

SENATE HEARING SEQUENCE

'Background

The Protect Country Alliance grew out of community concerns relating to fracking and is an alliance of community groups from across the NT. The PCA was formed by delegates representing communities across the NT including; Elliott, Marlinja, Minyeri, Borroloola, Mataranka, Jilkminngan, Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine and Hermannsberg communities, The Arid Lands Environment Centre, Environment Centre NT; AYCC, Original Power, Lock The Gate.

Create opening summary of key points

I have University qualifications in Politics, Economics, Education, Information Technology and a Masters in Environmental Management. My personal experience of over 40 years in Darwin includes being the Lord Mayor of Darwin from 2008 to 12 when the INPEX gas project was being planned for Darwin. I saw first hand the industry lobbying process and some of the NT govt processes through the Capital City committee formed between Council and Government.

My granddaughter is Yanyuwa, gurdanji, garrwa(Borroloola area) and my Grandson is Alawa, Marra, (Minyerri Area) ... both are likely to have their country impacted by fracking problems in their lifetime. There is a complete failure to understand the implications of ESD by government. Ironically they say it is a guiding principle of their policy.

I would urge the committee to make time to talk to traditional owners on-country later this year. From my experience there is no informed consent about fracking and the family groups I have spoken to at length have recently reinforced their opposition at a meeting in Darwin of some 45 traditional owners from the region, Jun 12-13 2021. I encourage you to engage fully with a range of Traditional Owners from the impacted area, including the Nurrdalinji traditional owners group and hear their perspectives as part of this Inquiry.

NT circumstances with no review house or mechanism creates a particular risk in relation to process and a groupthink mindset and that leads to risks around cutting corners and vulnerability in relation to corrupt behaviour. We are seeing an example of this problem play out in relation to the ICAC report into the darwin racing club grandstand where some 12 million was granted to the turf club under what ICAC concluded were corrupt circumstances.

The CEO of the then Department was named for deceptive conduct. He is in charge of implementing the review into the ICAC report that named him. He also used to work for SANTOS and is now overseeing core aspects of the fracking projects.

Oil & Gas Industry strategy involving lobbying, deceptive behaviour and mis-information campaigns is well documented. The Pennsylvania Grand Jury into fracking led their Attorney General, Shapiro to conclude that a "too close a relationship between the industry and the bureaucracy" was a key problem and was distorting policy and due process.

A Former NT chief minister is now a consultant to the oil and gas industry, key government senior staff are from industry and key people from bureaucracy and advisory positions leave to work for the industry. The revolving door is in full operation in the NT.

I note the Minister for the Environment has signed a statement to this inquiry supporting the process on economic grounds. The Pepper inquiry specifically shifted the responsibility for fracking approval decisions from the Mining Minister to the Environment Minister because of conflict of interest. How is it conceivable that the Minister responsible for the environmental aspects of the

NT and approving of fracking proposals can write such a support letter on economic grounds when she is supposedly reviewing an application right now for the Empire/ Imperial EMP? .

Coupled with the way the NT is governed these factors are creating very real problems here.

We have recently seen the shutdown of the community consultative group, the parliament scrutiny committee and the government recently stopped advertising the public consultation period for Environmental Management Plans in newspapers. The Minister responsible misled the community on this matter when she claimed the online system, the NT Governments “haveyoursay” website would notify people who were registered. This is not true, it appears to be a further attempt to avoid scrutiny. As an example the Roper Gulf Shire was unaware of the Imperial energy EMP just 48 hours before the 30 day submission period expired. Classical moves to shut down community input. Third party review is supposedly in the EPBC intent and this has implications like the really poor land access agreements we have had thrust upon us which are concerning pastoralists so much.

Federally, the Gas led recovery plans of the federal Govt are also an issue with a similar root cause. You can see the same sorts of information distortion. As but one example Andrew Liveris used all sorts of “industry facts” to support the argument for gas and was exposed by fact checking about industry numbers.

Gas is a polluting fossil fuel that leaks methane and causes GHG pollution and no amount of industry spin can change that. We often hear the “gas is 50% cleaner than coal” myth too. Peer reviewed research shows this is not the case. I note the 6000 jobs and other discredited estimates are being regurgitated in some of the submissions to this inquiry too.

The government’s are very much engaged in facilitating the very industry they are supposed to be regulating. Subsidies are one example of this.

Some of the implications of this facilitation that need the senate to help redress include the distortion of PEPPER Inquiry findings and corrupted recommendations.

In relation to the pepper Inquiry 4.6 on page 39 is pivotal.

It sets up the core of the recommendations and the 135 recommendations in ch 15. This section is very clear about the need for science to be done and then a final risk assessment made. This has not been followed and the government and Industry just talk about measuring some baselines. The report says: “In a number of cases, the Panel has recommended that a strategic regional environmental and baseline assessment (SREBA) (see Chapter 15) must be undertaken to provide the additional scientific knowledge and baseline information required **before a final risk assessment can be made.**”

The preliminary findings from the SREBA water studies regarding Stygofauna should be changing the process, but they are being ignored. Pepper made some very specific recommendations here.

Pepper inquiry said that if Stygofauna were present their 135 recommendations could not be guaranteed to protect groundwater.

There are extensive Stygofauna assemblages and they are species new to science. This should also have federal implications.

This needs careful consideration and a full EIS with EPA and Federal oversight. Sadly the research about the Stygofauna is being ignored in relation to fracking. Neither Imperial or SANTOS EMP'S, released since that research, even mention Stygofauna.

We also have data from Tanumbirri 1 well completion report indicating that 21 million litres of drilling mud was "lost" into the underground systems during drilling of that well. Possibly containing biocides which are highly toxic for aquatic organisms, as well as other materials likely to disrupt the balance in the Stygofauna food webs.

Government policy on greenhouse gas emissions is inconsistent and illogical, on the one hand talking about Climate change and risks, on the other facilitating a massive carbon and methane emissions increase. Fracking the Beetaloo would be the source of an enormous amount of methane and carbon pollution and neither the territory nor federal government have provided any indication of how these emissions increases will be offset.

The SREBA preliminary water study research - has been published and the results massively elevates risks everywhere. The people who understand risk the best, insurance companies, get this. Pastoralists in the beetaloo area had to sign a declaration that they had not entered into a land access agreement for gas companies to get insurance. Recent scientific reports by CSIRO have shown the aquifer beneath the beetaloo to be connected over a much wider area and to flow much quicker than previously thought, nothing has been done to address the increased impacts of contamination events demonstrated by this new research.

There are significant corrosion concerns and increased likelihood of problems with water systems, water quality through salinity, methane leaks as well as through chemicals such as endocrine disruptors and other chemicals.

You cannot get Informed consent from the flawed processes in place and the fact that a lot of the chemicals and issues are hidden, despite the Pepper Inquiry recommendations.

Indigenous groups- get ignored and their concerns not addressed. I have met and spoken at length with these groups many times, including family members and they have very legitimate concerns about these processes and the consultation. I will let them address the details but I can answer any questions you might have

The federal government subsidies are speeding up a process that should be science based and taking an appropriate amount of time.

The NT government is not able to manage the process nor the pressure from the Federal Government.

There is a catastrophe looming here and corners are being cut .