

Dear Committee members,

As a journalist, a person who grew up in regional Victoria, and a person concerned about a clean energy future, I wish to make a submission to the Unconventional Gas inquiry. I want to make it very clear that I do not support the unconventional gas industry in this state in any form.

I have done a great deal of research into this industry for my work as a journalist, and am gravely concerned about the impacts it would have on our regional communities and our state in general.

I think establishing this industry would pose a gross risk to industries that provide essential jobs for regional areas and essential services to our state. Exporting unconventional gas is a short-term industry that would put too many things at stake for short-term financial gain. The state of Victoria won't see the benefits of this industry, but will wear the costs to their farmland, environment and jobs in other sectors such as agriculture and tourism.

The risks to our environment, land productivity and public health are far too great for any responsible government to allow. This process has been shown to result in the Contamination of groundwater and surface waters from fracking and drilling fluids (which contain toxic chemicals) and from waste/produced water, the contamination of water from methane, impacts to rivers and groundwater levels due to dewatering, methane contamination of soil and air pollution from gas emissions to say the least. This industry has already been allowed in Qld and NSW and the damage that has been done in such a short time is unacceptable. The risk mitigation that we have seen in those states, and in the test wells in Seaspray has clearly demonstrated that no risk mitigation is enough. We have seen contamination of ground water with uranium, we have seen holding ponds leaking toxic chemicals into the ground, we have seen water become unusable and people have to leave their properties due to serious health concerns. A report in 2011 into the regulatory framework for coal seam gas projects in NSW found legislation was inadequate and out-dated. When aquifers were found to be contaminated, the penalties were laughably inadequate. Despite a documented history of major environmental hazards, there have been few scientific studies which have fully addressed these issues. There many critical information gaps and future research is most needed if the risks of unconventional gas and fracking are to be fully assessed. There has been no demonstration anywhere in the world that there is enough risk mitigation available to stop the clear impacts to water, land and public health.

Existing agriculture is essential for many of the areas that are under licence currently, including swathes of Gippsland and fertile regions in Western Victoria. Because of the inherent risks of contamination to groundwater, soil and air, maintaining a thriving food-producing industry is impossible. Once those things become contaminated, it will be impossible to provide the high-quality produce the region is known for and relies on.

The number of jobs created from the industry are not enough of an incentive to destroy the already existing jobs in agriculture and tourism. Those

industries are for the long term and will hold the community together. A short-term and destructive industry like unconventional gas will provide a tiny amount of jobs in exchange for a large amount of destruction.

Unconventional gas will also not be the 'saviour' of our energy prices. It being 'unconventional' means it is difficult and expensive to extract. Additionally, given that the idea is to primarily export the gas to other places, Victorian consumers will be competing with international energy prices rather than paying our comparatively low price. Unconventional gas is not going to make things cheaper for Victorians and it is not going to be a replacement fuel. We need to look into long-term sustainable solutions such as renewable energy.

As well as all of the above reasons, the emissions from this industry are unacceptable. At a time when we should be investing in clean, long-term energy solutions we are chasing after yet another fossil fuel. Unconventional gas may appear cleaner than coal, but assessments of fugitive emissions have shown that it is actually an enormous emitter. The emissions that would come from having to transport the gas to export hubs in Queensland, and the air pollution from treatment plants make this very dirty indeed. Perhaps compared to incredibly pollution brown coal it looks better, but if you put it next to wind power or solar power, there is no comparison.

Communities across the state have shown that there is no social license for this industry in Victoria. It is too dangerous, too dirty, too risky and not welcome here. There are no pros that can outweigh the enormous cons. I am highly concerned that the government is wanting to take us backwards in the fight to curb our carbon dioxide emissions, and at the same time investing in an industry that has the potential to tear apart regional Victoria. This is not something that should be allowed to happen.

Yours Sincerely,

Katherine Smyrk.