

Shire of Coorow
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Inquiry into the Implications for WA of Hydraulic Fracturing for Unconventional Gas

Monday, 27 October 2014

Introduction

Good Morning Mr Chair and Committee Members.

Thank you for the invitation and the opportunity to make this presentation today.

My name is Damien Rackemann and it is my privilege to be the Shire President of the Shire of Coorow.

Shire of Coorow Demographics

The Shire of Coorow is the southernmost of the mid-west shires with its southern boundary approx. 240 km north of Perth.

It covers an area of 4,137km² and has a population of approx. 1,100 people with its main population centres being Leeman and Green Head on the coast and the town of Coorow located 120 km inland.

The Shire's major industries could be viewed as traditional rural pursuits including grain, livestock, rock lobster and wet-line fishing along the coast, wildflowers and tourism.

The issue of Fracking in the Shire of Coorow

Resource exploration is not new in the mid-west. It has been in operation for some 50 years or more that I am aware of.

Activities concerning the operations of the Drover one site located east of Green Head and adjacent to the Mount Lesueur National Park were brought to Council's attention by the proponents AWE in a presentation to Council at its September 2013 meeting.

AWE requested Council's advice in engaging with the local community on its proposed operations which resulted in an open invitation to a forum held at the Leeman Recreation Centre on 21 November 2013 which I attended along with Cr Darren McTaggart and a number of interested local community members, several of whom are present in the gallery today.

To the best of my knowledge and recollection AWE has also distributed several newsletters within the local community advising of its activities at the Drover one well.

Council staff were involved in regular discussions and interaction with AWE earlier in 2014 concerning the drilling operations at Drover one and more specifically, the issue of on-site accommodation attached to the drilling operations.

These discussions were not always amicable as Council officers conveyed the requirements of the Shire of Coorow's Town Planning Scheme relating to the setting up and operations of temporary accommodation.

AWE was of the opinion that its licence issued by the DMP allowed for the setting up of any ancillary facilities attached to the drilling operations. This was clearly not the case as interpreted by Council Officers in relation to the Shire of Coorow's Town Planning Scheme and subsequent legal advice confirmed this. Upon receipt of the legal advice from McLeods Barristers and Solicitors, a copy was provided to AWE for its information.

Subsequent discussions involving AWE and Council Officers have been more amicable as a result. This has also been the case with Council itself.

AWE undertook core drilling at its Drover one site in the middle of 2014 having made alternative arrangements concerning on-site accommodation.

The Conservation Council of WA (CCWA) conducted two forums in Green Head and Leeman in late July 2014. Unfortunately the forums were not well advertised which resulted in neither elected members nor senior officers attending these forums. Piers Verstegen was subsequently invited to make a presentation to the August 2014 Ordinary meeting of Council held in Leeman so that elected members could hear the opinion of CCWA relating to fracking and the operations of the Drover one exploration well.

The Council meeting was attended by approx. 60 interested community members and a vigorous public forum resulted when a number of questions were asked of the Council in relation to the issue of fracking and more specifically the operations of Drover one.

Subsequent resolutions of Council has resulted in the following:-

RESOLUTION:

2014/103

Moved: Cr Sims

Seconded: Cr Jack

That Council:-

- 1. publicly supports the request from Green Head and Leeman residents for the fracking at Drover-1 to be put on hold pending a thorough independent investigation of the risks to the Mount Peron aquifer and bore field***
- 2. does not support any further gas fracking within the Shire of Coorow (including exploration fracking) without full environmental impact assessment by the EPA, including assessment of impacts to surface and groundwater resources***

3. **does not support any further gas fracking within the Shire of Coorow (including exploration fracking) without;**
 - a. **Health impact assessment (as called for by the Department of Health); and**
 - b. **Assessment of cumulative impacts on agricultural land (as called for by the WA Farmers Federation (WAFF))**
4. **Writes to all members of the Western Australian parliament advising of its position in relation to the Drover -1 well project and seeks their support in ensuring "due diligence" in all fracking operations within the Shire of Coorow.**
5. **Requests the CEO to draft a policy to be presented to the September 2014 Council meeting which clearly states Council's position in relation to the mining of Unconventional Gas via Hydraulic Fracture Stimulation in the Shire of Coorow.**

**CARRIED 6/0
Simple Majority**

RESOLUTION:

2014/118

Moved: Cr Sims

Seconded: Cr Jack

That Council adopts Policy 9.7.1 – Petroleum, Mining and Extractive Industries as shown as an attachment to this report.

**CARRIED 7/0
Absolute Majority**

Note: Council's resolution differed from Officer's recommendation to provide a stronger policy in relation to fracking, petroleum, mining and extractive industries in general.

POLICY - ECONOMIC SERVICES

Sub Section: Other Economic Services

Policy Number: 9.7.1

Policy Subject: Petroleum, Mining and Extractive Industries

Policy Statement: The Shire of Coorow supports the expansion of industry that helps deliver economic prosperity to its residents however, in providing this support Council supports every effort being undertaken to ensure that the initial assessment as well as compliance and monitoring of any activity is carried out at a level that protects the amenity of the natural and built environment and that of residents.

Objectives: To ensure that local values relating to lifestyle and quality of life, including public health, amenity, biodiversity, water (both surface and ground), and other economic sectors (such as agriculture and tourism) are adequately considered and protected from the development or expansion of any extractive industry activity in the Shire of Coorow.

To ensure that any future or existing extractive industry activity is thoroughly assessed, monitored and managed effectively to meet all conditions of development consent, and endeavour to continuously improve operational practices to reduce environmental impacts wherever practicable.

To ensure petroleum and mining companies build a commitment to best practice standards for petroleum and mining activity in the Shire of Coorow, and actively participate in local communities.

Guidelines: The principal role for Council is to advocate on behalf of the Shire of Coorow and its communities. Council is not the determining authority for mining applications, but no other organisation has the interests of the communities of the Shire of Coorow as its principal focus.

The primary economic land uses within the Shire of Coorow are food production (agriculture, horticulture and pastoral industries), fishing and tourism. These industries contribute to the history, community, identity and amenity of the region and should be preserved as the primary land uses for the Shire in the future.

The Shire of Coorow's communities and businesses are dependent on access to clean groundwater. The protection of

water resources and infrastructure (including underground aquifers, catchment and recharge areas, rivers, creeks, lakes wetlands, dams, wells and bores) from pollution or over-use is therefore of paramount importance to the sustainability of the local economy and communities in the region.

The Shire of Coorow contains areas of natural vegetation that are unique and of global ecological significance. These areas not only provide a basis for nature-based tourism industries, but are worthy of protection in their own right in order to support the maintenance of ecosystem services including clean air, water and biological diversity.

Large areas within the Shire of Coorow are subject to petroleum exploration leases and there is limited existing petroleum production within the Shire. The exploration and production of these onshore resources is likely to require hydraulic fracture stimulation (fracking) technology which is new to the Shire. These industries present potential risks to the town water supply of communities within the Shire. Continuation of existing land uses including through surface and groundwater contamination, air pollution, impacts on agricultural land, impacts on natural ecosystems and impacts on the health of communities within the Shire.

In respect to current and future proposals for on-shore petroleum or other extractive industries, Council will;

- a. Effectively consult communities within the Shire regarding onshore petroleum developments and represent the concerns and interests of these communities in decision-making on all matters relating to these developments;
- b. Assume a leadership role in negotiating with the State Government and resource companies to ensure that any petroleum or mineral resource projects in the Shire provide benefit to the community, and individuals within the community where appropriate;
- c. Ensure that the protection of the health of communities and the protection of groundwater resources is afforded the highest priority in decision-making by the Shire;
- d. Support and advocate for the rights of communities and residents within the Shire to clean water, clean air, and enjoyment of land without pollution or nuisance;

e. Support and advocate for the existing economic land uses within the Shire (including pastoral, agricultural and horticultural, fishing and tourism businesses) to continue to operate unhindered by impacts of petroleum or extractive industries.

f. Facilitate an open dialogue and discussion within the community of all stakeholders, based on the sharing of accurate information to encourage an informed debate about issues related to mining.

Council support for specific onshore petroleum development or exploration proposals

a. Council does not support further petroleum resource development within the Shire (including exploration) which has not first undergone thorough and independent assessment of environmental, health, agricultural and socio-economic impacts (including cumulative impacts) by the Environmental Protection Authority, Department of Health and other relevant agencies.

b. The Shire of Coorow will consider each proposal for petroleum resource development or exploration within the Shire by applying the follow criteria for decision-making. To be supported by the Shire, exploration and development must;

- Undertake thorough community consultation and achieve demonstrated broad community support for development;
- i. Maintain and protect the amenity and character of the Shire, and its existing communities and land uses;
- ii. Ensure zero impact on groundwater resources used for drinking, agriculture or other existing uses, including the catchment and recharge areas for these resources;
- iii. Ensure zero impact on the health of communities or individuals within the Shire;
- iv. Ensure that the impacts on Council infrastructure are adequately compensated for in the immediate and future life of that asset, and that the full costs are recovered for any additional infrastructure required;
- v. Provide full transparency to the community regarding all environmental compliance and monitoring data, including air quality and groundwater monitoring results, chemicals used, and any other relevant information which must be disclosed in a timely manner.
- vi. Accept a 'presumption of liability' for any groundwater pollution that is detected in the vicinity of petroleum operations and which can reasonably be associated with those operations.
- vii. Provide guarantees of full reparation and remediation of groundwater, land, infrastructure, public health or other unplanned impacts that arise from the development.

c. The Shire of Coorow is not willing to provide its support or assistance to proponents or other parties (including the State Government) who seek to undertake or promote petroleum activities within the Shire that do not meet these standards.

Resolution No: Council, 2014-
Resolution Date: 17 September 2014
Source: Council
Date of Review:
Review Responsibility: Chief Executive Officer/Council

Subsequent discussions involving both elected members and Council officers have been enlightening to say the least.

The meeting with Mr John Cotter, Commissioner with the Queensland Gas Commission in Eneabba, facilitated via Shane Love MLA was particularly beneficial. The meeting was also attended by Richard and Eric Holmes on whose land AWE has drilled the Drover one exploration well. Mr Cotter spoke of the requirement for mining companies to be more open and up-front in their dealings with private land owners rather than exerting some form of stand-over tactics and negotiated from that opening position.

The meeting with Officers from the Dept. of Mines and Dept. of Water was also beneficial for Council to learn of the licensing requirements as well as the consultation and condition requirements prior to any licence being issued for the exploration well.

In conclusion, the Shire of Coorow is neither pro nor anti-fracking. It is pro-water and very much pro-community. It is there to represent the interests of its community as its principal focus. This should be the principal focus of all local governments in Western Australia.

My thanks are extended to the Committee for the opportunity to provide this presentation this morning and I am happy to take any questions that you may have.

Thank you

