

Independent Science Panel Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracture Stimulation

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Dear Panel

I support hydraulic fracturing.

My name is George Morris. I manage the Broome office of Buru Energy, an oil and gas explorer proposing to use fracking to extract tight gas.

I am familiar with the process of hydraulic fracturing and the impact of onshore oil and gas exploration. There will be many people commenting on the science of fracking and the Panel will no doubt have access to the science and regulations involved in hydraulic fracturing, as well as to the previous Inquiries in Western Australia and around Australia. I will leave the science to others to comment on, where I would like to concentrate my submission is the negative community impact of activist groups who operate in the Kimberley and around Australia.

I have been a resident of Broome for more than 40 years. The oil and gas industry has been operating discretely in the background here all of that time and has always been contributors to the town in a positive way. I am supportive of hydraulic fracture stimulation and am comfortable that the process is safe and that the environmental footprint is small and not dissimilar to existing drilling techniques, otherwise I would not support the process.

The Broome operations of Buru Energy currently employs 12 local residents to operate its small oil operations 100km east of Broome. These positions are well paid and support the families of people who have actually invested in the town and will be here long term. They pay shire rates, are involved in community organisations, and have the long-term interests of the town at heart. I cannot say the same of the environmental activists who have come here only recently, who do not pay shire rates, do not pay tax, do not employ people, do not invest in the town, and stir up considerable community angst about resource projects.

One of the terms of reference for this inquiry is the community impact of hydraulic fracture stimulation. Although this is directed at hydraulic stimulation, I would like to request the Panel members question why hydraulic fracturing may be perceived as having a negative community impact – I put it down to the persistence of activist groups who are subsidised by the hard working taxpayer.

The concern of the community about fracking doesn't come from any incident in Western Australia where fracking has damaged the environment, because there have not been problems with the wells fraced here. The concern comes from the activist groups deliberately spreading fear. These groups are often funded from 'philanthropic' trusts located the United States or from east coast millionaires, yet their impact is felt locally in remote towns like Broome. The Panel should recommend that these groups must declare their major

donors so that the public can assess who is controlling these groups in the background. The activists must also face consequences for spreading misleading information.

In all my time in Broome, what I have noticed recently is the rise of environmental groups active in the region. Broome was a fairly cohesive town prior to the arrival of the activists groups. They have caused a lot division and angst in the town even though they contribute very little socially or economically. In fact I would say that they have a net negative influence on the town.

Often they position themselves as self-righteous warriors standing up for the oppressed, my experience with these people is that they unqualified individuals who aggressively push their own agendas by shoving their uninformed opinions down other people's throats.

I have listened to many anti-fracking antagonist groups who freely speak out about various aspects of the oil and gas industry, often in a capacity of 'self-appointed public educators', but they do so with very limited industry knowledge or experience. At times I have been seriously shocked by the level of inaccuracy in their statements, and to me this raises serious alarm bells, as they are trying to act as educators to an understandably curious or concerned public, who themselves don't possess industry knowledge, so there is huge scope for unfiltered misinformation to run rampant throughout the community, causing highly emotive, but factually baseless anxiety and fear.

What has been under reported or ignored by the media is the militant and irresponsible actions that these groups engage in. I have been concerned for my staff and contractors due to physical and verbal threats that these activists have made. I am also concerned that these groups are unaccountable even though they hold a particular privileged status in the country, receiving tax free status, deductible gift recipient status for their privileged donors, and are given large government grants. This is contrasted with the oil and gas industry being so highly regulated, who employ people, sponsor local events, pay local shire rates and pay royalties to the state. Governments seem to have their priorities wrong in allowing these groups to prosper without any adequate regulations. These groups seem to be able to say and do whatever they want without consequence.

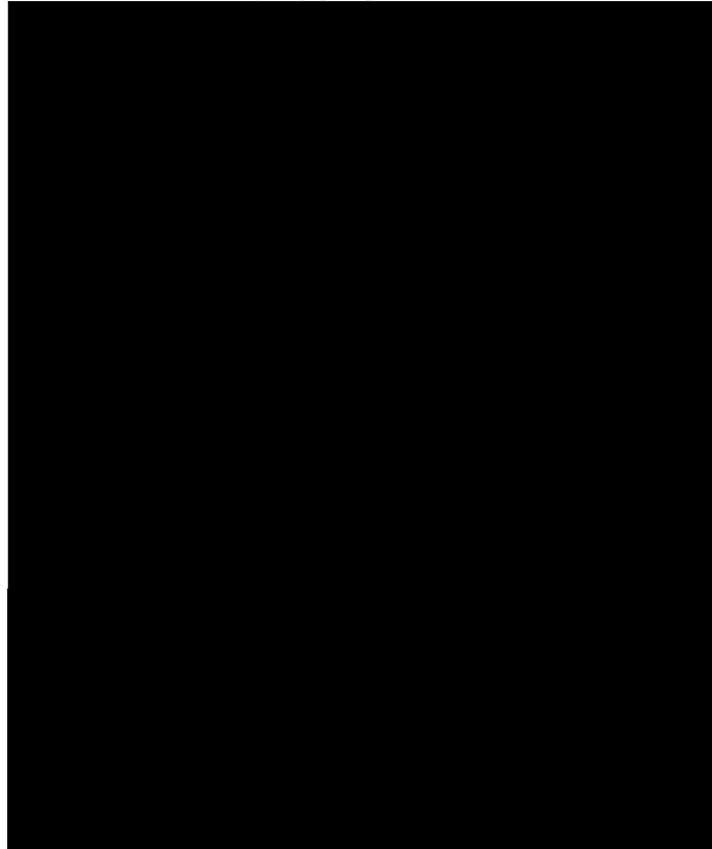
Behaviour of Activist Groups

Lock the Gate/Frack Free Kimberley and Environs Kimberley are two protest groups who have been vocal against hydraulic fracturing. Frack Free Kimberley is the Kimberley branded arm of the Lock the Gate Alliance. They have also been involved in blocking access to Buru Energy to its well sites at Yulleroo. Their representatives been involved in altercations with my staff and contractors. My staff should be able to perform their lawful employment without being unlawfully blockaded or abused by members of these groups.

Below are a few examples of the behaviour of these activist groups.

Example 1 – Violence against contractors

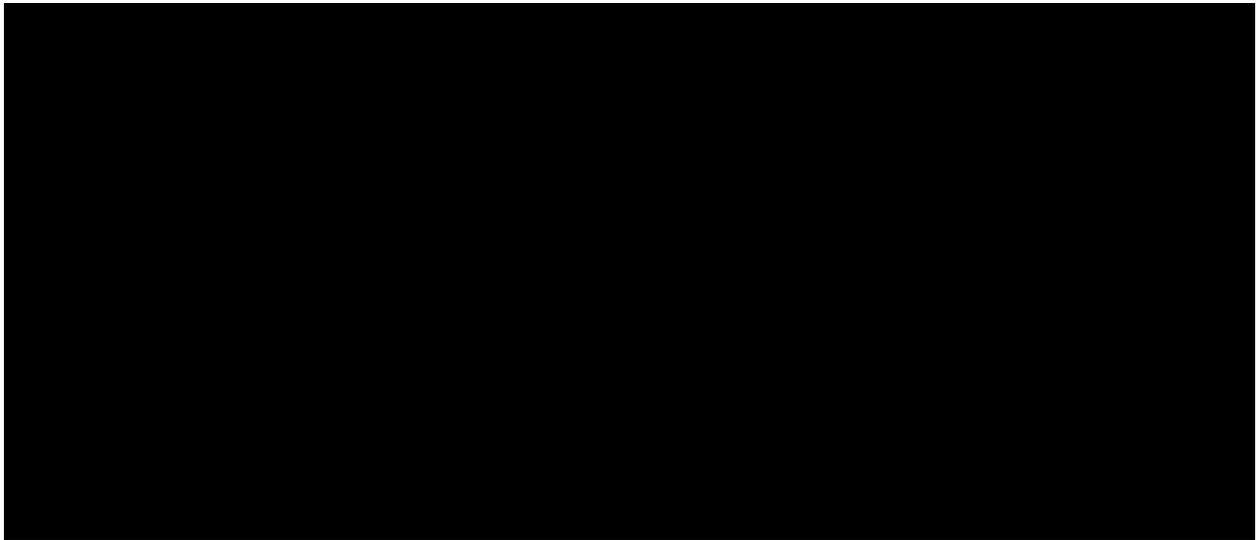
Photos identifying people have been removed



During a routine inspection of wells sites at Yulleroo, a Lock the Gate/Frack Free Kimberley (charity ABN 33156099080) representative blocked access to contractors and staff members. He punched a contractor's vehicle causing a crack in the vehicle's front windscreen. He then moved to the wide window of the vehicle and grabbed the driver and tried to drag him out of the vehicle's cabin. This Frack Free Kimberley representative then proceeded to sit in front of the contractor's vehicle with a star picket, threatening to hit anyone with it who crossed his line.

If the incident occurred the other way around, ie an oil and gas representative assaulting a protester, the Department of Mines and Petroleum would be investigating the company and significant penalties imposed. It is ridiculous that these charitable activist groups aren't accountable in the same manner.

Example 2 – Deliberate Blockading of Lawful Activities



Frack Free Kimberley representatives blockaded Buru Energy's employees' entry to its Yulleroo wells for more than a year.

During this time a gas valve on one of the wellheads was damaged. The DMP investigation that followed surmised that the well valve had been deliberately vandalised.

Fracking well deliberately vandalised in Kimberley, Government investigation finds

By [Erin Parke](#)

Updated 14 Jan 2015, 6:47am

A preliminary investigation into a leaking fracking well in the Kimberley has found it was deliberately sabotaged, sparking a police investigation.

Footage emerged last week of dangerously high levels of combustible gas escaping from the Yulleroo 2 fracking well east of Broome.

A video [showed a combustible gas metre being held up to the well-head](#), and the reading shooting up to a potentially explosive level.

Conservationists initially seized on it as evidence of the risks involved with fracking, but an inspection by the Department of Mines and Petroleum found the valve in question was not faulty, but had been damaged.



PHOTO: Activists said the image showed a high level of gas at the fracking well. (Supplied)

RELATED STORY: [Investigation into fracking site damage after gas leak claims](#)



Frack Free Kimberley Community

14 January · Edited ·

This is a rusting, old wellhead leaking gas, like they all do around the world. Apparently it has a bent valve that has been 'deliberately vandalised' - hang on a minute, let's just think about this, who could've done it? Could it be a 'third party'? Yes, but they'd have to have a deathwish, who in their right mind would tamper with a gas wellhead and risk blowing themselves up? Could it be the company Buru Energy itself? Yes, it could have happened during maintenance or at any other time without having been reported to anyone. Who has the most to lose from this? Is the Department of Mines and Petroleum independent enough from this industry when they actively promote it? Roll on but in the meantime the well is still leaking.



Kimberley fracking well 'deliberately vandalised'

A preliminary investigation into a leaking fracking well in the Kimberley finds it was deliberately sabotaged, sparking a police investigation.

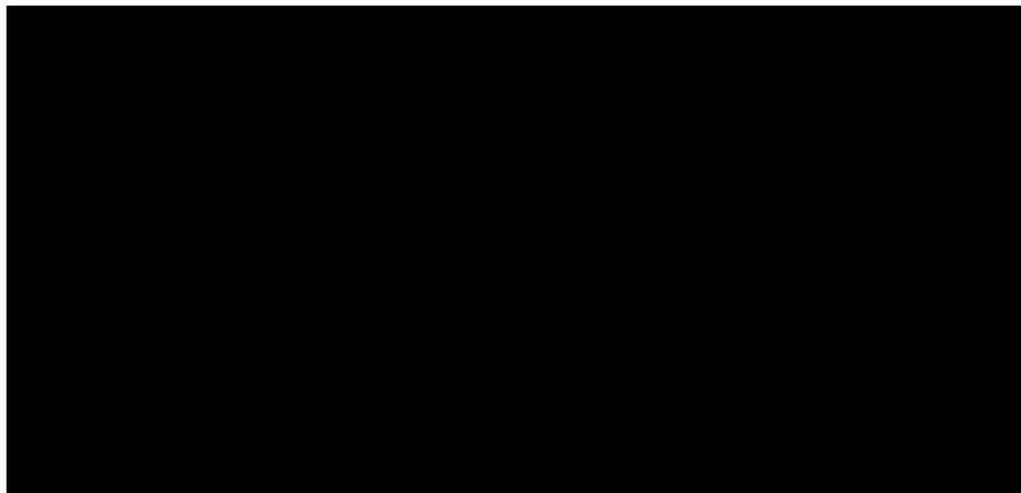
ABC.NET.AU

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The damage to the wellhead occurred while Frack Free Kimberley representatives were blockading the well sites from being accessed by company representatives. The well head had to be replaced at significant expense to the company.

Example 3 – Blockading of Lawful Activities by Board members of charitable green group

Environs Kimberley senior staff and board members have been involved in bullying of company staff and the blockading lawful activities of staff



These images above show Environs Kimberley and Lock the Gate/Frack Free Kimberley representatives blocking the vehicles of company personnel carrying out their lawful employment when carrying out maintenance at Buru Energy's Yulleroo well sites. One of the activists is a board member of Environs Kimberley (Charity ABN 17266405424), another is a senior staff member at Environs Kimberley. Police were called on this and other occasions, which resulted in move on notices being issued to one Lock the Gate representative. This is a waste of police time as it is a two hour return trip to Broome, not including the time they spend dealing with the protesters at site. The activists' actions create unnecessary costs for police and resource companies.

Hydraulic fracture stimulation has the potential to significantly benefit the region. The unaccountable behaviour of activist groups is not beneficial. It would be appropriate for the panel to recommend that these groups are accountable for their behaviour.

Thanks for your time

George Morris