



Submission to offshore gas inquiry

To Ms Kier Delaney

INTRODUCTION

I oppose onshore gas extraction with associated fracking in Western Victoria. The Victorian Government has banned fracking in Victoria until mid 2015. The use of BTEX in fracking fluids has also been banned, suggesting that fracking will again be allowed, when the moratorium ends.

However the City of Greater Geelong called for submissions on gas exploration and fracking in the Geelong region. The result was 450 against and 2 in favour. The council therefor sent a letter to the then Victorian Government, stating that they want a permanent ban on coal seam gas exploration and fracking in the Geelong region. The Surf Coast Council are also reluctant to sanction coal seam gas mining. Many public meetings have been held in the area west of Geelong regarding coal seam gas, have been held during 2014 and the tone of these meetings was decidedly against exploration, particularly amongst farmers.

AREAS OF CONCERN:

WATER

Rainfall in some areas of Western Victoria, particularly to the west of Geelong can be very variable, which significantly affects farmers. Fracking involves pumping millions of litres of water containing fracking fluids and sand 1.5-3.0 km. down a bore.

About 50-60% of the water, now saline, is pumped out again. The water can be reinjected, carried away in trucks or stored locally, which can lead to aquifer or surface water pollution

of the farm. Aquifer contamination at a higher level may occur due to bore rupture. These effects can lead to reduced agricultural production. Bores can disturb stock due to machinery and truck noise and pipes extending across paddocks from bores can make stock movement and feeding difficult. Transport of stock and feed may be hampered by heavy vehicles associated with drilling and fracking.

ROADS

Gas exploration and extraction requires many trucks, earth moving equipment and vehicles carrying heavy machinery, such as compressors. Such heavy traffic can quickly damage sealed roads. Many country roads may be surfaced with gravel or one lane of bitumen, with the result that considerable damage can quickly be done. Temporary roads across paddocks may result in erosion and injury to stock. Will the drilling company repair all the roads before they leave? Will damage to fencing, dams and pumping equipment be fixed?

TOURISM

The area west of Geelong is often used by travellers to coastal holiday towns, and to the magnificent Otway Ranges. The presence of numerous oil rigs would certainly detract from the visual impact of the area. Coastal towns such as Anglesea and Lorne are completely dependent on tourism.

LEGAL ISSUES

The oil and gas companies have a right to remove anything of value below the surface, despite objections from the owner of the land and can take the matter to VCAT. Compensation may be payable, but this may be only a small fraction of a farmer's total loss. If a farm becomes unworkable or unsaleable, as a result of mining activities, farmers would have lost their income or indeed, their livelihood.

FIRE HAZARD

The Otway Ranges, foothills and adjacent open country is extremely fire prone. Therefore roads will need to be kept clear of mining vehicles on high fire danger days. Volatile fluids such as those used in fracking and lubricating materials pose a particular danger.

SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Accommodation problems can be caused by drill rig workers arriving and leaving. Trade at local businesses can rise and fall and some may have to close down. Disagreements between residents for and against gas mining and fracking can be a cause for concern.

CONCLUSION

I believe that the Victorian Government should not support gas mining and fracking in this area. Such mining could result in the loss of valuable farmland and the income derived from it. This may continue long after mining has ceased. Thus not only must drilling and fracking be safe they should not be allowed to interfere with the current and future viability of farms.

Rod Clark

Geelong Environment Council

