

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 10 July 2015 1:55 PM
To: EPC
Subject: Re: Community views sought on onshore unconventional gas

Dear Sir / Madam

Here is my submission. I am happy for you to publish it but would prefer you not to include my name on publicly available documents / websites. This is because it would be available by internet searches, and I wish to keep this opinion separate from my name, as name searches on the internet are used for everything from judging a person when they apply for a job, to considering someone for a rent application. I am not ashamed of my opinion however appreciate that not every potential future employer would necessarily share it.

The potential benefits of onshore unconventional gas as an energy source

On the surface there are benefits with gas being available relatively cheaply.

However:

- experience in areas where gas was obtained by fracking shows that wells may not produce nearly as much gas as expected. This means the cost to the landowner, environment and public ends up far outweighing any benefit gained.
- I am of the understanding that this gas is mostly for sale to Asia. So the gas we do use here will be competing with the global price, which will mean higher energy bills for all of us.

Also:

- More and more Australians are purchasing solar panels for their roofs.
- Solar panels are continuing to increase in levels of efficiency.
- Germany has successfully transitioned to being heavily solar-dependent, even managing during an eclipse.
- South Australia gains much of its power from renewables, including wind power.
- Use of renewable sources of power continues to grow around the world. For example, in 2013, for the first time ever, more renewable energy was installed than all the oil, gas and coal combined.

This all shows that using non-renewables such as gas is not necessary. Using environmentally invasive techniques of obtaining this fuel when other options are available is short-sighted.

A court in The Hague has ordered the Dutch government to cut its emissions by at least 25% within five years. If Victoria experiences more extreme weather events attributed to climate change, people may take legal action against leaders who support new ways of obtaining carbon-based energy. This could happen even if the process of fracking did not have other environmental side-effects.

If our country or state is ordered to cut emissions, that may make any new gas wells redundant.

Or,
 The government may be forced to choose which fossil fuel energy sources to cut. If the government has given the go-ahead to energy companies behind unconventional gas, these companies may sue the government for loss of revenue.

The potential risks, including risks to the environment, land productivity, agricultural industries and public health, and whether such risks can be managed

Please refer to the following web resources:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WH5MS-v2prc>

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/specials/coal-seam-gas-by-the-numbers/>

http://www.melbourne.foe.org.au/just_say_no

This book also contains useful information:

<http://www.publish.csiro.au/pid/7218.htm>

I have a copy of it.

On the US documentary Gasland I learned of animals and people made sick from water contaminated by fracking. In the documentary, a man turned his kitchen tap on and could set the water on fire. The documentary linked above on YouTube (Gippsland Is Precious) shows an Australian farmer now able to do the same thing with his bore water. Research conducted in the US by Duke University has found that fracking can contaminate water with Methane.

Fracking requires huge amounts of water - one of our most precious resources. This will cost money, and we may have another drought. The water is combined with toxic chemicals to obtain the gas, and it is a big challenge to deal with it when it comes back up.

Fracking also uses land, because the wells and the tracks leading to them cannot be used for farming. This lowers property values, possibly along with a stigma of being a gas area. Clearly, adding a large number of gas wells and new tracks, with heavy machinery, would be detrimental to any natural environment too whether or not it is currently a national park.

As you know we literally cannot live without drinking water, and it is essential for farming, as is land. It is not worth the risk of contaminating one or both of these. Especially when other alternatives are available. If land cannot be used to grow crops due to fracking it will impact on Victorians' health and economy (lower quality, higher priced food imported from other areas).

As I understand, the unconventional gas industry in some overseas locations has used BTEX chemicals which are proven to be highly toxic to humans. Victoria banned the use of these chemicals and at the very least this ban should remain in place.

As unconventional gas would be in addition to fossil fuels already being mined and/or burned, that's an increase in carbon emissions, which clearly impacts climate change. I will not go into too much detail here as government departments already have access to the large amount of evidence that climate change affects environment, land productivity, agricultural industries and public health. For example: El Nino and/or droughts, conditions that exacerbate bushfires, increased storms including flooding and cyclones.

The impact on the legal rights of property owners and existing land and water uses

While I am personally against fracking in Victoria, if it ever does go ahead, it would be important to limit the damage done to other people's property. Neighbours and those with an interest in national parks must be given the right to "veto" and stop installation of gas wells within a certain distance of their concern. The previous Liberal government did that with wind farms which are far less dangerous than unconventional gas wells. Any veto right would need to be in legislation not just policy, to continue protection under future governments.

How this issue is managed in other Australian and international jurisdictions

Before any publicly owned land would be used for unconventional gas there should be a referendum. I understand that in NSW and QLD the unconventional gas industry has been given overwhelming power. Farmers and other residents have been given little or no say in stopping the companies, even on their own land. To me this is completely unacceptable and I would not want to see anything remotely similar happen in Victoria. Large companies do what they like so the only way to prevent that is to keep the industry out completely by legislation.

Potential changes to our legislative and regulatory framework

As mentioned above, if class legal action is taken against governments who fail to reduce carbon emissions, support for more gas drilling could lead to greater liability. (Please note I am mentioning this merely as a risk, I am not involved in any such legal action myself).

Thank you for the opportunity to share information with the Inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.