

Environment and Public Affairs Committee

From: Christina
Sent: Friday, 20 September 2013 7:14 AM
To: Environment and Public Affairs Committee
Subject: Parliamentary Inquiry into gas fracking in WA

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

Re: Parliamentary Inquiry into gas fracking in WA

I welcome the opportunity to express my concerns about gas fracking and it's potential impact on our water, land, health and environment. I am hopeful my concerns will be considered as part of your inquiry and will have an impact on the Term of Reference and decision makers.

I live in Broome, not far from a site where Buru Energy has already done some test fracking and is planning to do more next year. So my concerns are of a deeply personal nature.

I have visited the site where fracking has occurred a couple of years ago now and have sighted the dam where the water has been stored. Dead birds were found next to this pond. We took some samples to have them tested and just after a couple of days of having them in my house the smell out of a *closed* jar was so unbearable that we had to put it outside until we were able to establish where to send the samples to. I clearly distrust any industry representative and politician who states they are happy to drink fracking fluid or that fracking is safe. In my view, gas fracking places unacceptable risks on the environment, groundwater, air quality and public health. These risks include toxic contamination and depletion of aquifers, air pollution and large-scale disturbance of fragile ecosystems. Who has liability for abandoned sites after well abandonment, and what steps can be made to ensure that fracking companies don't just cut and run, leaving land managers and the community to deal with the consequences? 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 pollution might occur post-well abandonment without anyone knowing, because no monitoring is being done, will tax payers have to foot the bill for any problems after wells have been abandoned?

Here in Broome we are particularly reliant on groundwater for drinking and food production (it doesn't rain for about 9 months a year) and groundwater contamination is irreversible. I am also concerned about the amount of water that would be used: each frack can use up to 30 million litres of water. Thousands of wells in the Kimberley would be a huge pressure on precious groundwater in an arid environment. Will fracking be allowed in areas that are reserves for Town' water supply?

I question if the risk of irreversible pollution of our groundwater but also of the surrounding bush of a fracking site relating to flooding is sufficiently taken into consideration. In the case of a cyclone or even a big storm (as occur regularly in the Wet Season), this part of the country floods easily. What effect would this have on the wells and our groundwater I ask?

I urge you to include the social impacts into the Terms of reference of your inquiry. An influx of a large number of FIFO workers into a small town like ours would destroy the social makeup of our town and its issues. We already have very limited and stretched health services and housing that is too expensive for many. Cashed up mining workers would exacerbate these issues immensely.

I am not convinced that regulatory frameworks for fracking are adequate. The gas fracks that were done in our areas were done with only a small number of individuals being informed and being able to have a say. If our groundwater

and environment is at risk I believe the community is entitled to be informed and have a say. We live in such a remote place with not other town anywhere near it that we can't just move another 50 kms to have access to safe drinking water if it does get contaminated.

As became apparent with the recent proposal at James Price Point research of the current state of the environment, hydrology and hydrogeology is very limited. Comprehensive base line data/research has to be available **before** any fracking is done, so we know what's there and how fracking might impact on the local conditions, not only on a well by well basis, but looking at the region. Conservation parks must not be degraded by fracking. They've been conserved for a reason, and should be totally off limits.

Being familiar with the details of the process that was used to try and push through the James Price Point proposal I have not confidence whatsoever in the WA government to properly assess and manage the environment and health risks of gas fracking. Government and industry are far too closely connected for me to be convinced that government takes all aspects into consideration not just the economic gain. Around the world environmental regulators have been captured by the powerful gas industry and it appears that this has already occurred in WA. The cumulative impact on the environment, farm land, human health and the climate must be examined in a full public process before any further development occurs.

We need to be developing clean energy sources for WA and capitalising on our natural advantages of clean, renewable energy. Gas fracking does not produce clean fuel – there is mounting evidence that lifecycle carbon pollution from gas fracking is similar to burning coal. We cannot afford this massive additional contribution to climate change.

Western Australia's water and land is vital to our health, our lifestyle and our economy. Gas fracking is not worth the risk. Many visitors from the East coast report how fracking has affected their health, home and farm land and destroyed their life.

Please let's not do the same here in the West.

Thank you for considering my submission

Christine Elsasser