



18/9/13

Ms Margaret Liveris  
Committee Clerk  
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
GPO Box A11  
Perth WA 6837

## Re GAS FRACKING SENATE INQUIRY.

Under Western Australian law, landowners cannot prevent gas fracking occurring on their land and shale gas fracking companies are permitted to frack in nature reserves and other areas of conservation estate. I strongly object to Petroleum companies that seem to go where they want, pay a pittance in compensation, pollute people's water, and then leave the state to clean up the mess. It seems that petroleum companies get special treatment - and leave the rest of us to pay the price.

I believe the terms of reference of the current inquiry are far too narrow. It is extremely important that the terms of reference are expanded – fracking will have devastating impacts on the WA environment and on the health of Western Australians. The terms of reference of the inquiry need to capture the key risks of the industry. Amongst issues that I believe the expanded terms of reference should cover are the following:

- The potential for human health impacts. Fracking can make people sick.
- Social impacts. Gasfields will bring in hundreds of FIFO workers to communities, who drive up rents, disrupt communities, and then pull out of town.
- Groundwater contamination that may flow from failed wells, from migration via natural fissures and abandoned wells.
- Air pollution isn't covered under the terms of reference of the inquiry.
- Impacts on farming and pastoral land, as well as on natural ecosystems.
- Climate change impacts that flow from fugitive emissions.
- Regulation. The regulatory frameworks for gas fracking are inadequate. While other activities such as mining and minerals processing require Operating Licenses to control pollution, shale gas fracking is currently exempt from these requirements. I believe this is wrong.
- The cumulative impact on landscapes of shale and tight gas development. A

gasfield comprises several thousand wells. The cumulative impact of those wells on the environment, farm land, and human health should be considered, as well as the social impact on communities. Well-by-well assessment, as is preferred by the current government, is clearly inadequate.

- I am concerned that the Department of Mines and Petroleum is too deeply conflicted to be trusted with regulation of this potentially environmentally disastrous industry. The government regulator appears to be conflicted, tasked with both ensuring that WA's environmental values are protected and with promoting the industry.
- The fight for native title was decades long. Now aboriginal people may be forced to enter access 'agreements' imposed on them by inflexible legal instruments that give frackers the right to frack on native title land. I believe that's utterly wrong.
- I am concerned who has liability for abandoned sites after well abandonment, and what steps can be made to ensure that frackers don't just cut and run, leaving landholders and the community to deal with the consequences.
- Conservation parks must not be degraded by fracking I believe. They've been preserved for a reason, and should be totally off limits.

Re the regulation of chemicals used in the hydraulic fracturing process:

- No dangerous pollutants should be pumped through our aquifers – laws should ensure that all fracking chemicals are completely safe.
  - A range of dangerous contaminants are released from shale or tight stone by fracking, and have the potential to contaminate ground or surface water. Concern doesn't end with the chemicals that are pumped into the well – we should be concerned about what comes back up again, as well.
- 
- Each frack uses up to 30 million litres of water. The Mid West might see 25,000 wells, the Kimberley over 100,000. That kind of water use will deplete aquifers.
- 
- Who is liable for contamination of water that occurs after a well has been abandoned? Companies are obliged to 'monitor' for two years after well abandonment, but that is the point at which their obligations cease. But the wells remain a pollution threat forever. Concerningly, pollution might occur post-well abandonment without anyone knowing, because no monitoring is being done, creating a public health time bomb.

I would like you to consider my concerns as part of your deliberations.

Yours sincerely

Erica Brock

---