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Standing Committee on Environment and
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Dear Sirs and To Whom It May Concern,

Please find my submission to the inquiry into the implications for Western Australia of hydraulic fracturing for unconventional gas.

My submission centres on the authority and effectiveness of the environmental protection agency and this body's ability to stop a project should findings by this body determine that an unacceptable amount of negative environmental outcomes would result from an examined project being approved.

It should be very clear to any enquirer that a large amount amount of negative environmental impacts to the water reserves and to the landscape have been caused by the execution of the method in question in the past within Australia and abroad where ever this method has been carried out.

This inquiry will find that there are negative environmental impacts in every fracking project purely because any interaction between nature and industry will result in some impact on the environment both positive and negative.

A point which I would like this committee to consider while reading my submission is what is the threshold of tolerance for damage to the environment which must be exceeded before an assessed project is rejected by the Environmental protection agency.

Clearly the tolerance threshold for environmental damage is very different for every observer, depending on their connection to the environment or their dependence on income derived from the industry creating the damage.

It should be examined where the observer stands on the tolerance threshold scale and if the observer is a member of a senate inquiry committee or a member of an environmental protection agency involved in an project approvals process then how accurately do they represent community standards of tolerance for environmental damage.

I ask this because of all the projects utilising this and other similar methods of extraction that have been approved in the past clearly many of them have resulted in an unacceptable amount of environmental damage yet they have clearly passed through an environmental approvals process

and this fact casts doubt on the effectiveness of this process to adequately protect the environment to the standards expected by the community.

I would like to think that, as all the completed and producing projects utilising this method and other similar methods throughout Australia must have passed rigorous environmental assessments then there should only be a level of environmental damage from these projects that is well below the tolerance threshold of the community.

Clearly this has not been the case. There is ample evidence of community outrage at the level of environmental damage, a very real fear pervades the community of further damage and a deep mistrust of the authorities and the bodies responsible for granting the environmental approvals for these methods of extraction exists within the community.

In fact at a recent community forum in Dongara where I was given the opportunity to question industry and environmental protection agency representatives I asked a simple question, whether of the hundreds of thousands of fracking well projects that had been submitted to the protection agency for environmental approval how many of these had been rejected on environmental grounds. The answer I received was that no projects had failed to pass the environmental protection agencies approvals process as far as the industry and environmental protection agencies representatives present at the meeting were aware.

Even if the answer had been a few or even a hundred, I put it to the committee that in light of the community outrage and the very real evidence of environmental damage on a very large scale that there has been a failure of the environmental protection assessment and approvals process of a catastrophic scale.

As a member of the community interested in the development of the resources of Australia for the benefit of the whole population I would be disappointed and suspicious if all, or a disproportionate number of projects submitted for approval were rejected and in the same token I am equally disappointed and suspicious that all projects have been approved.

The point I would like the committee to consider after reading my submission is;

In the light of community standards for tolerance toward environmental damage and the fact that every project utilising these extraction methods under question does result in significant environmental damage is the environmental protection agency equipped with adequate authority and sensitivity to correctly determine an approvals process that accurately reflects community standards and tolerances for environmental damage and if not how can this situation be improved?

Ian James

Farmer