

BURU ENERGY — SHALE GAS PROJECT

22. Hon ROBIN CHAPPLE to the minister representing the Minister for Mines and Petroleum:

I refer to an article on the front page of *The Australian* dated 30 December 2013 by Andrew Burrell headed “Gas wars to open up on a new front” in which he reported the Western Australian Minister for Mines and Petroleum as giving an undertaking that —

the government would ensure all future shale gas projects were assessed, with auditors conducting inspections to check compliance with safety and environmental standards.

- (1) Is this consistent with the decision by the Environmental Protection Authority not to assess the proposals by Buru Energy to undertake tight gas stimulation using hydraulic fracturing of four existing exploration wells in the Canning Basin area of WA?
- (2) If no to (1), what steps will the minister take to maintain his undertaking to ensure all future shale gas projects are assessed, as reported?
- (3) If yes to (1), will the minister please explain how it is consistent?
- (4) Will the minister please issue an explanation to the community about how this is the case so they can have faith in the process?

Hon KEN BASTON replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of this question. The Department of Mines and Petroleum advises —

- (1) Yes. The Environmental Protection Authority is a statutory authority and its assessment process under part 4 of the Environmental Protection Act 1986 is independent from the Department of Mines and Petroleum’s assessment of environmental impacts under petroleum legislation.
- (2) Not applicable.
- (3) In addition to DMP’s environmental regulatory responsibility, it also seeks advice from other regulatory and advisory government agencies where applicable. Any proposals that could potentially have a significant impact on the environment must be referred to the EPA for independent assessment.
- (4) Western Australia’s regulatory framework for hydraulic fracking is coordinated, transparent and risk-based, and is continuously being improved in response to new scientific, technological and social considerations. DMP has also established an interagency working group to ensure that updated legislation, regulations and guidelines are robust and address community values and expectations for the developing shale and tight gas industry in Western Australia. Development of natural gas from shale and tight rock in this state is still in the early stages of exploration and evaluation, so WA is well positioned to learn from other jurisdictions to ensure that industry adopts the highest international best practice standards.