

(Email sent on 24th May 2015)

Dear Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio

It is with extreme disappointment and grave concerns that I write to you about the Final Report from the Primary Agency on "Community and Stakeholder Attitudes on Onshore Natural Gas in Victoria."

Firstly I object to the use of the term "natural gas". What we are talking about here is unconventional gas mining for Coal Seam Gas, Tight and Shale Gas. Saying 'natural gas' does not communicate the type of gas under consideration nor the controversial nature of how it is extracted. This feedback was provided by people at the Open Days, however, this feedback has been ignored. There are many advertisements currently on television that are extolling the virtues of natural gas and how good it is; therefore, people who are uninformed about the type of gas and the method of extraction would think that onshore natural gas must be good, because it is natural gas. The key question in the quantitative survey (refer to item 2. in the Executive Summary of the report) in fact used the term "onshore natural gas". Did everyone who was part of the quantitative survey understand that onshore natural gas is actually unconventional gas; I suspect not.

I refer you to a research paper that was written by the Research Service of the Parliamentary Library dated December 2013, entitled "Unconventional Gas: Coal Seam Gas, Shale Gas and Tight Gas" by Dr Catriona Ross. Mick Maguire and Dr Bruce Kefford of the Primary Agency were not aware of this report until I brought it to their attention. This research paper very clearly outlines the many documented risks associated with unconventional gas mining. Further evidence of problems and issues from Australia/overseas has become available since that paper, that should lead your Government to have more caution about gas mining. One recent example is the clear link that has been found in the USA between fracking and seismic activity. Given Gippsland is a known seismic hotspot this should be cause for extreme caution. That research paper recommended a number of areas that require further research and time to fully understand the implications of unconventional gas mining.

Therefore, given the risks are already known and well documented, I can't understand why the community is being asked how we feel about it and our attitudes when it is the Government's responsibility to ensure that the community is protected.

Problems with the Community Consultation Process

I am aware that the Primary Agency's report was not commissioned by your Government. In case you are not aware, there were some major problems with the process even before the Open Days were held.

On 26th May 2014, I sent an email to naturalgasinfo@dsvbi.vic.gov.au with the following concerns:

- 1 *It is not possible to register on the website any more. My husband just tried to register on the Natural Gas Community Engagement website and could not find a place to register his name and interest. Early on in the process, it was possible to provide a name and email address which I did. Now there is no provision to do that. I rang the 136 186 telephone number shortly after 9am this morning. The operator taking the call said that she couldn't see any place to register either and suggested that I email you about this. This is of deep concern to me as it means that there could be many people who have tried to do the same thing and that these attempts to register will have been lost. □*

- 2 *As someone who registered early on, I have not received any email communication about any of the meetings (open days).*
- 3 *To date no information has been released about the time, place and structure of these meetings. With the first one on 5th June, next week, this is totally unacceptable.*

It wasn't until 3:48pm on 27th May 2014, and a threat of "The Age" running a story about the above problems, that the details of the venues were provided, with the first Open Day on 5th June at Warragul, leaving only 6 working days to advertise that event. The next one was at Bairnsdale on 11th June. Many more people could have participated if the venues and details of the process had been advertised earlier. Also, it is not clear how many people missed out because it was not possible to register on the website and it is not known how long that problem occurred.

Problems at the Open Days follow:

- lack of clarity about what people were to do at the Open Day; there was no one to register people as they came in so how would they know how many people were actually there;
- changes were made to their process after the first Open Day: they were individual one on one discussions at Warragul; they offered group meetings at Bairnsdale as there weren't enough consultants to meet with people individually;
- at Warragul some people were interviewed by Government officials not Primary Agency staff as there weren't enough consultants;
- some people were put off by the idea of having to meet one on one and were intimidated by that so didn't participate - they may have if they had known that group meetings were going to be offered;
- some people went into the big room where the discussions were being held and thought they had to go to each group to give their feedback and felt they didn't have time so left (there was no one to explain the process); and
- some people arrived to face a queue so left.

Problems with the Primary Agency Report:

- Only a very small section of the report is about the Open Day results and even those comments are watered down. The report concentrates on the results of the quantitative survey which is a smaller sample size (960 people) compared to the 1500 people involved in the Open Days.
- At the Open Day that I attended at Bairnsdale, the consultants didn't ask people the questions that were asked in that 15 minute quantitative survey.
- The way the report is written it can be misconstrued that the responses to the quantitative survey are the result for the whole community consultation process.
- Where are the appendices for the Open Days with the list of questions we were asked and the responses that were given? All the information is provided from the quantitative survey (over 100 pages) but no appendices or raw data from the Open Days.
- It is not stated whether those who were telephone surveyed from rural areas outside of Melbourne were from regional towns or from rural districts; the people who are most affected are in small rural districts as that is where the mining licences are located. Where were those rural people located?
- How can a random phone survey be community consultation? Community consultation should be about engaging with the communities living under or close to approved licences (communities under threat).
- The Executive Summary of a report is the part that most people read, in some instances that is the only part that gets read. The Executive Summary in this

report is exclusively about the results of the quantitative survey and attitudes of stakeholder groups it says nothing about the Open Days (Part A of the report). How can it be an Executive Summary if there is no reference to a major section of the report?

- Looking down the column of responses to the survey questions, the highest percentage for most is in the “Don’t Know” column. Polling people with no knowledge won’t provide a meaningful outcome even where questioning is adjusted to take that into account. For example, most people would think finding energy is a good thing without necessarily considering what might be involved in getting it. The general community would not understand how invasive the Unconventional Gas Mining (UGM) is without some knowledge.
- It is also not surprising that people who don’t know anything about it would think the UGM industry would create jobs without having the facts that mining crowds out other industries that already contribute much more financially to the economy (please refer to data from the Australia Institute).
- The key question in the quantitative study (refer to point 2 in the Executive Summary) is “loaded” in its construction (refer to page 25 of the report for the question): “*Considering what you currently know about the onshore gas industry how likely would you be to support the introduction of the industry in Victoria if it turned out to be feasible in the future?*” What does feasible mean? This could lead people into thinking that feasible means agreed/accepted/technically possible? It potentially leads people into responding in a more positive way in their response which means that they would say “yes” or be more likely to support it. This question is used as the overall summary of the feedback when it is said that “29% of the respondents indicated support for the industry while 27% indicated that they do not support the introduction of an onshore natural gas industry”. Furthermore, people could be misled into thinking that this result is the overall result for the whole consultation. It is further reported that there were only slight differences between the Melbourne and rural responses to this question however as indicated above, we don’t know whether those rural responses are from large towns or rural districts?
- Page 7, second paragraph, under the heading “Community views about onshore natural gas” is flawed and this paragraph is contested: “*The level of community support on this and many other issues is discussed in detail in the following chapter (which is the quantitative study of 15 minutes) but in overview almost half of the community are in the undecided/don’t know cohort and the other half are equally split between do not support and support.*” This paragraph is in the section of the report that talks about information from the Open Days; it deliberately leaves the impression that the qualitative results are the same as the quantitative. If that is the case, where is the evidence for this?
- Asking uninformed people (as is evidenced by the results of the survey) in a 15 minute market research survey about what they think and their attitudes is not going to help address the concerns of those people who are informed. The report is silent on the extent of concern by the general community that would have been expressed at the Open Days, by people who would have, for the most part, been informed about the issue.

As mentioned on Page 7 of the report, “the issue has galvanised the interest of people who describe themselves as ‘never having been involved in any community issue before’ and the hope their views would be considered genuinely by authorities.” I went into this process in good faith although many were cynical about it. I now have to agree with those cynics. This is not a report about the attitudes of the community who are impacted by the potential for unconventional gas mining, as

we were led to believe.

I am aware in the Districts surrounding Bairnsdale, over 750 people who are directly impacted by an unconventional gas exploration mining licence over their land have been asked whether they want gasfields on their land and 98% of those people have said "no" to gasfields. These are the people who the Government needs to be listening to. Nine districts have been declared gasfield free in our area and a total of 61 communities across Victoria, and this number is growing. This is the information that decision makers need, not the responses to a random 15 minute survey of people who appear to be mostly uninformed. It is my understanding that most of the people who participated in the Open Days were against gasfields although this is not reflected in the report from the Primary Agency.

Kind regards

Debbie Carruthers