

**Ms Nicki Jennings**  
*Submission to*  
**Standing Committee on Environment and Planning**  
**Parliament of Victoria**  
**Inquiry into Unconventional Gas in Victoria**  
**July 2015**

Nicki Jennings



**Back Ground and Introduction**

I have lived and farmed at Giffard West since 1983. My husband and I run a dry land sheep farm producing fat lambs and wool. We have a bore that we use for stock water and garden. Our farm is adjacent to a large pine plantation run by Hancock Victoria Plantation (HVP).

I am very concerned about unconventional gas development in Gippsland. Gippsland, and in particular the farms in the Seaspray, Giffard and Darriman areas are very productive agricultural enterprises. Our district also has a wealth of natural ecosystems in reserves, on farms and in a large State forest called Mullungdung. All this area lies over other valuable resources, the Boisdale, Giffard and deeper still the Latrobe Aquifers .

I am concerned that unconventional gas threatens the integrity of our farming produce, our forests and our aquifers. The Lakes Oil's exploratory wells already in the district have a bad track record that gives me no confidence in future development.

**Concerns With The Parliamentary Enquiry**

I attended the Parliamentary Panel Hearing into Unconventional Gas in Sale on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> July. I was very disappointed and annoyed to see three members of the panel constantly distracted by their mobile phones while presentations were being made. People sitting in the audience around me said it had been the same on the previous day's hearings.

Mr Daniel Young was the worst offender. He sat like a school boy at the back of the class constantly checking and texting then laughing and showing his mate next to him ( Mr Bourman )his screen. Mr Bourman was also frequently looking at his phone while presentations were being made. The Hon. Richard Dalla- Riva was also looking at his phone for long periods of time. At one point he did refer to a website he had checked. None of these three panel members were giving the presenters their undivided attention. Their behaviour was rude. How can they make a fully informed decision? Thankfully the remaining panel members including the chairman Hon. David Davis MLC, Mr Sean Leane MLC, Ms Melina Bath MLC, Ms Harriott Shing MLC, and Colleen Hartland MLC were attentive and listening.

### **Concerns with Lakes Oil's current wells.**

I live near Lakes Oil's disused Echidna well. This well was put in the middle of a high quality piece of forest on HVP leased land. A gravel road was cut through the middle of the bush and an area of approximately 1 ha was cleared and gravelled. Bores were sunk but drilling did not last long and Lakes Oil changed their focus to the Wombat wells. Since 2008 the Echidna well has been an unused scar on the landscape. Initially when the miners left there was rubbish left on site and in the surrounding bush, a greasy looking dam and unprotected well heads. I rang Rob Annells but nothing happened so I rang the EPA and the rubbish was cleared up but ?? years later there are still two uncovered bores that someone could pour something toxic down into what I presume is ground water many metres below. The greasy looking dam is still there open to wildlife and I have seen dead water birds in it. The gravel road in has given people access to the centre of the bush to illegally get wood, dump rubbish and shoot. At one stage someone set up a target for shooting practice along with dumping their rubbish. At the Panel hearings last Wednesday Rob Annell said he had not received any phone calls complaining about Lake Oil's operations. As I have mentioned I called him and complained about the state of the Echidna well. The EPA told me that Lakes Oil does not have to rehabilitate the site while their licence is current even if the well is not being used.

The photos below are of Lakes Oil disused Echidna Well Giffard West.

Anything could be dropped into this bore!

Lakes Oil's Wombat wells and Ignite Energy's wells on McNaughton's Seaspray property are similarly placed in areas of remnant forest where they think they are hidden. It is wrong that mining companies are not bound by the same legislation to protect native vegetation as farmers and other individuals. If unconventional gas goes ahead in Gippsland, I fear that forests such as Mullungdung will be soft targets for mining companies to clear fell, build roads, import gravel, spread rubbish and contaminate surface water. This has happened in the NSW Pilliga Forest. There is also the proven risk of fire from flaring. Lakes Oil started a bush fire from flaring at their Wombat Well that local brigades had to attend. These are my concerns on the surface of the land but that is not where the potential threat ends.

### **Concerns with Aquifers**

I am very concerned at the potential threat that unconventional gas and fracking may pose to underground water. It is naïve to think, as mining companies would have us, that underground water bodies are totally distinct from each other and that cement and steel can fully protect the surrounding aquifers from contamination. In 2012 an earthquake of magnitude 5.4 struck Gippsland near Moe at a depth of 9.9km. Our house at Giffard West shook strongly and our holiday house at Metung developed cracks in some of the plaster. It was the strongest quake in Victoria for at least 30 years. How strong will the next one be? Can mining companies guarantee that their wells will stay intact if a stronger earth quake hits in the future? There is no turning back if toxic chemicals leak into the aquifer.

Water contamination has already occurred in Australia. Water from a Santos storage pond in North West NSW seeped and contaminated ground water with Uranium. The EPA fined Santos \$1500. What an insult to the environment. Lakes Oil's poor environmental record so far gives me no confidence that this sort of incident will not happen here.

Fracking poses a great environmental risk to ground water, aquifers and rivers. In the USA companies have been found guilty and fined for contamination of all three of these water bodies. An Exxon Mobil subsidiary was fined \$100,000 and ordered to spend \$20 million to improve its hydraulic fracturing wastewater management. Naturally occurring radioactive materials not suitable for above ground disposal leached into the Penn Township River. There is no guarantee that this sort of contamination will not happen in Victoria. Companies are focused on production not the environment, expenses are kept down, corners are cut and accidents do happen. The bubbling of methane from the Condamine River in NSW has been linked to nearby CSG wells. The Monash University School of Engineering has stated that it is feasible that "de-watering of the coal seam had enabled methane gas to escape to the surface." We do not want this happening in Merriman's creek or the Latrobe River.

### **Right to Veto**

Farmers should have the right to veto mining on their land. There is widespread opposition to gas mining in my local area. Many farms have "Lock the Gate" signs on their gates and community rallies have been well attended.

There will always be some farmers who will allow gas mining on their land. Some have large levels of debts or don't believe in the risks. The problem is that while these farmers may accept mining their neighbour who does not want mining may be affected. Water and gas do

not respect property boundaries. If ground water or aquifers are contaminated then the problem belongs to a much wider area.

### **Gas Prices**

I do not believe that increase gas production will lead to lower gas prices for Victoria. Gas exploration is fueled by the lure of the export dollar and domestic gas prices are often set at a parity with the export price.

### **Conclusion**

Lakes Oil shares are worth less than half a cent. Their return to shareholders is negligible. In a worrying development Gina Rinehart has spent \$3.5 million for a 19.53 % share in the company. Now more than ever, local communities, individuals and farmers require that government protect their assets and the environment when financial heavy weights such as Gina Rinehart have entered the debate.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my concerns. I hope that the government extends the moratorium on unconventional gas and bans fracking altogether. We do not need this industry threatening our water, farming and environment. Is Gippsland to look like the photos below?

Nicki Jennings



Gas mines in the Pilliga State Forest North Western NSW

Water overflow from dams in the Pilliga Forest NSW