



## **Darwin – Pauline Cass**

*Please be advised that this transcript was produced from a video recording. As such, the quality and accuracy of this transcript cannot be guaranteed and the Inquiry is not liable for any errors.*

**2 August 2017**

**Darwin Convention Centre, Darwin**

**Speaker: Pauline Cass**

Pauline Cass: I'm Pauline Cass ... Oops. And I'd like to say thank you for this opportunity to address you all today, and your commitment to community consultations; really appreciate it. Thank you. I'd like to clarify, before I start; I've recently been employed by the Lock the Gate Northern Territory Alliance, but I am here today very much as a individual, speaking for myself. I've taken today off work, and here in a voluntary capacity. And I suppose you could say I'm speaking as Pauline Cass community advocate, which is my Facebook page.

So, it was very hard for me to pick a topic to talk about today. There's so many issues, so many topics. I was wondering, should I talk about road how traffic accidents and how regulations and robust regulations haven't reduced the road toll to zero. I considered talking about wildlife fatalities. I'm a wildlife carer. And I also considered talking about how roads divert water flow away from properties and caused issues, and we've all seen Kane Booth on 60 Minutes with those problems in Queensland.

After a lot of thinking and consideration of flares on total fire ban days and things, I decided that I'm going to speak about social licence. So, enduring value, the Australian minerals industry framework for sustainable development defines social licence as, "Obtaining and maintaining broad community, acceptance, and support"; which, that's a pretty general definition of what social licence is. And social licence is vital to the fracking industry. Heart Energy says that, "Securing the social licence, the acceptance of fracking as an industry, is vital to their ability to operate, and crucial to an oil and gas company's bottom line. Without this broad community support, the industry can not operate in the Northern Territory; especially if landholders are given the right to stop fracking companies from accessing their land." And I believe that land owners very much deserve the right to have a say on what happens on their land.

When I say "fracking", I'd like to clarify that I'm using the community's definition of fracking, and the definition that pretty much all territorians use of fracking, which is, shale gas extraction, and all its related activity. So, road use, we consider that part of fracking, and label that as fracking as well. Auto use, we consider that part of fracking. And I think that there's often a



miscommunication between industry and every day people in that terminology. I'll be talking about fracking, and I will mean everything to do with the whole industry; whereas, someone from one of the gas companies at the show, for example, will be talking about fracking, they'll be talking about just that point of fracture where the shale rock is fractured by the water, chemicals, and sand.

Now, I've volunteered on many ... I volunteer at everything, actually, and I have been for years; but, I've volunteered at many frack free stalls in the territory. I've done stalls at markets, I've done stalls at shopping centres, at the Katherine show, Darwin show, Fred's Par shows; I've even done stalls at the local pub. And the idea behind my stalls was to provide information. I'd have the government maps there, and information on where fracking might occur, a diagram of what it is, and explained the mechanics of it to people. And the main thing that I've learned while talking to all of these people, multitudes of people from all walks of life, from housewives, to tourists, to pastoralists to everybody; is territorians want fracking to be banned. It is so rare for me to hear from somebody that they support the industry, that I just about have to say, "Pardon? Do I hear you right?"

We genuinely want it banned. We want the whole discussion over, done with. And I think everybody, probably you guys, too, are getting a bit tired of the issues with it. And, when I say that territorians want fracking to be banned in the territory, I'm actually speaking on behalf of the 2,887 people that have signed my petition asking for fracking to be banned. So, there's signatures, and signatures, and signatures, and there is 2,887 of us that have signed this. And this is a petition that I wrote it, I instigated it, and I have collected pretty much every signature that you will read here, except for a few that friends have collected for me. So, we very definitely ... I know that it's not in your terms of reference, but just putting it out there that it is what we are calling for. You've got a question?

Hon. Justice  
Rachel Pepper:

No, no. I think the attitudes of territorians, and how they feel about fracking absolutely is within our terms of reference, and absolutely we do want to hear about that. And, if you wish you provide that petition to us, please do so. But, what is not in our terms of reference on what this inquiry will not be doing is basically telling, or recommending, that the government lift, or maintain the moratorium. That will be a decision that the government makes, presumably; and I hope after reading our final report.

Pauline Cass:

Sorry, I'm just .....It's a problem when you print things, isn't it? That was actually my next paragraph; page five of the interim report's executive summary also found that, overwhelmingly, the message received from the people who attended these meetings was that fracking was not safe, was not trusted, and was not wanted in the Northern Territory. And we feel that very deeply. We don't want it here. And it's not needed here. We have got a surplus of conventional gas coming from offshore, from the Black Tip. That was the justification to build the Jemena pipeline from Tenant Creek to



Mount Isa, was we had this surplus of gas, and we had to do something with it, so let's send it to Queensland for distribution on the east coast.

And the other thing that has been coming out quite clearly in newspaper reports, and the like, is that the shale gas that is fracked here is not for the benefit of us; we don't need it, we've got a surplus. It's also not for the benefit of the east coast. It is for export. It is to go out to Japan, Korea, and the other countries that buy Australian gas. So, you add that into the mix, and it adds to our reasons for not wanting shale gas onshore here.

So, all this means that hydraulic fracturing for shale gas, and all its related activities has no social licence in the Northern Territory. And fracking will never have social licence in the Northern Territory. My many conversations with territorian communities, from Daly Waters to Darwin, has found that fracking will never obtain or maintain a broad community support or acceptance due to several factors, and I've listed the factors here.

So, the first factor is the territory community is well networked, and interlinked with everyone knowing everyone, or we know someone who does; so, news spreads really fast. It spreads very quickly, far and wide, through our whole community. And when I say the whole territory community, I am meaning border to border; we are very much a community. Especially us longterm territorians. Some of the newcomers, not so much. But, those of us that have been here for a long time, we all do know each other, or our friend knows our ... You know. What is it? Six degrees of separation? I think it's about one or two in the territory.

So, the second point that leads me to saying that fracking will never have social licence in the Northern Territory is that territorians see fracking as a threat. And it really is a threat to us. It threatens our water, it threatens our jobs, it threatens our lifestyles, our homes, our children's futures, and any risk to any one of these things is unacceptable, and we simply will not allow it. Which leads me to number three; that territorians have no faith in regulatory controls. We've seen regulations fail too many times. The McArthur River mines, an example, Ranger Uranium Mine, Darwin Port; we've had numerous experiences with regulatory failure, noncompliance, and accidents occurring as well. Which, whenever you've got men or machines, there is a chance of an accident, and you can't regulate against, accidents, really.

So, number four is we're very important ... Sorry. Put my glasses on. We're very aware of the importance of safe, reliable water. As the Central Land Council said on page 13 of their issues paper submission, "Community members view any level of risk to their water supplies as unacceptable." Any risk. It doesn't matter how small, how low, whatever phrase you want to use for it; any risk at all is unacceptable when you're talking about our water. Without water, we cannot live here. The current PFAS debacle in Katherine has really brought home to a lot of us what happens to a community when



your water's contaminated. They're having problems there. They can't eat their chicken eggs. They can't grow the fruit and vegetables they grow in their garden. They can't drink the milk from their cows.

And this, then, goes on to affect what are the mango growers going to do with their huge crop of mangoes that they can't sell because of the PFAS contamination? Land prices are already dropping. People are considering moving out of town because of the risk to their health and their children's health. And this is just one town with a contaminated water supply. I know that there's an argument that hydraulic fracturing will only be done for shale gas in the Beetaloo sub-basin. But, many territorians feel that's just the thin edge of the wedge. This is just, "We'll get our foot in the door with that, and then we can expand from there." And the Beetaloo is not the empty wasteland that some people might perceive it to be; it is a flourishing community all of its own, with its own ... They have rodeos there. They have lives there. This is peoples' livelihoods.

So, reason number five for why hydraulic fracturing in the territory will never gain social licence is that territorians, on the whole, cannot be bought. And we're too aware of the risks of fracking, and we know these risks are too high, and no price is great enough to compensate us, or make us consider risking what we have, and what we love for anything. And, an example of this ... I wanted to put a bit of a humorous, funny story in my talk. And, an example of that is at the Katherine shows, and the Darwin shows that we just had. And I was there volunteering on the frack free stall with my friends, and APPEA had a stall. At Katherine, though, they were directly this far away from us, and at Darwin, they were a bit on the diagonal to us. And the APPEA stall was Origin and Santos.

People were going to their tent, getting the free fishing lures with "Origin" on the side, and then coming across to us to get their stickers for their cars, and the big yellow "no fracking" triangles for their fences. And I actually pointed it out to one man that, "Oh, you know, I like your fishing lure with the "Origin" written on it." And he goes to me, "Yeah. Lucky fish can't read." Which, I found really amusing. People were also going and getting the Santos hats for free, because we're miserly; we didn't want to pay for a hat at the show stall. Well, I was under shape, but they didn't want to pay for a hat at the show stall. So, they'd get their free Santos hat, come to us, and get a little triangle ban fracking sticker and put it over the label "Santos". And I've got photos. I probably should submit them to give you guys a giggle.

And it wasn't just one person doing this, or two people doing this; this was heaps of people doing it, that have their hat on, or their lure in their hand, and sign a petition to ban fracking. So, really, even I went to the APPEA tent, I got the Origin lures for my kids, because greedy brand fishing lures; they're expensive. And they're easily lost, so why not? We might even send the company broke in the process, I'm sure was a secret thought a few of us had.



So, what this means is we're not giving them social licence by patronising their stall and getting the free stuff, you know, "We're after the loot, why not?" It doesn't mean that we've been bought. It doesn't mean that we've changed our opinion. It means that we're pragmatic. The lures are there anyway, why not? We're practical. And it doesn't mean that we support a company ironically giving away free fishing lures while threatening our fishing through water contamination, water depletion, and reducing our access to our fishing spots. Because where we might tell tourists about fishing spots that are well known, we've all got our secret little spots that are hidden in the bush. And these are the places that we're likely to get fenced out from should fracking happen.

I mean, look at the Roper River. People go there and catch giant barramundi. And the Roper River is in the Beetaloo basin area. So, yes; don't be mistaken that, if someone says to you, "Oh, we had blah, blah, blah number of territorians come to our stall." That's not social licence. There's a definite difference, then.

Now, I've been asked several times by various people, I've been asked by politicians, just as Pepper asked me when I met her once; different people have asked me, "Will hydraulic fracturing, will onshore shale gas ever be able to gain social licence in the Northern Territory? If the fracking inquiry finds that hydraulic fracking for shale gas, if you find it, if heavily regulated, will territorians accept this answer?" And the answer is no. That's not a sign of disrespect to you, but that's just the facts of it. Territorians will not accept the fracking of our homes.

As Katherine ....said, "Our home is much broader than just the place we live." For me, when I talk about home, I talk about the whole territory; the whole of the Northern Territory is my home. And it's home ... Many of us, especially those of us that have been here for a long time, we consider the whole area home. We're very, very territorial, so we're well-named as territorians. And we will not accept any risk, even the low to minimal risk will not be accepted, because it is still risk, and we know that risk exists. And therein lays our strength; our territorian cohesion. And this lack of social licence allows us so many ways to fight, and stop fracking.

So, we will even oppose fracking if no go zones are recommended for certain areas. I was talking to David Close from Origin at the Katherine show. And one of the things that he told me that I was unaware of is that, in Victoria ... Victoria's got the fracking ban ... Or, actually, they've got a total gas ban for onshore gas. They've banned conventional as well as unconventional gases there. And David said to me that Origin is drilling from onshore to access offshore gas in Victoria, and they've found a loophole that allows them to do this.

I actually went and researched what he said, to check. I thought, "Well, this is crazy; there's a ban in Victoria. How can they possibly be doing this?" And



they are; which makes you then question, if we have no go zones, if we have land that's being protected through veto, or being a national park, or however it's protected, how can we trust that the companies won't draw horizontally from out of the area to into the area? The latest papers that I've been reading show that they can now go five kilometres horizontally, which is quite a distance. I'm sure that they could probably push it further if they wished.

So, territorians, I doubt, will ever grant social licence. There's too much distrust. There is risk. We're too aware. And we have educated ourselves. And so, therefore, it won't happen. Now, to further support what I'm saying about the lack of social licence for the unconventional gas industry in the NT, I'd like to read a letter that has ... It's been given to me by Debbie Bokes, she's a rural resident. She wanted to come and address the hearing, but was unable to register. Many people were waiting for the interim report to come out before registering, and didn't realise that the registration's closed on the Wednesday. And then, by the time they ... We can be a bit slow, sometimes. By the time they got their act together, registration's closed. So, I'm going to read her-

Hon. Justice  
Rachel Pepper:

Absolutely. Please do so. And, of course, if she wishes, she can put that in ... Basically lodge that as a submission with the inquiry as well.

Pauline Cass:

Yeah. So, yeah; I've told her that.

Hon. Justice  
Rachel Pepper:

We were over subscribed, as it was, for the three days, so we could not have fit any more people in.

Pauline Cass:

Yeah, yeah. Yep. And I really appreciate that you stretched it to the three days this time round.

Hon. Justice  
Rachel Pepper:

Thank you.

Pauline Cass:

Okay. So, this is from Debbie. "Dear justice Pepper and panel, my name is Debbie Bokes. I've lived in the Darwin rural area for the past 31 years. My husband and I bought a virgin five acre piece of territory to call our own and make into our little piece of paradise. The biggest risk with this purchase was the availability of usable ground, or bore water, as there was no local history of water in the immediate area, and town supply was unavailable, as is still the situation." Pretty much, the entire rural area survives on bores. We don't have town water for most of the rural area.

"Everything that is on this block we have planted, built, and planned for the longterm. During this time, we have raised three children, and one has shown interest in eventually purchasing this property, and when the time comes, raise his family here as well. Now, I know that fracking isn't going to happen next door to me. But, with study, I've learnt that a seven acre pad



that is fracked can radiate out underground, like octopus tentacles, to access 2,000 acres of shale reservoirs." And she's got a reference. "This is a consideration that could have an impact that could jeopardise our lives, our lifestyles, and properties. This could impact on our water supply that we use for drinking and everyday use. Without this supply of uncontaminated ground water, we will have no future on our rural block. Neither will those around us who supply freshly grown food for the community. This could've a very real scenario if the reports on fracking's past history are correct.

Just recently, many rural blocks had their water supply severely reduced, and in some circumstances, completely dry up due to below wet seasons rains in the past couple of years. They were left no choice but to import water to remain on their properties. Darwin and the rural area is growing, and demanding more water, with limited plans for future storage and containment. Therefore, groundwater must be considered the most valuable commodity above all. Yet, we in the NT are being asked to contemplate giving our approval for fracking, which can consume 10 million litres of drinking water per frack that should be reserved for the survival of mankind in return for a better deal with GSG. What are we thinking?

We see stories appear in the paper and on TV of real people; families fighting the mining magnates to save what is theirs, and for the environment. We all need to be standing together as one against these companies who rape and pillage the land for their own financial gain; usually, leaving an environmental mess behind. Accidents can and do happen, and when they do, the impact is irreversible. Can we take that gamble? I couldn't image what Mataranka Springs would look like if Gina Rinehart gets her way and fracks there. Don't tell me that there won't be any environmental destruction or disturbance to nature, that you won't see the impact on Mataranka. Will the tourists still want to visit there?

Recently, our son climbed Ayers rock. He was totally in awe of the beauty and the magnificence of it from the top; being able to view the scenery for as far as the eye could see. But, wait; the mining industry has staked out around the rock, just outside the national park, with Santos wanting to frack gas within 75 kilometres from the rock. Imagine what it would look like from the top of the rock. The tourists probably wouldn't want to visit, which leads to another problem; the impacts on tourism and our economy. There's also the question of how the mining will actually affect the rock, and the augers. There is evidence that fracking can cause earthquakes. How is that going to affect these two beautiful sights?

Don't ask the mining companies, because their response will be, "There's no scientific evidence that would suggest fracking causes earthquakes." Really? There's reports on that as well." And she's got a reference. "I just don't trust what authorities say anymore. They tell you what they choose to tell you, and it usually lacks transparency and truth. Before building .....Point, authorities said we wouldn't see it from the wharf. What a joke. What a lie. I



love fishing and being out on the river. I don't care if I don't catch a fish; I love looking out for crocodiles. They certainly make the trip interesting and exciting. Our waterways are fresh, clean, and home to so many fascinating animals, birds, and fish. The government advertises the million dollar Barra as a tourist plug, to get the fishers from all over the world to have a flick and try their luck at landing a tagged fish or two. It may be all for naught if fracking goes ahead.

There are 600 different chemicals used in fracking fluid; that's approximately 150,000 litres of chemicals used for each fracturing site. The waste fluid left over from the fracking process is left in open air pits to evaporate, which releases dangerous, volatile organic compounds into the atmosphere, creating contaminated air, acid rain, and ground level ozone. I actually question why we are having an inquiry, and why we need a report done on the effects of fracking. The questions and answers come from the countries that have gone down that fracking road. Would they do it again knowing what they know now? I would suggest probably not. So, why is the territory, and even we as a nation, considering this?

Mr. Gunner, I have only touched on the fracking process, and not the impacts associated with the longterm effects, which also need consideration. As chief minister, you now have," ... She means she thinks he's listening as well. I hope he is listening; Mr. Gunner. "As chief minister, you now have the opportunity to make a stand and demonstrate to the territory public that you have their interests at heart. Sign the legislation against fracking. You will have spared the territory from the mistakes made elsewhere, and protected some of the most beautiful and iconic places in the world. Our environment is why we call the territory home, and many visit supporting our local tourist industry. Are you prepared and 100% confident that there will be no cost to public health and the environment? And can the true cost be known when there is a lack of transparency in the fracking industry?

There are enough countries now witnessing the effects of fracking poisoning the environment and the health of those living with it. Don't let this happen to the territory. Please stand your ground, and don't be bullied by the giant companies, and even our own government in Canberra, who look for short term solutions. Please look at the great, big picture that the territory paints; it is a beautiful picture. Let's keep it that way.

One more thing to consider; shale gas is a resource that will always be there for future generations. Maybe one day, a safer method of extraction will be available, and all territorians will benefit from the correct decision to ban fracking now. Say no to fracking, and let the future tell the real story."

Hon. Justice  
Rachel Pepper:

Thank you.

Pauline Cass:

Thank you.



Hon. Justice  
Rachel Pepper:

Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Ms. Cass. Thank you for concentrating on social licence to operate; it's an area which tends to be overlooked, in my experience so far, in most of the submissions that have been presented to the inquiry today.

Pauline Cass:

And that's what I thought when I was thinking, "Talk about water." It's been done. And we've had some medical experts talk about the health impacts. So, social licence has been ignored; or, it's been talked about by people that I consider recent arrivals, which might be a bit territorian-ist ... Is that a word? Of me, but; yeah. I genuinely do talk to pretty much anyone and everyone, and we do have that existing network here in the territory. If someone wants to know something, you've only got to ask someone, and the answer's provided. So, yeah. I don't ... I was answering questions. Sorry, I-

Hon. Justice  
Rachel Pepper:

As I said, I was grateful for you concentrating on this particular aspect of the inquiry. I did want to ask one question about the definition that you sort of explained, or gave in relation to fracking. I take it, though, when you said ... I understand when you said all shale gas extraction, but does that ... You must mean that's hydraulically stimulated. Are you including fracking? Are you talking about all shale gas; would that include conventional gas, as well?

Pauline Cass:

Well, the only way that they can get gas from shale is to hydraulically fracture it.

Hon. Justice  
Rachel Pepper:

All right.

Pauline Cass:

So, conventional gas doesn't require hydraulic fracturing. So, perhaps, I should have said all unconventional gas extraction. You know, it's-

Hon. Justice  
Rachel Pepper:

No, no. You're quite right about the way you extract shale gas, but I just wanted to make sure you were-

Pauline Cass:

So, anything to do with the fracking industry was my main point. I think, sometimes, things get lost in translation; you can have two people talking about fracking, but they're talking about totally different things. So, I wanted to be clear that, when I say "fracking", and when most territorians say "fracking", we mean all aspects of it; from fly in, fly out workers, to everything.

Hon. Justice  
Rachel Pepper:

Thank you. Yes. It was my misunderstanding; I apologise.

Pauline Cass:

That's okay.

Hon. Justice



- Rachel Pepper: Any questions? Yes, Dr. Andersen.
- Dr Alan Andersen: Thank you. Following up the social licence, and I'm just wondering; would it make any difference, in terms of social licence, whether it was conventional or unconventional gas?
- Pauline Cass: I've only really been talking to people about the shale gas. We do have some onshore conventional gas down south of Alice Springs, in the Mereenie Basin, and I haven't really discussed that with anybody. I'm thinking ... I can only really answer for shale gas. Just because that is what I've been talking to people about.
- Dr Alan Andersen: Yes. So, I guess maybe just rephrasing the question is more to do with the extent to which the concerns are specific to fracking, unconventional, or they would be similar concerns to-
- Pauline Cass: I think one of the largest concerns with fracking is the industrialization of the landscape. So, it's the fracking industry, but they industrialise our landscape; they change our lifestyle. Places where people might have gone, pig hunting might become ... When you look at where the applications are, and where the granted licences are for petroleum activities in the territory, it covers pretty much the whole map of the territory. And so, we view that ... You can't have a gas well somewhere, or a flare, or whatever, and have it just open for anyone to go riding their cod bike past while chasing a pig. So, they're the thing ... They're parts of the things that concern us, and will stop us from giving social licence. And there's no way to get around those impacts, because it would be totally unsafe to have someone going through an unrestricted gas field.
- But, I can't really comment about conventional gas, because that's not what I've been talking to people about; to answer that question. Yeah.
- Dr Alan Andersen: Thank you.
- Hon. Justice  
Rachel Pepper: Anybody else? Again; thank you for, particularly knowing you took the day off, the panel's very grateful for ... We're even more grateful for your time, and effort, and continuing engagement with the inquiry. We're most appreciative.
- Pauline Cass: Yeah. Anything that I can do to help. Like I said, my network is the territory network, and I'm happy to seek answers as well, if there's anything you wanted to ask them.
- Hon. Justice  
Rachel Pepper: I think we have written to you asking specific questions, if from memory, I've seen that letter go out.
- Pauline Cass: Oh, when?



Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: I'll clarify that after we formally close today.

Pauline Cass: Okay. Yep, thank you.

Hon. Justice

Rachel Pepper: But, that concludes the Darwin hearings, and we will resume, I think, tomorrow in Alice Springs. Thank you very much to all the people attending today.