



## **Submission to the Inquiry into the Implications for Western Australia of Hydraulic Fracturing for Unconventional Gas**

**By Roy Oldham, BSc (mining)**

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Dear committee members, I am writing this submission to voice my concerns at the arrival of this new technology on Western Australian soil as I have great apprehensions that the problems experienced in America with this practice may also befall the people of Western Australia.

I would first like to submit that perhaps the most fundamental question that the inquiry might need to answer is that of; is Hydraulic Fracturing for Unconventional Gas (fracking) actually necessary to the well-being and prosperity of the people of Western Australia? Is there any good reason why we should accept any risks associated with this practice? It is my personal belief that WA as a net exporter of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) is in a position where it is unlikely that the wellbeing or prosperity of the Western Australian people will be affected in any greatly negative way by not adopting the practice as an energy source. I recently read in the paper that the greatest problem our electricity grid is currently facing is an oversupply of electricity due to reduced demand and increasing dispersed generation by renewable sources.

Secondly I submit that the people of Western Australia simply should not have to accept any level of secrecy when it comes to the release of chemicals into the environment, especially when there is a good chance that those chemicals will end up in our underground aquifers. No industry in WA should be allowed to maintain secrecy about its emissions into the environment. This is simply not acceptable and must be prevented by law.

Thirdly I submit that a state such as WA which is currently desalinating water to make up its water requirements cannot afford to waste countless gigalitres of water on an energy industry that it does not need. Further, I am concerned that fracking will cause far less artesian water to be available to existing industries such as WA's staple of mining and pastoral industries. After fracking has finished exploiting our land will our other industries still be healthy and viable if our water resources have been depleted or contaminated?

Fourth, as a qualified mining professional with years of experience, I submit that this industry is nothing like any other that we know in WA today. In mining we know where our holes are, we monitor and try to minimize ground damage beyond our excavations. Even the biggest mining operations might only spread over an area of less than 200 acres and such operations tend to have productive lives well in excess of 20 years. Most mining operations are far smaller. Mining does not pump anything

outward into the environment. It generally recycles most of its water. All of its waste is secured in tailings storage facilities. Fracking is a very different beast. While companies may know where their holes are, they cannot possibly know the full extent of their fracturing efforts. They then pump a toxic concoction of "proprietary" ie; secret, chemicals into these fractures and then prop them open for good with sand. Their operations spread out like a dermatitis across thousands of acres of land per project. This creates a web of drill pads and pipelines that scar the land everywhere that they operate. They turn gigalitres of good water into waste on a daily basis and have no further use for it. The on-site separation plants dotted over the countryside release volatile organic compounds (VOCs) into the air and affect the health of all who must breathe the air in the area. It is of great concern to me that many West Australians may not be weary of this practice, thinking that it is just another well controlled industry that will add to the wealth of the state like all the others.

Fifth, I am gravely concerned at the risk of contamination of our underground water resources. At a time when great economic minds are saying that future wars will be fought over water supplies and old oil barons are buying up water resources, how can Australia think that to risk the security of our water resources to get gas that we don't need makes any long-term sense at all? In a world where the future of our economy may be more based on our water than our petrochemicals it seems like a very bad financial decision for the future.

Finally, I must stress that if fracking is to continue in WA then it must only be allowed to continue following extensive baseline studies in 4 main areas; water quality (surface and underground), air quality, hydrogeology and land condition. Without these baseline studies it will be impossible for the people of WA to fully prosecute complaints against offending fracking companies if damage to these main areas of known risk does indeed occur. It is well known that environmental damages can be very hard to prove in the absence of baseline studies. These studies should also be required so that the environmental authorities have standards by which to measure the impact of these operations.

I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude that this inquiry is underway and I wish you all the very best of success in determining your findings.

Yours sincerely

Roy Oldham