

[REDACTED]

From: Inquiry into Unconventional Gas POV eSubmission Form
<cso@parliament.vic.gov.au>
Sent: Friday, 10 July 2015 12:15 PM
To: EPC
Subject: New Submission to Inquiry into Unconventional Gas in Victoria.

Inquiry Name: Inquiry into Unconventional Gas in Victoria.

Miss Eve Fisher
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SUBMISSION CONTENT:

--

To the committee,

My name is Eve Fisher and I live in Torquay at the start of the precious Great Ocean Road.

This area is currently under an exploration licence for unconventional gas (PEP 163) and I have grave concerns about this industry coming not only to this area, but coming to Victoria as a whole.

I will address my concerns more thoroughly in relation to the terms of reference listed below, but in short, I wish to see a ban on unconventional gas mining in Victoria, as any short term economic benefit is far outweighed by risks to the environment, public health and other industries such as agriculture and tourism. Especially when renewable energy offers a clean, safe and farsighted alternative.

(1) the prospectivity of Victoria's geology for commercial sources of onshore unconventional gas; Compared to Queensland and New South Wales, Victoria's geology for commercial sources of onshore unconventional gas is minimal. Therefore, royalties paid to the government from this industry would also be minimal.

In addition to this, the areas where the geology is conducive to this industry, is also Victoria's prime agricultural land. Despite claims from the gas industry that gas mining and agriculture can co-exist, the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) clearly disagrees, having backed a resolution for a five-year moratorium on unconventional gas mining at their Conference on Friday June 25, 2015.

To destroy our precious agricultural land for the sake of minimal mining royalties doesn't make any economic (or moral) sense.

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

The environmental and public health risks of unconventional gas activities are myriad, but perhaps the biggest risk is the one that's posed to our water supply.

Firstly, unconventional gas mining requires huge quantities of water to operate. In a country prone to

drought, using water for mining as opposed to agriculture is reprehensible. Secondly, the water used in the hydraulic fracturing process is combined with chemicals that the gas industry continually refuses to fully disclose. If the concrete casing used in the drilling process is faulty, underground aquifers risk being contaminated by these chemicals and from the methane contained in the gas. Thirdly, even if the drilling process is deemed to be safe, there is still the major issue of the disposal of chemically laden wastewater. These chemicals and methane releases have the potential to not only contaminate the water, but to contaminate the air and land as well, posing health risks to gas field workers, local residents and local livestock. The industrialisation of rural communities may also lead to other health risks such as psychological and social stress.

In the United States, studies have also shown that intense fracking has led to a sudden increase in seismic activity.

One could argue that for every report outlining the risks of this industry, there's another report (usually funded by the mining industry) claiming its safety, but surely in these instances, policy makers must err on the side of caution and, at the very least, maintain a moratorium until the long term effects of this industry on the environment and public health can be fully studied and known.

- (3) the coexistence of onshore unconventional gas activities with existing land and water uses, including —
- (a) agricultural production and domestic and export market requirements;
 - (b) the legal rights of property owners and the impact on property values; and
 - (c) any implications for local and regional development, investment and jobs;

As mentioned above, the unconventional gas mining industrialises rural landscapes. Gas drilling operations require access roads, drill pads and processing equipment, waste ponds and water treatment sites, flaring pits, and pipelines.

The other factor to consider is that the life span of a gas well is only about 10-15 years. What happens after the well is no longer viable? Who will remove it and rehabilitate the land? But more importantly, why would you destroy the environment and other long term industries like agriculture and tourism, for such a short term gain?

- (4) the ability of potential onshore unconventional gas resources contributing to the State's overall energy sources including —

- (a) an ability to provide a competitive source of energy and non energy inputs for Victorian industries;
- (b) an affordable energy source for domestic consumers; and
- (c) carbon dioxide emissions from these sources;

The Australian Institute report "Fracking the Future. Busting the Industry Myths about Coal Seam Gas" (Institute Paper no. 16, March 2014) by Matt Grudnoff came to the following conclusion:

"CSG mining is a controversial way of extracting natural gas. The Asian LNG price is at record levels and Australian gas producers are keen to meet export demand.

The high price and big profits explain why the gas companies are pushing hard to expand CSG production in NSW and Victoria.

In their campaign to get more gas out of the ground, the gas companies have made regular claims about the economic benefits of CSG. The truth of these claims is unverifiable, exaggerated or non-existent.

While the CSG industry will provide some economic benefit, that economic benefit will be far smaller than the industry has led the general public to believe. The industry is a relatively small employer, a significant portion of the economic benefit goes to the majority overseas owners and there are uncomfortable questions over whether CSG can act as a transition fuel. The industry has also been unwilling to discuss the negative economic consequences that will be created by an expansion of CSG.

The industry has failed to engage with the public's concerns about the environmental and health impacts of CSG. The impacts CSG could have on farming land, water and human health are serious and require further research.

Before CSG can be considered safe, further research needs to be done into the impact of fracking fluids, aquifer contamination and wastewater. Until these areas have been addressed, CSG production should be approached with great caution.

At a time when the general public wants the federal government to take a key role in expanded regulation of the CSG industry, the Abbott government is planning to reduce regulation and to devolve much of it to the states. The expansion of CSG in Australia is an important issue and needs strong leadership to ensure industry claims are properly scrutinised. This is what the federal government needs to do.

The expansion of CSG in Australia is likely to bring limited economic benefits and to come with large environmental and health risks. Because of this the industry should be subject to further scrutiny by governments and policy makers before any expansion is considered. The benefits do not seem to justify the risks.”

In addition to this, when the rest of the world is finally acknowledging and addressing climate change by divesting from fossil fuels and investing in renewables, why would Victoria take a backward step? I see the initiative of the South Australian Government with “RenewablesSA” which has “translated into investment to the State of \$5.5 billion to date, with some \$2 billion, or 40%, of this occurring in regional areas” (<http://www.renewablesa.sa.gov.au>) and can only hope that Victorian policy makers will have the foresight to do the same.

(5) the resource knowledge requirements and policy and regulatory safeguards that would be necessary to enable exploration and development of onshore unconventional gas resources, including —

- (a) further scientific work to inform the effective regulation of an onshore unconventional gas industry, including the role of industry and government, particularly in relation to rigorous monitoring and enforcement, and the effectiveness of impact mitigation responses; and
- (b) performance standards for managing environmental and health risks, including water quality, air quality, chemical use, waste disposal, land contamination and geotechnical stability;

If Queensland and NSW are anything to go by, the government (both Liberal and Labor) has severely failed its citizens in regards to regulation of this industry, and I am not convinced that if this industry goes ahead in Victoria that our government will be any different. The bottom line is, no matter how rigorous the regulations, both in monitoring and enforcement, accidents will happen and damage will be done. So why waste time and energy regulating a dirty industry when renewable energy offers a clean and safe alternative?

(6) relevant domestic and international reviews and inquiries covering the management of risks for similar industries including, but not limited to, the Victorian Auditor- General Office’s report Unconventional Gas: Managing Risks and Impacts (contingent upon this report being presented to Parliament) and other reports generated by the Victorian community and stakeholder engagement programs.

As mentioned above the Australia Institute’s report “Fracking the Future” provides an excellent insight into busting the economic myths purported by the unconventional gas mining industry, but further independent reports into the true supply/demand for gas in Victoria are seriously required.

Such reports should also be read in light of the fact that myriad of rural communities throughout Victoria have been surveyed and declared themselves to be “Gas Field Free”, meaning that there is no social licence to carry out this industry in these areas. In the area where I live, this includes Moriac, Mt. Moriac, Paraparap and Freshwater Creek.

I am calling for a complete ban on unconventional gas mining and clean renewable energy all the way!

Thank you for taking the time reading this submission.

Eve Fisher
Torquay