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Mr Keir Delaney
Secretary
Parliament House
Spring St.
MELBOURNE, Vic. 3002

Dear Sir,

Submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into unconventional gas extraction

As a resident of Belmont in the City of Greater Geelong and the owner of a Trust for Nature covenanted bush property at Gherang in the Surf Coast Shire, both of which are situated within the boundary of Licence REP 631, I wish to make the following submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into onshore natural gas, a controversial practice, which raises a myriad of questions concerning its effects on water, air and land usage.

Water

I understand that a vast amount of water needs to be pumped into a well to force out the gas. Where will this water come from – a nearby aquifer or will Rural Water build a pipeline? Who will pay for any possible pipeline construction, and will the miners be charged for their water at the same rate as other water users? What will happen to the discharged water? Although the most toxic chemicals are now banned, it would appear that such waste water would still contain some hazardous chemicals. Should a well liner burst, could these chemicals get into an aquifer situated above the gas seam? Would it be possible to recycle the waste water to drinking water or at least grey water standard? Where would this water end up and the thereby extracted chemicals be stored? In case of drought, would the miners pay for necessary desalination of the water of which the general public has been deprived by their activity?

Air

It has been known, that the air quality of the fracking area is much impaired by escaping methane gas. Could this be completely eliminated? Would EPA enforce the same strict standards on emissions as for other industries? How could mining staff and residents of the affected area protect themselves? Would the miner come up for any health costs?

Land

According to Australia's archaic laws, landowners possess merely the top centimetres of their property. What lies underneath can be extracted by anyone who manages to obtain a licence to do so.

While it is highly unlikely that someone would wish to frack in the suburbs or townships, the rest of the area under Licence REP 613 is either valuable farmland or precious bush. Since any mining operation requires a certain amount of surface land for access, plant and storage, this would have to be either purchased or leased from its private or public owners. Would the miner compensate a farmer for the opportunity cost of future loss of crop or animal husbandry? How could the value of bush for recreation, tourism or much needed protection of flora and fauna be determined?

Once the coal seam is exhausted, would the miner be required to rehabilitate the destroyed land, and would this even be possible? What if the miner became insolvent?

Furthermore any mining operation requires access roads for equipment, staff and the extracted gas unless a pipeline were constructed. Who would be expected to construct and maintain these roads? In addition the transport of hazardous chemicals always involves the risk of spillage. Could the miner guarantee that this would not occur and rectify any such accidents? Should the general public be expected to be prepared to accept the extra traffic?

Under the circumstances, provided all stakeholders would be duly compensated for any possible losses, it appears that fracking in our area could never really be a viable proposition.

However, in view of the many problems associated with this form of gas extraction I would like to urge this government that all existing gas mining licences in this state be revoked if at all possible and that a permanent ban be placed on unconventional gas exploration in Victoria. Instead every effort should be made to create more renewable energy sources.

Yours sincerely,



ELIZABETH POLLOCK