

WA Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracture Stimulation in WA 2018

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I am a retired professional health care worker. I have worked in both public and private sectors in clinical and community settings including health education and promotion. In my capacity as a volunteer guide, sports and literacy coach, as well as creative arts facilitator, I have shared in the lives, albeit in a relatively small way, of a multi-cultural Australia.

In various ways I have always worked toward the well-being of individuals, groups, and community connections including the care and protection of our natural environment.

I believe that the greatest inclusion in the political process is not just valuable but necessary.

I am deeply concerned about the potential for irreversible environmental damage that may result from 'fracking', but also the de-naturing of the visual landscape is of considerable concern.

WA being one of the driest places on the planet can ill-afford the risk of 'fracking' to our ground water. 'Fracking' is extremely water use intensive.

A single shale gas frack uses 11-34 million litres of water in fracking fluids. This use is multiplied with repeated use of the same wells (up to ten times). Some of this fluid returns to the surface as flowback, but often it is never recovered and stays underground with its contaminants - estimates suggest 70%. Wastewater may contain heavy metals, salts, radioactive materials and volatile organic compounds (VOC's).

The marking out of claimed potential sites is largely invisible, so to a great extent this means out of sight, out of mind. Generally, it seems people simply do not know what they do not know regards 'fracking': Until it's too late.

Large areas of Australia, amounting to some 37.3% of the nation, are covered in coal and gas leases and applications. Surely, the government has a responsibility for the public to be made aware of this, as whole areas can be industrialized with wells, roads, pipelines, and infrastructure.

A little recognised loss in the course of industrialization is light pollution. We have already lost sight of the stars in so many parts of the world, and this loss continues to grow. Our remote areas hold precious wonders and we are losing them by increments. As well as the diminishing of our nature-scape along with loss of habitat for native fauna and flora there is also the additional loss to land already agriculturalised.

A case study in the USA 2012 found serious evidence of harm to livestock from contaminated water. Further, these lands suffer reductions in property values. No one wants to live near potential hazardous air pollutants from venting, flaring and wastewater contamination, especially when the industry is not necessary, and so the life-cycle of this opportunistic industry will surely be short.

Further there is no right to access of these areas even for aboriginal people who it can still be argued have a right existing prior to the assumption of 'Crown' rights. Friends of mine, Joan and Dave (Blue) Cook who have an organic farm at Dandaragan WA fear the loss of their living, life-style, neighbourhood and community with 'fracking' on their doorstep.

I have heard increased calls from industry in the past week or two for re-assertion of Crown rights in the face of local protest to mining claims. One of the tenets of our system of government, as I understand it, is that there is a social contract between the people and the government that the government acts in the best interests of the people.

There has been an assumption that a pre-cautionary principle would usually be applied by government i.e., that preventative action would be taken by government in the face of uncertainty, and of great importance, that proponents of a proposed activity would be required to demonstrate its safety, not the community. This seems to be the reverse with 'fracking'.

There are years of anecdotal evidence as well as many studies that de-bunk industry assurances. If fracking is so safe why does the industry not cover the liabilities? Given the costs and risks of fracking one asks, "Whose interests are being served"? It does seem that any discussion is limited to the powerbrokers of politics and industry.

Given this submission it might be argued that the community is being consulted, but this process is very intimidating for a great many people regardless of educational qualifications. The lack of public participation in the decision-making regards fracking leads to a sense of betrayal by government; that business interests are placed ahead of other stakeholders like property owners and the general public. There is uncertainty, anxiety, and fear while risks appear to be being denied or ignored.

The stress for farmers, whether it be collectively or alone, to engage with CSG companies, impacts negatively on their well-being and so the community. They have perceived the nature of CSG development as akin to "invasion" or "occupation".

A 2013 study involving a dozen workshops established that communities in southwest Queensland were under "sustained stress" due to coal seam gas operations.

A 2014 study noted that "gas developments can have numerous and considerable social and psychological effects, which may exacerbate more direct health risks".

The heralding of "jobs for the regions" not only attempts to silence the supposed affluent 'out of touch' dissidents in the cities by dividing the community, but it is an un-informed and erroneous claim of economic benefit.

It appears to a great many that successive governments are increasingly in the thrall of powerful business interests. The industry cannot be trusted. There are

too many things at odds with their claims. So self-regulation would mean no regulation.

I am deeply concerned by these matters and urge you to immediately stop any current pursuit of 'fracking' in WA and further, request that you institute a ban to all unconventional gas mining in WA.

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