

To: Rodney Thomas, RThomas@geelongcity.vic.gov.au
Manager Environment and Waste Services, Geelong
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Tony Gleeson's submission to City of Greater Geelong re fracking

Dear City of Greater Geelong Councillors

I welcome the opportunity to present this submission to your enquiry into 'onshore gas extraction' within your jurisdiction.

I am a foundation member of Frack Free Geelong. We started this group because we were concerned about the negative impacts which this completely unnecessary and destructive industry would have on this area.

You need to decide who to believe: an industry which relies on myths, half truths and speculation and which continually tries to refute any evidence against it, or hundreds of your constituents who have taken the time to educate themselves about this very worrisome industry. The stakes are very high. Geelong's future is literally at stake.

Personally I have had first hand experience of just what to expect if it were allowed to gain a foothold in Victoria.

Until two years ago, I lived on the the Northern Rivers of New South Wales. About ten years ago, I started to hear horror stories from Queensland about the physical, psychological and environmental damage, which the unconventional gas industry was causing in communities, especially in the Western Darling Downs town of Tara.

When people found out that exploration licences were being taken out in the Northern Rivers, residents from fracking impacted communities around Tara were invited to come and address public meetings.

No one could believe what these people had to say at first, but it soon became apparent that they weren't exaggerating. It was devastating to hear guys like Brian York and Dayne Pratsky, two guys who had moved out onto blocks for a quiet life with their families, tell how their lives had been completely turned upside down by this industry. They told of head aches, skin rashes, unexplained nose and ear bleeds in children and

grandchildren. They spoke of untreated toxic 'produced water' being used as dust suppressants on local roads; of water which they could ignite as in the film Gaslands; of their previously quiet backwater existence being turned into a 24/7 noisy and light polluted industrial zone.

Rather than just giving up, they felt that they had a responsibility to warn other areas so that they could organize and stop the same destruction happening to all aspects of their communities.

The fracking companies promised lots of jobs and economic development, but the reality proved to be quite different. There were very few jobs for locals, the majority were given to fly-in fly-out workers, who contributed very little to the local economy and took most of their money with them when they returned to their homes. They stayed in completely self-sufficient camps while working, so contributed very little locally.

The industry also put increased pressure on local infrastructure like roads, but didn't contribute anything to help local councils maintain these. Additionally, the companies involved were mostly owned by overseas entities, so the profits went offshore. The social fabric of their communities were also torn asunder as they sponsored influential groups in town. Anyone who dared to speak out publicly against or voice concerns was vilified.

After these meetings, many anti-fracking groups were started up. I was part of one at Ballina. We set out to inform the community there about what was happening in Queensland. This meant we had to learn more ourselves. We became part of a rapidly growing network of community groups and academics who shared information, pictures, stories and independent research. This network included people from fracking impacted communities and academics in other countries, mostly the United States.

We contacted as many people as we could. People like Doctor Mariann Lloyd-Smith from the National Toxics Network, Doctor Merryn Redenbach from Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA) Fiona Armstrong from Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) and Drew Hutton from Lock the Gate.

I went to many forums, conferences and seminars on the topic. This left me with absolutely no doubt that this industry must be resisted because it had so many things against it.

It didn't contribute much, if anything to the local economy. It contaminated

water courses and aquifers, it made people sick, it didn't lower co2 emissions. It polluted the air, it divided communities and most of the profits went offshore.

The same research threw up alternative energy sources which weren't going to cost us the earth literally, ie renewable energy, like wind and solar.

When I shifted back to Western Victoria, I found out that exploratory permits had been granted over a big area from the edge of Geelong to the Surf Coast and along to the Bellarine Peninsula in PEP 163, I felt that I had a responsibility to be part of the same community information process. Frack Free Geelong's first meeting 18 months ago attracted about 30 people. This has slowly, but surely, grown until last Sunday approximately 1,000 people attended a rally demanding real action on climate at all levels of government.

This was achieved by simply telling people the real facts and exposing the myths which were being trotted out by the fracking companies via their industry voice the Australian Petroleum Producers and Exporters Association (APPEA) It was interesting to see exactly the same myths coming out down here as they used in both New South Wales and Queensland - jobs, lower emissions, government heavily regulates them so if they do anything wrong, they'll lose their licences, the chemicals they use are found in many households and besides they are so diluted they won't cause any problems. Interestingly they very rarely, if ever, mention what they'll do with the 'produced water' which comes to the surface with the gas. I'm sure that you'll hear all about this in other submissions. Also the impacts which this industry would have on tourism.

My take home message for CoGG council is: Geelong was build on the back of fossil fuel, reliant industries ie Ford, Alcoa and Shell. It's no accident that these three are leaving town at the same time as the more enlightened countries are listening to the peer-reviewed climate science and moving to a post carbon economy. What a great opportunity for Geelong to lead Australia into that same economy. We won't achieve that by backing onshore gas extraction.

Yours Sincerely
Anthony Gleeson
Newtown 3220