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KE & AC Smith

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My husband is a third generation farmer and came to the Dandaragan area with his parents and brother from Dowerin, in the middle 1960s, to take up a conditional purchase block of virgin bush to develop into a farm; bush tracks, no Brand Highway, no power or telephone service but plenty of kangaroos and roo ticks.

There was a wave of wheatbelt famers and business people from the city taking up blocks of land that had been released by the government. This release was to open up more land, suitable for farming, because of the discovery that trace elements could turn sandplain country into productive farm land. The terminology given to these new arrivals and pioneers were 'new land farmers'.

Our nearest country town was Moora; Dandaragan had a post office/telephone exchange, St Anne's church, a wooden hall, a shire office and depot and a primary school.

1978 my husband and I were able to farm in our own right and continued to develop new land to create our farm. We now have 1400 hectares of Land at Dandaragan West where we run a mixed farming enterprise of cropping, prime lambs, merino wool, hay making.

We have raised three children and have been very active in our community. Dandaragan has evolved to now have an 18 hole golf course and club house, hockey oval, football oval, a licensed community club, community hall, tennis courts, bowling green, ambulance and bush fire centre and Aggie's Cottage at Wolba Wolba, Dandaragan. All created and run by community.

We have valued and enjoyed being part of this community, growing and prospering with agriculture under pinning the growth.

I was diagnosed with cancer in 2008 and from that experience it has made us explore how we can farm to ensure a safe and healthy environment while sustaining the land and produce nutritional and safe food.

For the last five years we have been transitioning to regenerative agriculture and have dramatically reduced the use of chemicals and have completely eliminated the use of inorganic fertilizers, fungicide, insecticide and pickle used on seed grain.

We are following the agricultural principals taught by, agricultural scientists, Dr Maarten Stapper, Dr Christine Jones, Walter Jehne and Nicol Masters.

Water is our number one asset for our farming enterprise along with the health of our soil and air. We have two bores on our farm for the watering of livestock and cropping requirements. The depths of our bores are 85 meters and 135 metres. We have rain tanks for house hold requirements.

Our farm rainfall records show that our annual rainfall is reducing. In 1965 the annual rainfall for our area was 26 inches, the average is now 24 inches and in the last five years we have not received the annual rainfall each year.

It is predicted that our annual rainfall will keep reducing and to add to our situation, the trend of traditional winter rainfall has started to shift to receiving more rain over the summer months, making growing a winter crop more challenging.

We have observed in our Red Gum tree country, (that includes our creek line, Minyulo), at the front section of our home block, **old trees are dying**. We first noticed this some 10 years ago. Once our skyline was all leafy green when we looked across the valley. Now the sky line has gaps with dead tree branches revealed. The general thought is that because of the reduced rainfall, the trees become stressed, come under insect attacked at either trunk or root system and at some point the tree can no longer get the nutrition to survive. Three years ago we started to apply a foliate microbial product to the paddocks, to help support the health of the soil and growth of the Red Gums and have changed grazing management.

When my husband's family first came to Dandaragan, **Minyulo Creek was fresh water, running year around**. The flow then changed to drying up in November/December and then would recommence around March, without a rain event, as it is feed from the Dandaraga Springs east of Dandaragan. Now the creek can dry up as early as October, depending on seasonal rainfall, and will not start running until we received rain. Some years the commencement for the flow of the creek has been as late as May. On top of this flow change, the salt content of the creek water has risen, and now cannot be used for garden.

We watch with interest to the **weather events reported globally and note that new records are being recorded for wind speeds, heat, cold, droughts, floods and so on**. It is distressing to hear the plight of the islands in the Pacific with the increasing of ocean levels.

We personally do not believe that our Australian government and industry are doing enough to safe guard our planet. Hence we have lost faith in the processes used by all levels of government; local, state, federal and we feel this submission is simply another process, to show a pretence of safe regulation, to quieten the population that fracking will impact on.

Passing through both our blocks is the Dampier to Perth gas pipe line and now we have a lease for gas exploration over our land. With all we have researched over the last 5 years and with more and more research coming to light we do not believe that unconventional fracking can be carried out safely. The meetings we have attended with gas companies and the CSIRO representative present, have not left us feeling reassured.

We feel uncomfortable knowing that the CSIRO is no longer funded 100% by government. Research funding is from the gas and oil industry. How can the general community feel confident with such an arrangement? There is no such thing as a free lunch, someone, somewhere always pays.

Our community has been surveyed, door to door by members of Dandaragan Groundwater Protection and 96.4 % wish to live in a gas field free area.

Australia is recognised as one of the driest continents in the world. Why would we put our water at risk, especially with the confirmation that our rainfall is reducing? On the ABC news on Sunday February 18th 2018 it showed footage of the drought ravaged pastoralist areas in Queensland. A three year long drought that has brought farmers, businesses and families to their knees. We are following with interest the 3 year drought at Cape Town in South African and wonder could that be Perth one day?

The elephant in the room with this enquiry.

The known history of farming since the beginning of time is creating some lively discussion among scientists as to why desertification is occurring globally and why global warming is happening.

“Call of the Reed Warbler”, by Charles Massy explains the evolution of farming from a global perspective and the devastation to the landscape and our planet by ignorance and greed.

Charles Massy gained a Bachelor of Science at ANU in 1976 before going farming for 35 years. Concern at ongoing land degradation and humanity’s sustainability challenge led him to return to ANU in 2009 to undertake a PhD in Human Ecology.

“Call of the Reed Warbler”, released in 2017, is creating a lot of media attention both here in Australia and globally and is creating a lot of conversation in the agriculture industry and government.

At a public meeting in Badgingarra hosted by the CWA, with guests from a gas company and a CSIRO scientist, was certainly interesting. There was a large attendance of concerned residents of the Shire of Dandaragan and some very good questions were put forward. As the meeting progressed and the gas company representative could see the opposition in the room to unconventional fracking, he lost his temper and stated that farming practises do more harm to our environment. The crowd went quite, however one voice from the audience spoke up, **“And that is why we don’t want unconventional fracking to occur, because our environment is already at a tipping point and we can’t afford for any more risks to our air, land and water.”** The audience applauded that reply.

In Charles Massy’s book, “Call of the Reed Warbler”, he talks of “Hidden Hunger”, “Slow Violence”, ‘alarming transgenerational impacts’, ‘environmental epigenetics’, ‘decline of our DNA’.

I quote, from page 469:

“Author Rob Nixon used the term ‘slow violence’ to describe our industrial, over processed, nutrient-bereft food that is strongly implicated in a huge spectrum of modern diseases. The escalating predominance of a false, mechanically minded world view that destroys people and community along with Mother Earth is also a form of slow violence: ‘a violence that occurs out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all.’ End of quote.

Unconventional fracking is also a ‘slow violence’. We are asking for base measurements of our: air, water, soil, human and animal health, should any fracking occur because of this unseen contamination by fracking.

Had there been base measurements taken at the start of the Green Revolution in Agriculture after the end of the Second World War; we could now be measuring the damage to our environment and our health with the introduction of in-organic fertilisers, herbicides, insecticides, fungicides?

What was the leadership of governments’ and scientists’ thinking at that time? How sound was the scientific research? Who funded the research papers?

I refer to the introduction of our submission and the reference to the release of new land for agriculture. What history has now revealed is the government of the time, should not have released certain areas of virgin bush for development, as the land was not suitable for farming. Farmers looking for a future, trusted the government advisers. They purchased land that has only cause land degradation, heartache, financial ruin and in some cases real tragedy for farming families.

The irony to this story, is for my husband's family to get the land titles to their CP block, they had to meet set requirements by the government. They had to fence the boundary of their block, build a dwelling and clear a specified percent of the land; mass land clearing throughout certain areas of WA caused land degradation issues and it was through direction of the government.

Government departments were later created to assist farmers to correct the wrong. We have received, fifty percent cost of project funding, from government, to plant native vegetation along the creek lines, to fence off existing virgin native vegetation; all to correct an error and develop a natural eco system to support our environment. Fortunately our labour and financial contribution, government subsidies and time are correcting the issue. The question that now arises here is, **Should fracking contaminate our surface water, or worse, contaminate our aquifer, how can that be corrected?**

As farmers we were told that glyphosate was safe; in fact it was so safe you could drink it. Starting on page 473 – 478, Massy **quotes leading world scientists who have written scientific papers lifting the lid on the dangers of glyphosate.**

It concludes with:

“The evidence would suggest that this coterie of big chemical, big pharma, big retail, big food processors and big traders care only about shareholder value and profit, and not the well-being and certainly not the physical and mental health, of customers, society and our sustaining Earth. Given their strategic manipulation of food products and additives (just to name salt, sugar and fat for starters), and given their knowledge of the impacts of their products on human health, these ‘corporate kleptocracies’ could well be **also accused of multiple and hidden forms of genocide and mass human suffering**”. End of quote.

Will unconventional gas fracking be viewed, by history, as hidden firms of genocide and mass human suffering?

Page 479 refers to mental health:

“there are higher levels of mental ill health in the bush than in non-farming environments”. Farming ‘is associated with a unique set of characteristics that is potentially hazardous to mental health’, concluded one academic study, while another stated, **‘even farmers scoring positively on mental health or wellbeing measures appear more likely than non-farmers to feel hopeless about the future, have suicidal ideation or contemplate suicide...apparent in several countries...’** “

End of quote

It goes on to give reasons for this perplexing, corrosive and damaging situation. With gas exploration licenses over most farming areas of our shire, this adds another burden to our farming families and community. A number of farming families have developed horticultural activities, new to our area, out laying huge amounts of money and very dependent on underground water supplies. They are feeling very unsettled and unsure of their future.

We have a large mineral sands mining operation in our area that is now expanding. The use by that industry for water is massive and we have been told that the mineral sands companies are not comfortable about the extra demand on water should fracking go ahead.

There is the development of wind farms/solar farms, in our area, which we are told is for clean energy and will most certainly impact on our landscape visually. Within 8 kilometres we already

have a lot of change, mineral sand mining, solar and wind farms and we can only wait and see what that outcome will be.

Historically land prices have dropped for land near wind farms and the local real-estate agents have informed us that perspective land buyers' first question when inspecting land in our area is, "Is there going to be fracking here?" **It makes people nervous and we believe should fracking go ahead it will affect our land values in a down ward trend.**

My husband and I have discussed what the future could hold for us should fracking be allowed.

Although we have well and truly put our roots down here (my husband's parents and our youngest child are buried at the Dandaragan cemetery), **we have decided that we will sell our property and search out farmland that is free of this menacing threat.** Our health, both mental and physical, is a high priority for our family and our farming activities.

The cold hard facts is that fracking should not be allowed in WA. No community should have to suffer this invasive and unproven industrial practise.

I could list all the scientific facts that support our views however I know your enquiry committee will be flooded with all relevant science references from other submissions. I don't need to waste your time.

Regenerative Agriculture - which contests the dominant industrial model is the subject of Massey's book. Page 51, Massey writes: "The term is derived from the verb 'regenerate', which has a number of connotations in the Macquarie Dictionary: 'to effect a complete moral reform in'; 'to re-create, reconstitute, or make over, especially in a better form or condition': 'to generate or produce anew; bring into existence again'." End of quote.

There is a grass roots revolution building, of farming families, understanding that they need to be changing their farming practises. This demand is also coming from consumers. China is a good example of consumer demand driving change.

Farm land in China, the size of Belgium, has been assessed as contaminated and not able to currently grow clean, healthy food. The Chinese government has started to restrict development of certain industries because of pollution. They also have just completed a 200 hectare project to reclaim desert through mass multi species planting of green cover and create precipitation to hydrate the area. There has also been Chinese companies buying farming land here in the Dandaragan area over the last 5 years. The Chinese are putting in place practises to safe guard their food chain for their people; our government, farmers and consumers should be doing the same.

Australian scientists are leading the way in the world with regenerative agricultural practises. The Senior Australian of the Year for 2018 was awarded for creating a mathematical formula to describe photosynthesis. He was the first scientist to crack the code and apparently this is a giant step forward for regenerative and all agriculture.

Our Australian of the Year is a Quantum Physic Scientist developing a computer that doesn't even exist at the moment. Once created it will benefit mankind at levels not even fully understood. This type of science when first revealed was refuted and ridiculed, now it is being accepted and applauded.

There has to be a solution to our energy requirements other than fossil fuels. Our government should be funding the brains of our country to create a solution, rather than spending tax payer's

money on funding foreign companies (who it is reported pay very little tax to our government) to explore for gas and put at risk our very being for a sustainable existence.

Gas mining is not sustainable, the life of a well is no more than 30 years. The employment by the gas industry will not benefit the culture of our community.

We are all here to develop a sustainable future for our future generations. A gas company is only here to take a commodity that has a short life and cannot be replaced.

An example of how mining impacts on a farming community is already evident for Dandaragan.

The mineral sands company operates with a four day on, four days off; the roster swings then to four nights, four days off. A number of locals work for the mine, however in doing so, they have lost the previous rhythm of their country lifestyle. They often miss out on social weekend activities, which are traditionally how country towns operate. It has impacted on our local clubs for participation to events and volunteering.

On top of that the company has the employee living quarters near the mine, so the majority of employees (who are from outside our community) do not even connect with our community. They are drive in, drive out, onto the Brand highway to their families and community elsewhere; they are unknown to us and they do not spend money in our community.

Also with the down turn in mineral sand prices in the latter years, the company closed down one of their mines. Now with the upturn of prices another mining company has started to develop in the adjacent area. All this mineral sand mining is apparently interfering with the water course of the Minyulo creek according the aboriginal elders in our community.

I have been told they are powerless to intervene because of the political situation that exists with the South West Aboriginal settlement between the government and mining companies. This situation developed through changes with the previous Barnett Government. I have been told there is intimidation and bullying in meetings and immense frustration within the Yued Noongar community because their cultural heritage rights have not been adhered to by all the parties.

This is a single example of the power of government and big business that we know of and it further adds to our distrust of the processes currently in place.

The other example of suppression by government (any government that is in power), is anyone employed by government in the relevant departments that have an association with the subject of fracking, cannot make a comment on the matter. To further add to this, as most employees have a mortgage on a house, individuals are too afraid to speak out, as a private citizen, for fear of losing their job as a kick back on their action. Their first priority is the financial security for their family and rightly so.

To conclude with our submission, we are totally opposed to any form of fracking, not just in our area, but the whole of our state.

We, as farmers, are making a real effort in farming with regenerative practises and enhancing our environment.

With these practises it is believed that we can play a real role in helping to reverse climate change by sequestering carbon in our soils. Scientist, Walter Jehne, recently did an interview via webinar, the subject, "Hydrating the Planet". (reference – Healthy Soils Australia).

NutriSoil, one of the companies we purchase a product off for regenerative farming, has an excellent web page explaining the ten steps to regenerative farming backed by Australian scientists who are recognised worldwide for their pioneering work.

Having lost our youngest child, Brodie William Smith, at the age of 21 years, in 2004, as a result of an accident on our farm; we know what loss truly means. We also know what the loss of health means with my breast cancer journey starting 2008 and we actively work at improving and enhancing our lifestyle and environment.

It was stated in the forerunner to guide lines for the fracking submission that it needed to be supported by scientific facts; however emotional facts cannot be separated from this debate.

As the government appointed panel to investigate unconditional fracking for our state, you have a real responsibility to speak the truth, be transparent, unbiased – regardless of your back ground, and to apply unconditional love for fellow man and our planet.

We wish you all well with your work ahead.

Kingsley and Christine Smith