



25 September 2014  
mikaidt@climatesafety.info

To: City of Greater Geelong  
Att: Mr Rodney Thomas, Manager Environment and Waste Services  
RThomas@geelongcity.vic.gov.au

## Submission to City of Greater Geelong on the question of fracking

Dear Mayor, City of Greater Geelong Councillors, and Mr Thomas

The fossil fuel extraction company Lakes Oil has a licence to drill in our region. I look forward to hearing what concrete action Council will take in regard to cancelling or opposing this drilling licence to Lakes Oil under the Exploration Permit 163.

At the moment it looks like that fracking operations is something that could begin in our region from next year, when the state moratorium on fracking runs out. Judging from the state government's website – and contrary to the "Not on my guard" election promises from Premier Denis Napthine – both state government and the fossil fuel industry appears to be very eager to get started.

In New South Wales, the onshore gas industry – according to sources within the industry itself – is paying \$135 million in land access payments to farmers and landowners, and the NSW government's revenue is estimated to be \$1.6 billion.

A 49-page report from 2013, 'Getting gas right: Australia's energy challenge', talks about producing an estimated \$50 billion-a-year gas industry in Australia by 2017, and about Australia's role in a so-called "gas revolution" created by surging demand in Asia.

"We believe that the US shale gas revolution is about to hit Australia's shores," "the potential size of Australia's shale gas resources is truly enormous," writes the gas extraction company RFC Ambrian.

"It's Cleaner. It's Safer. It's Jobs. It Is The Future," proclaims the Australian Petroleum Production & Exploration Association, APPEA.

And accordingly, lots of money appears to have been invested already in trying

to convince our elected representatives and decision makers in government to let what I would call “the fracking nightmare” roll out here in Victoria.

### **Our faith in democracy at stake**

I will give some examples which explain why it will become a nightmare, if you allow this to happen. I will give you some of the reasons why I don't think we should allow fracking for gas in Victoria – ever.

You need to understand that people in your municipality are quite upset about this. “How can this happen in a democratic society when a vast majority of the population is against it?” they rightfully question.

Citizens feel that their legal and civil rights have been taken away from them. Old laws from another century – those days when gold mining was a big thing here in Victoria – have never been modernised, and this means that when the state government grants a licence to a gas company, as it has done with Lakes Oil in our region, the legislation actually allows Lakes Oil to mine *anywhere* within that licence, even if it is on private land.

In order to maintain good public relations, most mining companies do try to gain permission from land-holders, but in reality a land-holder has no legal right to stop mining from occurring on their land.

In legal terms, people don't even have the right to lock the gate on their own property and refuse gas mining on their land, and so far, I haven't seen or heard anyone in politics advocating for an update of these old laws. This needs to change.

What we need to understand here is that what is happening with the fracking question is that people's faith in democracy is being shattered. Fracking creates anxiety and tension, and it makes otherwise normal peaceful citizens lose faith in the democratic processes and move over to unusual and often very messy civil disobedience measures with sad and expensive consequences for everyone.

This is one aspect of what it is at stake if you allow this industry to enter our municipality.

### **Dangerous air pollution**

My name is Mik Aidt. I live in Ryrie Street, and I run a weekly radio program about sustainability on our local community radio, called 'The Sustainable Hour' on 94.7 The Pulse and a podcast in iTunes as well.

What drives me to do this kind of volunteer work is that I am a father to three small children, and I am concerned about their health, their mental health, their safety and their future in general. I see some very serious problems arising in our society at the moment.

The most urgent of these problems is that we are collectively ignoring what science is telling us, almost screaming at us, at the moment: that we have to *stop* burning fossil fuels. We have to stop filling the air with our tonnes and tonnes of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

The solution is to quickly switch over to solar, to wind, to hydro power instead, and the good news is that there are so *many* good reasons to start doing that, economically, health-wise, and so on.

Even so, it is not really happening at the rate and at the scale which the scientists are advising us we should be doing this. You probably noticed the warnings coming from the UN Summit in New York about the same topic this week. Extensive reports from the Climate Panel of the United Nations, IPPC, use more urgent language at each successive report to say we must stop burning fossil fuels if we want future generations to avoid a total runaway climate disaster.

And no, unconventional gas is *not* cleaner than coal – and it does *not* make environmental sense to use it as a “bridge fuel”. That is industry spin. Recent peer-reviewed science from Cornell University as well as several other universities raise serious doubts about the industry’s claim that gas is “cleaner than coal”, in particular because of the fugitive emissions at every stage of its extraction through to use.

Every dollar spent on gas is one we don’t get to spend on renewables, which – slows down the transition to a post carbon world. Investment in gas mining removes focus and economy from the transition to renewables and sustainable jobs. Gas mining is creating an unnecessary detour away from where we need to get to.

If you understand the latest peer-reviewed climate science, then you are aware that we must leave fossil fuel reserves in the ground to avoid runaway climate change. This gives you a great responsibility. Because we can see that that won’t happen unless you, our elected leaders in City of Greater Geelong, step in, take some real leadership and legislate in this area:

- 1) Ban onshore gas extraction once and for all
- 2) Move investments from fossil fuels over to renewables.

### **Worrying health impacts**

When taking a position on fracking we must first of all look at its impacts on our health and safety – that fracking is risky gambling with drinking water and health. However, the issue also raises a question about which connection we would like to have with the land that we live on, and to that end, which possibilities we would like to have in terms of cultivating tourism.

Another issue with fracking, which you must take into account when you make your decision, is that our farmland becomes an industrial zone with lights, noise and truck movements 24/7, and how this affects the local tourism industry. We have seen this in Queensland and in the United States.

Many more trucks will be on our roads. The landscape becomes mutilated by drilling towers and machinery. Geelong region's reputation as an area for tourism gets ruined, and the real estate value of houses near gas mining wells drops.

Fracking has become known to be a very destructive industry that pumps toxic chemicals deep down in the ground and leaves us with lakes of poisonous water that we can't get rid of.

The industry claims that it knows what to do with the produced waste water, but the reality is that it doesn't. Naturally occurring toxic chemicals and active elements which have been trapped in the rocks which are fractured are released with the gas. These plus 60 percent of the initial injected chemicals are returned to the surface. Not even reverse osmosis can remove some of these. Often these are just put into the local sewerage treatment system. Even the chemicals and elements which reverse osmosis can remove still have to be disposed of. They don't just vanish. Where to?

The negative effects on our health, on our environment and the climate are all very well documented by now, and I assume you have been made aware of that.

The local pollution from fugitive emissions, toxic chemicals, mining equipment and particulates from diesel powered equipment causes citizens who live near the gas wells to get sick – and apart from the individual problems this causes, the bill for this sickness eventually becomes a bill to you, the Council, and to our society.

The mining industry has impact on people living nearby and workers who are exposed to the chemicals and pollution. A study which recently came out of Yale University found that people who lived near oil and unconventional gas operations had greater respiratory illnesses and skin rashes than those who lived further away.

And regardless of what the industry claims, accidents happen. Water contamination happens. The industry at the same time won't give any guarantees that water contamination won't happen. Evidence both from Queensland and the United States shows that this *is* happening.

In terms of the chemicals being used for hydraulic fracturing, the industry only mentions the least offensive ones – vinegar, 'many of the chemicals are under people's sinks', or 'chemicals used in making ice-cream'. Very few of the chemicals they use have been tested for health effects on people and animals, let alone when they are used in combination.

### **The real bill is left unpaid**

The only reason that fracking is taking place and happening even so – especially in Queensland, but also now possibly coming to Victoria, and maybe even to our region – is that there are some people out there who are making a

lot of money on this (most of them not even living in Australia), while we, the rate payers, are unfairly left with all the bills to pay and the destruction of our land.

The mining industry has some very bad records for not cleaning up after itself, and unconventional gas mining is only profitable because costs of cleaning up and climate damage are not made a part of the equation.

What drives the gas mining industry forward is a desire to make profits. Local communities in Queensland are seeing the devastating consequences of this industry: Only a few people benefit financially from it, and they are not held accountable by authorities to pay the bills for the damage they create in the ground as well as in the air. Take a look at Tara in the Western Darling Downs for nightmarish health and community impacts.

It becomes the local community which must bear the burden of the industry's environmental impacts while the profits go elsewhere. Why should we, the citizens, accept being treated like that?

### **See through the industry spin and lies**

'Facts' and 'the science' is being used as an argument for allowing onshore gas mining. Like the 'fact' that there has never been a 'proven case' of contamination of ground water because of fracking. This is not true. Facts and science can be manipulated and deliberately miscommunicated and many other myths are being created to delay the inevitable transition away from fossil fuels over to renewables. I can see that CoGG and the Victorian Government as well as local media all refer to studies and research carried out by CSIRO as if it was a reliable and 'neutral' scientific source. I suggest you ask yourself: Can the branch of CSIRO working on unconventional gas be relied on to be impartial when they are funded by the unconventional gas industry? They clearly *cannot*!

Regardless of the aggressive 'fact claiming' rhetoric flying through the air and through local media columns, there is one 100 percent indisputable argument as to why unconventional gas mining must be permanently banned. That is the fact that gas is a fossil fuel and a greenhouse gas.

The methane, which leaks in the gas production, is a fossil fuel and an extremely potent greenhouse gas. The greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels which we flood our atmosphere and oceans with are damaging our planet to a point where it is getting really dangerous now. It could get out of hand for humanity within the life time of our children, according to scientists in the United Nations' Climate Panel.

Investing in gas mining in our area is not only locking us into polluting the air with more carbon, which is the wrong thing to do – we all know that, even most of those who pretend to ignore or oppose it – instead of going over to solar, wind and hydro, and so on, as our main sources for electricity.

When on top of that you add the risk-factors involved and the fact that fossil fuels in general are not just dangerous to the climate, they are very dangerous

to our health as well, then switching over to renewable energy sources becomes a very obvious choice. Gas can explode, and the gas production involves a lot of risks. Renewable energy sources don't involve any such health risks.

Add to that that the gas prices are continuously rising. More fracking won't make gas cheaper to the consumer. On the contrary, prices are expected to triple soon. Meanwhile, prices on renewables are dropping – and will continue to drop.

The list of good reasons to ban fracking appears to be almost endless. As Victoria and Geelong gets drier and drier because of climate change, the gas extraction companies' excessive use of millions litres of water in itself represents a threat. You will need to consult with Barwon Water about this.

The vast quantities of water needed to release oil and gas by fracturing rock formations are not available in many of the large areas with the richest deposits – and globally this poses a major challenge to the viability of fracking.

According to a report by the World Resources Institute, 38 per cent of the areas where unconventional gas and oil is most abundant is arid or already under severe water stress – and the 386 million people living in these areas need all the spare water they can get.

### **Please apply for the exemption**

Our neighbours in Surf Coast Shire have put forward a motion on Unconventional Gas Exploration and Development expressing concern about potential impacts and lack of regulatory framework. (See [council minutes](#) for motion details, page 177).

It seems the Shire can apply to be exempt from this type of mining, but needs the community to ask council, through letters and emails, to apply for the exemption. I therefore ask City of Greater Geelong Council to apply for this extension as Surf Coast Shire is doing, and ensure that City of Greater Geelong remains gas mining free.

### **Help stop this intergenerational theft**

Gas mining jobs are not needed here, there are many more jobs in energy efficiency and renewable energy, and that is the path we need to invest in. In California, for every job lost to fossil fuels, 50 new jobs have been created in energy efficiency.

The most basic and fundamental question you as councillors must ask yourselves is probably: Why should we allow further investments in a fossil exploration and exploitation such as gas when we all know that what we urgently need to invest in is modern and clean, renewable energy technology?

There comes a time when we must say 'stop it', and that time is now. Fracking

is intergenerational theft. It is a short-sighted and amoral to provide energy in a world that needs to decarbonise its energy production.

Yours sincerely,  
**Mik Aidt**

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[www.climatesafety.info](http://www.climatesafety.info)



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