environment, which is finite, so the economy cannot grow forever. Economic growth can then only be achieved by one group of people at the expense of another.

It is disturbing that our governments are vigorously adopting economic, environmental and social inefficiency – in the name of economic rationalism – while claiming to be brilliantly managing economics and environment and to be serving the citizens. This is plainly not the case.

It is also surprising that the Terms of Reference for this inquiry has overlooked questions about whether unconventional mining of fossil fuels is economically viable without all kinds of subsidies, and whether the adverse impacts on other industries – farming, grazing, water, conservation areas, etc – outweigh any economic advantages to be gained from unconventional fossil fuel mining in the short and long term. There are many financial, environmental and social subsidies required to support mining generally, and apparently more so in the case of unconventional fossil fuel mining.

Who will pay?

Who will pay for environmental/economic damage; leaking, or flooding waste containment ponds, chemicals injected underground that seep into aquifers slowly over centuries,

explosions and fires from gas leaks, bare and contaminated land and production pads abandoned?

The answer is very clear: not the mining industry. The public will pay, either directly or indirectly for the clean-up, or by living with the consequences of unfixable problems, and that could be for a very long time.

We should steer well clear of “unconventional” fossil fuel mining.