

Submission to the WA Independent Scientific Panel Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracture Stimulation in Western Australia

This submission is being made on behalf of the Gasfield Free Swan and surrounds Alliance.

We are a group with members in the Swan Valley, The Vines, Ellenbrook, Guildford, Caversham, Midland, the Perth Hills and Bullsbrook.

We oppose all unconventional gas exploration and development including fracking in our region. We are also concerned at the gas exploration lease that remains over the Swan Valley despite the hydraulic fracture ban. We understand that the gas under these areas is most likely tight gas, and we do not want gas wells in this area.

The City of Swan agrees with us, and at its meeting on 19 October 2016, Council resolved unanimously to not support any form of unconventional gas mining, and City officers were asked to investigate the appropriate means of regulating petroleum exploration and production activities in the City of Swan. The following is the relevant extract from the minutes.

Resolved unanimously to:

- 1) Not support any form of unconventional gas mining including coal seam gas and fracking within the local government boundary due to the need to act with a precautionary approach to large residential populations, sensitive environments, water resources and horticultural land uses.
- 2) Have City officers investigate the appropriate means of regulating petroleum exploration and production activities in the City of Swan through a Scheme Amendment and prepare a report to Council on available options by 30 June 2017.

We commend the Council for taking this stand.

The Shire of Mundaring and the Shire of Chittering took similar stands around the same time.

Our key problems with the unconventional gas industry (of which hydraulic fracturing is only one part of the process, and we are disappointed that the inquiry is taking such a narrow view):

- Fracking threatens drinking water, via contamination and limiting supply due to competition for water.
- Drilling and fracking emissions contribute to toxic air pollution and smog at levels known to have health impacts.
- Public health problems associated with drilling and fracking, including reproductive impacts and occupational health and safety problems, are increasingly well documented.
- Natural gas is a threat to the climate. The domestic carbon footprint from all of WA's unconventional gas resources, which have been proposed for development, is three times more than what Australia's entire energy sector can emit to comply with the Paris Agreement. (Ref: Climate Analytics report March 2018).
- Earthquakes are a consequence of drilling and fracking-related activities in many locations.
- Fracking infrastructure poses serious potential exposure risks to those living near it.

- Drilling and fracking activities can bring naturally occurring radioactive materials to the surface.
- The economic instabilities of fracking further exacerbate public health risks.
- Fracking raises issues of environmental justice.
- Health care professionals are increasingly calling for bans or moratoria until the full range of potential health hazards from fracking are understood.
- Growing evidence shows that regulations are simply not capable of preventing harm.

The above points are supported by peer-reviewed scientific evidence via the latest (5th) edition of the Compendium at concernedhealthny.org/compendium/.

Hydraulic fracture stimulation has a ban in place in Argentina, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Romania, Scotland, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, The Czech Republic, Uruguay and Wales as well as the US states of California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maryland, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas and Vermont and the Canadian Provinces of New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and Quebec. It's also banned in Victoria.

Conclusion

It is time for Western Australia to follow examples from other states and countries, for the protection of our state's, and our children's, futures.

The risks of fracking and unconventional gasfields don't justify risking existing industries like viticulture, horticulture, agriculture and tourism, as well as our own health. The precautionary principle must be applied. The scientific evidence referenced above and in other submissions makes it clear that this industry cannot be regulated safely.

WA does not need to keep extract gas onshore, because we have alternatives in terms of solar and wind energy, and there is enough gas offshore to use while alternatives are still growing (as long as we don't keep exporting most of that gas, similar to what is going on, on the east coast).

We recommend the Inquiry Panel recommend a permanent ban on unconventional (shale, tight and coal seam) gas exploration and production in Western Australia, including but not limited to the process of hydraulic fracture stimulation.

Submitted by: Nat Innes, Michael Thomas, Janette Huston, Jill Charles, Paul Longva and Anne Gething on behalf of Gasfield Free Swan & surrounds Alliance.