

SUBMISSION TO THE WA FRACKING INQUIRY

info@frackinginquiry.wa.gov.au

Dear Inquiry Panel,

I am opposed to fracking in any part of Western Australia, but particularly in the Kimberley region of WA. My reasons are as follows:

The impact on the environment

- There is huge potential for groundwater to be contaminated in the fracking process. Whilst the mining/gas industry will argue that cement casings never fail, containment ponds never overflow, accidents never happen etc there is enough evidence from around the world that they do. The risk is even higher on work sites far from public scrutiny. Life in the West Kimberley relies on clean water from the aquifers of the Canning Basin. We cannot take risks with this resource.
- In a changing environment, planning for safe fracking processes is increasingly uncertain. Witness the record breaking rainfall in the West Kimberley this year. The Dept. of Water told us the new sewerage ponds would never overflow and relining would solve the issues at the old treatment plant. Overflows occurred at both locations. Similar events could easily occur at containment ponds holding waste fracking chemicals.
- Climate change is real and is happening now. Australia claims to be reducing its carbon emissions yet fracking leads to large deliberate and fugitive emissions of methane. This is unacceptable.

As the Inquiry panel must be aware, everything in the environment is connected. A change in water quality or quantity has extensive downstream impacts – on rivers, wetlands, migratory waterbirds, vegetation growth etc etc. We do not have the capacity to contain these chains of destruction and should do everything to ensure that they do not occur – not via ad hoc management strategies but by never starting fracking in the first place.

The impact on local communities

- While people living in small towns and remote communities in the Kimberley aspire to more access to jobs, there is little evidence from other mining/gas sites that these people will be the ones who get the limited number of jobs available. Despite mining company rhetoric about local employment, the urgency for companies to maximise profits and complete works as quickly as possible conflicts with the ongoing training, mentoring and support requirements of inexperienced workers. What long term, sustainable improvements will occur in these towns and communities?
Research from other parts of Australia should not be ignored or brushed over. For example research into the economic and social impacts of the unconventional gas industry in Queensland has shown that the industry has led to a reduction in community well-being and social cohesion. It also caused a deterioration in local skills and infrastructure, few additional local job opportunities and limited economic benefit to the wider economy.

- Rather than positive outcomes there is evidence from Queensland and the USA that unconventional gas mining and fracking is harmful to health. Communities living near gas fields in those locations have reported serious health effects following the commencement of unconventional gas operations. These conditions include respiratory ailments, nose throat and eye irritations and neurological illnesses. Health services in the Kimberley are stretched enough. They do not have the capacity to deal with additional issues.
- The fact that Landholders and Traditional Owners have no right to refuse access to oil and gas companies in WA is an abomination, particularly after the time taken to grant native title rights. How can Aboriginal communities or pastoralists plan for the future if they don't know that they will have continued access to their land?

Government capacity to oversee fracking operations

- Self reporting and self regulation seem to be the current modus operandi in the mining industry. This is totally unacceptable. World wide experience indicates that fracking is the type of industry that requires extensive and ongoing **on ground** scrutiny. Does the government have the capacity to recruit, train, house, transport and provide salaries for the number of inspectors that would be required? I suggest not. In which case, fracking should not be allowed.

The alternatives to fracking are being ignored

Unconventional gas is a resource that is not strategically vital. With government leadership and the right environment for the alternative energy industry it can be replaced by renewable forms of energy generation, particularly in the Kimberley region where solar and wind power opportunities are almost infinite. There is no need to destroy our environment for a finite resource that will not provide the long term/ongoing job solutions that the government is looking for, where profits will go to companies whose primary interests and shareholders are elsewhere and where local people are likely to become even more marginalised and devalued than before.

I therefore urge the Inquiry to make a recommendation to permanently ban fracking and all unconventional gas mining in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. As many of my points are likely to apply to other parts of WA, the precautionary principle should be applied. I therefore suggest that the ban should be statewide.

Jan Lewis
Broome
18.3.18