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## **Unconventional Gas Extraction using Geophysical Structural Fracturing in Western Australia**

To Whom It May Concern

Introduction Author

I am a lifetime local farmer in the Mid West, along with many other community roles I was the corporate secretary and elected board member of the Northern Agricultural Catchments Council for 6 years. I was also the elected Chair of the West Midlands Catchment Council (now the West Midlands Group) for three years. Previously I spent time working in the Department of Agriculture and working overseas in London as a communications officer in the national office for the UK Department of Health.

Preface

As a member of a community who has experienced first hand the impacts of the process of the onshore gas industry I have found that this intrusion into my business was all involving and extremely disrupting. This industry has also proved to be detrimental to our environment and social wellbeing. I would therefore like to outline the workings of this industry as experienced by our farming business and our shire mainly to highlight the issues and the lack of corporate responsibility in this sector.

### **The process of gas well completion as experienced by landowners.**

#### **Contacting the Landowner and Access**

This initial contact can be in the form of a letter or a phone call, there is no set procedure in place or requirements to initially protect the landowner from feeling stressed and threatened. The process is viewed as a conflict from the beginning not only from the point of view of the landowner but also the company. There are no safeguards or context that allows the landowner protection from the proponents, no intermediary, government department or adjudicator. Landowners who can afford legal advice will generally seek to block the process from the start as the industry is usually confrontational and the process is constructed to give advantage to the proponent. This credibility issue has come about because in the past the mining industry and in particular the gas industry has taken the more powerful position and forced the initial legal position to gain quick access. This confrontational approach serves the purpose of "glossing over" the issues to unsettle the landowner and get the process over and done with quickly.

An example of this impact was experienced when a gas well was constructed at Warradarge by a relatively large and experienced company. In this case the community rallied around the long

term farming family and witnessed first hand the denigration of the familys confidence. The company employed what can only be described as harassment techniques. An example of this was their home/business phone was continually called on a computerised loop with the intent to pressure the landowners to sign a document. The compensation that was initially offered to this family was insignificant, the approach from the mining companies is never to cover the time taken from the business and the disruption. There is no recognition of injurious affection and no loss of income compensation.

The access agreement is a complicated document, it often involves clauses that are unfair and include outcomes form unforeseen circumstances. For example their will be a non-disclosure clause and a potential successful well clause both of which bind the landowner.

### **The Seismic Survey**

This survey is extremely invasive to a farming business.

After what can only be described as conflict the landowners have to agree to a contract that is very complicated and has no set construct. The farmer is required under the mining act to allow access for surveying. This is viewed by the mining companies as an open gate and the objective is to include more than the access in this first document. The landowner is then required to constantly monitor the project, as the extent of this type of operation will interrupt all aspects of the farming enterprise.

Some aspects include the following

- No prior notification of access by vehicles.
- Access to the property by vehicles that haven't been cleaned for soil/seed contaminates.
- Damage to water pipes and water infrastructure.
- Gate and fence damage.
- Changes to routes without notification
- Stock interference
- Redefining and policing procedures

Other aspects effecting farm production

- Extensive vehicle traffic restricting normal farm operation
- Constant disruption to usual work practice
- Loss of efficiency with the landowners workforce
- Legal and insurance concerns
- Land devaluation
- Incapacity to pay compensation by the company
- Post survey management, soil rehab, ongoing maintenance.
- No consideration to the farm worktime structure

The farmers are often left out of pocket in this process, whilst there are environmental requirements for mining companies, these regulations are not always applied to farm land. Often the farmer must police the remediation to have his land rehabilitated to a satisfactory level. The damage to the soil profile is extensive due to the number of vehicles, especially on lighter soils. Seismic crews argue that they have floatation tyres on the trucks however the damage is compounded by the support and ground crews driving along the seismic lines. We

have experienced first-hand the damage to paddocks and the compaction was visible years later.

The natural bushland is not immune to this process, we experienced entire crews driving through caveated bushland even though there was a strict requirement of no access to any bushland caveated or otherwise.

It is well known and a regular experience for landowners, that groups that have right of access to farmland under legal acts exhibit little or no respect for landowners rights. The Mining Act and the Power Act give access rights under certain circumstances. To give an alternative example, In the case of electricity companies access to farm land. Access is written into the power act where access can be taken without notification for certain urgent circumstances. This access is often used for general maintenance in breach of protocols and we personally have been working with Western Power for decades to rectify this issue. We have experienced high-level members of this organization flagrantly ignore proper procedure in cases where the company has large infrastructure programs in place and a vested interest. This arrogance and ignorance is more obvious with mining companies and this conditional access right is at the root of the attitude issues that land owners experience.

It is important to note that most farmers don't have an issue with legitimate access to their land for any reason, providing it is done professionally and the landowner isn't seriously inconvenienced. If the access is inconvenient and costs the business, then there must be compensation, as would apply to any other business transaction. There are also reasonable and practical reasons the system of access needs changing to reflect the landowners responsibilities, many of which I have already outlined, another key aspect is operator safety.

### **The Drilling Processes**

The next stage is the drilling which involves very large truck drills, water tankers and semi trailer loads of rods, pumps, often a backhoe or excavator and sometimes accommodation vehicles. This is a construction site within a working farm environment that does not operate with the same values and is foreign, particularly where livestock management is the core business. The operation is often using sub contractors who are *not* informed of the existing agreement or any of the procedures in place by the seismic company. (this has also been the case where shockwave blasting was used during the survey stage)

There are similar aspects outlined in the above points under seismic survey where the farmer is disengaged from their own business and productivity. The monitoring of this initial drilling process is less involving, this operation usually requires water and other resources that do infringe on the existing farming operation. There are no compensation guidelines for these resources and often the said recompense is on a promise.

### **Well Commissioning**

If the preliminary drilling exploration process is successful the companies usually have a more open process of compensation engagement, in other words the farmer has more leverage. This depends on the initial contract, often companies have written into the access agreements critical components that make it difficult for landowners to re-negotiate. If the well is unsuccessful the farmers can be left carrying considerable costs, the companies can leave the premises and with

no recourse other than the courts available to the farmer. In some cases (Barrack Energy 1990) the company goes into liquidation, this is a common practice as the cost of this operation is expensive and is speculative. This practice has left landowners with extensive costs in the past and is a large part of the attitudes to gas mining companies.

The gas well establishment is similar to the drilling, reasonably localised, however the process is very complicated. There are numerous vehicles, monitoring staff, specialised contractors and constant access is required. If the well is within the main workings of the property it is almost impossible to maintain the existing work environment. Again the issue of sub contractors not being aware of the procedures such as “clean on entry” is invariably an issue.

If the well proves to be a natural gas well the impact once established is minimal. The land taken out of farm production is also minimal in area however it can mean a significant change to the overall approach to the workplace. The land effected even though relatively small by percentage is still an infringement on an existing industry. These industries do affect the way in which the farm operates and can adversely affect farmers and their families.

In the case of the Warradarge well there were issues associated with the construction and decommissioning. During the process of construction because many contractors were local we were aware of events that were not reported. For example, the community witnessed fluid from other drilling sites being transferred to the Warradarge property from another drill site near Dongara because there wasn't enough storage at the initial site for the fluid, risking contamination or a spill. This posed questions as to the planning and requirements that were in place at the Dongara well site. Another incident was at the Warradarge well where the casing was to be fully sealed as part of the decommissioning, when this was investigated we were told by the contractors that they ran out of concrete, this issue was not rectified. It is simply the workings of industry where shortcuts and cost savings are always the priority, this magnifies the risk significantly as the repercussions are not immediately evident. This is highlighted by the numerous ponds from previous works that contain toxic materials that are simply left behind to evaporate, in fact, a breach of the procedures and environmental law yet no-one is held accountable.

### **Well Networks.**

In the case of an unconventional fracturing field being constructed, where the wells can be hundreds of metres apart and numerous, it is safe to say that agriculture in its current form cannot exist within this environment. The experience of landowners in the eastern states where these fields have been established is well documented.

The issue is whether this industry is so important to our energy security that we are willing to sacrifice and risk everything that we have for more gas. In contrast to farming this industry is singular in its outcomes, it doesn't culture communities, it doesn't employ large numbers of people, it is relatively short term, it is self-governing and unchecked, it doesn't in net outcomes reduce impacts on the atmosphere.

The risks associated with the industry include;

#### Environment

- Unknown geological, geochemical and geophysical disruption that cannot be quantified.
- Long term inter- aquifer mixing, due to bore casings failure.

- Extensive soil disturbance and compaction on agricultural land.
- Methane loss to the atmosphere.
- Surface pond leakage.
- Loss of chemical product from ponds into the waterways.

#### The Community

- Social and emotional impacts on the landowners.
- Division and isolation in the community between the small number of complicit landowners and the majority.
- Financial cost of engaging in groups and committees to minimise impacts.

#### Industry Procedural and Practice

- Lack of set of standard procedures for all aspects.
- Compliance is not policed.
- Inconsistent and costly.
- Lack of disposal points for chemical products.
- No standard or compensation requirements for infringement on existing industries.
- No Western Australia best practice standards.

#### **Conclusion**

Impacts of the Warradarge well and another established in Badgingarra resulted in a considerable amount of input of time and money by the concerned members of the community. Two committee groups were formed to investigate the industry and found inconsistencies, unknown outcomes, government support based on short term concerns regardless of the risks involved, hydrologists making claims that the fracturing will not pose a risk to containment of aquifers and yet all the overseas and interstate evidence could show examples where this has occurred. The conclusion was unequivocally a resounding *no* to this process, simply based on the evidence that the unconventional gas industry carries an untenable element of risk to so many valuable aspects of our industry, society and environment.