



10 July 2015

To:
Environment & Planning Committee
Att: Keir Delaney, Secretary
Parliament House, Spring Street
Melbourne VIC 3002

epc@parliament.vic.gov.au

Submission for the parliamentary inquiry into unconventional gas extraction in Victoria

Dear Keir Delaney,

The fossil fuel extraction company Lakes Oil has a licence to drill for gas in our region, Geelong and the Surf Coast. We write this submission because we want to see this Exploration Permit 163 cancelled, and because we oppose any form of unconventional gas extraction to take place in Victoria.

In New South Wales, the onshore gas industry – according to sources within the industry itself – is paying \$135 million in land access payments to farmers and landowners, and the NSW government's revenue is estimated to be \$1.6 billion.

A 49-page report from 2013, 'Getting gas right: Australia's energy challenge', talks about producing an estimated \$50 billion-a-year gas industry in Australia by 2017, and about Australia's role in a so-called "gas revolution" created by surging demand in Asia.

"We believe that the US shale gas revolution is about to hit Australia's shores," "the potential size of Australia's shale gas resources is truly enormous," writes the gas extraction company RFC Ambrian.

"It's Cleaner. It's Safer. It's Jobs. It Is The Future," proclaims the Australian Petroleum Production & Exploration Association, APPEA.

Accordingly, lots of money appears to have been invested already in trying to convince you, our elected representatives and decision makers in government, to allow rolling what we would consider a "fracking nightmare" out in Victoria.

Faith in democracy at stake

Why will it become a nightmare, if you allow this to happen? Here are some of the reasons why we don't think we should allow fracking for gas in Victoria – ever.

First of all, you need to understand that people in our municipality are quite upset about this. “How can this happen in a democratic society when a vast majority of the population is against it?” they rightfully ask.

Farmers who own the land on top of the ‘gasfields’ deep down feel that their legal and civil rights are being taken away from them. Old laws from another century – those days when gold mining was a big thing here in Victoria – have never been modernised, and this means that when the state government grants a licence to a gas company, as it has done with Lakes Oil in our region, the legislation actually allows Lakes Oil to mine *anywhere* within that licence, even if it is on private land.

In order to maintain good public relations, most mining companies do try to gain permission from land-holders, but in reality a land-holder has no legal right to stop mining from occurring on their land.

In legal terms, people don't even have the right to lock the gate on their own property and refuse gas mining on their land, and so far, we haven't seen or heard anyone in politics advocating for an update of these old laws.

This needs to change.

What you need to understand here is that what is happening with the fracking question is that people's faith in democracy is being shattered. Fracking creates anxiety and tension, and it makes otherwise normal peaceful citizens lose faith in the democratic processes and move over to unusual and often very messy civil disobedience measures with sad and expensive consequences for everyone.

This is one aspect of what it is at stake if you allow this industry to continue its destructive fracturing of our state.

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“We have not inherited the Earth from our fathers and are hence entitled to use it according to our wishes. We have rather borrowed it from our children and have to maintain it properly until they can take over.”

Australian Minister of the Environment, speaking at OECD Ministerial Conference on the Environment in November 1974

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Dangerous air pollution

Centre for Climate Safety is run by Mik Aidt and Anthony Gleeson. We live in Geelong, and we run a weekly radio program about sustainability on our local community radio, called 'The Sustainable Hour' on 94.7 The Pulse, which is a podcast in iTunes and streamed live on the Internet as well.

What drives us to do this kind of volunteer work is that we are fathers – in Mik's case to three small children aged 6, 8 and 10 – and we are concerned about our children's health, their mental health, their safety and their future in general.

We see some very serious problems arising in our society at the moment.

The most urgent of these problems is that we are collectively ignoring what science is telling us, *screaming* at us actually: that we have to *stop* burning fossil fuels. We have to *stop* filling the air with our tonnes and tonnes of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

The solution to the problem has been developed over the last 20 years. It is to quickly switch over to using solar panels, wind turbines, hydro power stations, wave energy generators and bio energy instead. The good news is that there are so *many* good reasons to start doing that now – economic reasons, health reasons, environmental reasons.

The warnings are coming from the United Nations, the World Bank, summit after summit on the same topic. Extensive reports from the Climate Panel of the United Nations, IPCC, and the Lancet Commission use more urgent language at each successive report to say we must stop burning fossil fuels if we want to avoid a total runaway climate disaster. Even Pope Francis and numerous religious leaders are saying it.

So why it is not happening at the rate and at the scale which the scientists are advising us we should be doing this?

The 'bridge fuel' myth

It has been discussed, but by July 2015 it stands clear to everyone but the gas industry itself and its allies in politics that unconventional gas is *not* cleaner than coal, as it has previously been claimed, arguing that it could be used as "bridge fuel" while we work on getting the renewables in place.

It does *not* make environmental sense to use gas as a "bridge fuel". That is industry spin. Peer-reviewed science from Cornell University as well as several other universities reject the industry's claim that gas is "cleaner than coal", in particular because of the (often hidden or 'forgotten') fugitive emissions that are emitted at every stage of its extraction through to use.

Every dollar spent on gas is one we don't get to spend on renewables, which – slows down the transition to a post carbon world. Investment in gas mining

removes focus and economy from the transition to renewables and sustainable jobs. Gas mining is creating an unnecessary detour away from where we need to get to.

Anyone who understands the latest peer-reviewed climate science is aware that we must leave those massive fossil fuel reserves in the ground to avoid runaway climate change. This gives you, our elected leaders, a great responsibility. Because we depend on you to do this. Because gas is still a sellable product, fossil fuels won't be left in the ground unless wise politicians in governments step in, take some real leadership and legislate in this area.

Ban onshore gas extraction once and for all, while moving subsidies and investments away from fossil fuels over to renewables.

Worrying health impacts

When seeking which position to take on onshore gas mining, we must first of all look at its impacts on our health and safety. Hydraulic fracturing is risky gambling with drinking water and health.

The issue also raises a question about which connection we would like to have with the land that we live on, and to that end, which possibilities we would like to have in terms of cultivating and maintaining our farming and tourism industries.

When making a decision for or against gas mining, we must take into account what we have seen onshore gas mining has done to areas in Queensland and in the United States: the implications of turning farmland into industrial zones with lights, noise and truck movements 24/7.

Many more trucks will be on our roads. The landscape becomes mutilated by drilling towers and machinery. Victoria's reputation as a state for tourism gets ruined, and the real estate value of houses near gas mining wells drops.

Fracking has become known to be a very destructive industry in particular because it pumps toxic chemicals deep down in the ground and leaves us with lakes of poisonous water that we can't get rid of.

The industry claims that it knows what to do with the produced waste water, even our Prime Minister claims "no evidence of damage from CSG 'done properly' – but the reality is that it is not safe. Naturally occurring toxic chemicals and active elements which have been trapped in the rocks which are fractured are released with the gas.

These plus 60 percent of the initial injected chemicals are returned to the surface. Not even reverse osmosis can remove some of these. Often these are just put into the local sewerage treatment system. Even the chemicals and elements which reverse osmosis can remove still have to be disposed of. They don't just vanish. Where to?

The negative effects on our health, on our environment and the climate are all

very well documented by now, and we assume you must have been made aware of that from within your own departments.

The local pollution from fugitive emissions, toxic chemicals, mining equipment and particulates from diesel powered equipment causes citizens who live near the gas wells to get sick – and apart from the individual problems this causes, the bill for this sickness eventually becomes a bill to you, the Government, and to our society.

The mining industry has impact on people living nearby and workers who are exposed to the chemicals and pollution. A study which came out of Yale University found that people who lived near oil and unconventional gas operations had greater respiratory illnesses and skin rashes than those who lived further away.

Regardless of what the industry claims, accidents happen. Water contamination happens. The industry at the same time won't give any guarantees that water contamination won't happen. Evidence both from Queensland and the United States shows that this *is* happening.

In terms of the chemicals being used for hydraulic fracturing, the industry only mentions the least offensive ones – vinegar, 'many of the chemicals are under people's sinks', or 'chemicals used in making ice-cream'. Very few of the chemicals they use have been tested for health effects on people and animals, let alone when they are used in combination.

The real bill is left unpaid

The only reason that fracking is taking place and happening even so – especially in Queensland, but also now possibly coming to Victoria, and maybe even to our region – is that there are some people out there who are making a lot of money on this (most of them not even living in Australia), while we, the rate payers, are unfairly left with all the bills to pay and the destruction of our land.

The mining industry has some very bad records for not cleaning up after itself, and unconventional gas mining is only profitable because costs of cleaning up and climate damage are not made a part of the equation.

What drives the gas mining industry forward is a desire to make profits. Local communities in Queensland are seeing the devastating consequences of this industry: Only a few people benefit financially from it, and they are not held accountable by authorities to pay the bills for the damage they create in the ground as well as in the air. Take a look at Tara in the Western Darling Downs for nightmarish health and community impacts.

It becomes the local community which must bear the burden of the industry's environmental impacts while the profits go elsewhere. Why should we, the citizens, accept being treated like that?

See through the industry spin and lies

'Facts' and 'the science' is being used as an argument for allowing onshore gas mining. Like the 'fact' that there has never been a 'proven case' of contamination of ground water because of fracking. This is not true. Facts and science can be manipulated and deliberately miscommunicated and many other myths are being created to delay the inevitable transition away from fossils fuels over to renewables.

We can see that the Victorian Government as well as local media all refer to studies and research carried out by CSIRO as if it was a reliable and 'neutral' scientific source. We suggest you ask yourself: Can the branch of CSIRO working on unconventional gas be relied on to be impartial when they are funded by the unconventional gas industry? They clearly *cannot*!

Regardless of the aggressive 'fact claiming' rhetoric flying through the air and through media columns, there is one 100 percent indisputable argument as to why unconventional gas mining must be permanently banned. That is the fact that gas is a fossil fuel and as such, becomes a greenhouse gas when we burn it.

The methane, which leaks in the gas production, is a fossil fuel and an extremely potent greenhouse gas. The greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels which we flood our atmosphere and oceans with are damaging our planet to a point where it is getting really dangerous now. It could get out of hand for humanity within the life time of our children, according to scientists in the United Nations' Climate Panel.

Investing in gas mining in our area is not only locking us into polluting the air with more carbon, which is the wrong thing to do – we all know that, even most of those who pretend to ignore it or oppose it – instead of going over to solar, wind and hydro, as our main sources for electricity, and invest in developing and enhancing these technologies.

When on top of that you add the risk-factors involved and the fact that fossil fuels in general are not just dangerous to the climate, they are very dangerous to our health as well, then switching over to renewable energy sources becomes a very obvious choice. Gas can explode, and the gas production involves a lot of risks. Renewable energy sources don't involve any such health risks.

Add to that that the gas prices are continuously rising. More onshore gas mining won't make gas cheaper to the consumer. On the contrary, prices are expected to triple soon. Meanwhile, prices on renewables are dropping – and will continue to drop.

The list of good reasons to ban fracking appears to be almost endless. As Victoria gets drier and drier because of climate change, the gas extraction companies' excessive use of millions litres of water in itself represents a threat. You must consult with your own health authorities about this.

The vast quantities of water needed to release oil and gas by fracturing rock formations are not available in many of the large areas with the richest deposits – and globally this poses a major challenge to the viability of fracking.

According to a report by the World Resources Institute, 38 per cent of the areas where unconventional gas and oil is most abundant is arid or already under severe water stress – and the 386 million people living in these areas need all the spare water they can get.

Stop this intergenerational theft

Gas mining jobs are not needed here, there are many more jobs in energy efficiency and renewable energy, and that is the path we need to invest in. In California, for every job lost to fossil fuels, 50 new jobs have been created in energy efficiency.

The most basic and fundamental question you as decision makers must ask yourselves is: Why should we allow further investments in a fossil exploration and exploitation such as gas mining when we all know that what we urgently need to invest in is modern and clean renewable energy technology?

There comes a time when we must say ‘stop the fossil madness’, and that time is now. Gas mining is intergenerational theft. It is a short-sighted and immoral way to provide energy in a world that needs to decarbonise its energy production.

Audio submission

Here is a link to our ‘audio submission’ which we hope you will listen to:
www.cpod.org.au/download.php?id=13927

It was broadcasted as a radio show on 94.7 The Pulse on 8 July 2015.
More information about it on www.climatesafety.info/thesustainablehour80

Yours sincerely,

Mik Aidt and Anthony Gleeson

Centre for Climate Safety


www.climatesafety.info

• *Appendix: The attached appendix is an excerpt of the podcast’s webpage with more recent news updates on the topic and information about the interviews*