



Darwin – Heidi Jennings

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Speaker: Heidi Jennings

Hon. Justice Pepper: Good afternoon and welcome to the last session of the first day. Ma'am if you could please state your name for the recording, and if you're here representing an organisation, the name of the organisation as well. If not, just your name. Thank you.

Heidi Jennings: My name is Heidi Jennings. I'm a concerned Territorian and I'm opposed to fracking. Good afternoon Justice Pepper and the Panel. I've chosen to speak up as many people cannot as they fear their jobs may be lost due to speaking out. I actually wonder what we'll leave the place like, for future generations to deal with the damage, corruption, greed, and sadly the possibility of no potable water. I was born in Alice Springs which relies heavily on groundwater. Water to the Red Centre has always been a welcoming sight. Aquifers supply water for general use, agriculture, industry, but more importantly is crucial for our surviving remnant vegetation and the ecosystem.

There's a general understanding that aquifers recharge. Unfortunately once depleted some take thousands of years to recharge naturally due to their large capacity and their intricate systems. These resources require management for long-term sustainability and we need to protect them. The Territory has many beautiful rivers, billabongs, gorges, and wetlands. We've countless beauties which rely heavily on freshwater systems. The national parks: Litchfield, Kakadu, Elsey and Nitmiluk. As well as the waterways, the national geological formations have huge cultural significance just like our waterways. They're key players in making the NT unique and a point of interest for domestic and international tourists.

We also experience huge tidal movements and monsoonal rains that flood our wetlands, helping to soak the ground and kick start a seasonal river's journey to flow for hundreds of kilometres. Without these core aquifer systems we'll be unable to give the NT its permanent waterways like the groundwater aquifers in the Beetaloo basin, which flows north and discharges into the Katherine, Daly, and Roper rivers. Aquifers and the hydrology of the territory are still not fully understood. We know that all our waterway is linked in quite complex ways. To ensure sustainable use, the issue requires a level of scientific knowledge far beyond the general public's



and general politicians' understanding, and for this reason alone there needs to be more study before action.

We've lived on our 20 acre property at Berry Springs for the last 25 years. Although we're not farmers, we have enjoyed keeping the natural bush. We do rely on bore water. Our bore draws one litre a second which is relatively small in comparison to some agricultural bore systems in the top end. The bore water was originally documented on a bore report in 1993 coming from the Burrell Creek formation. This has changed over time with new investigations that now our bore water comes from the South Alligator Rock formation. This was discovered after new bores were drilled in the area not far from our property. This is one example of water having the potential to possibly change over time, travel over large distances and bring light to our current misinterpretation of where our water really comes from.

Therefore if any waterway becomes contaminated in a certain place in the territory, we put every waterway in the territory at risk. A moratorium was put on Berry Springs aquifer to ensure it wasn't overused. This was to maintain groundwater levels and water quality to meet the requirements for consumption and environmental use. This was also to ensure and support the Aboriginal culture, community, and the environment are all protected as well as ensure economic development is sustainable. In 1997 a mobile base station was permitted to be erected over the Berry Springs aquifer. My concerns eventually turned into knowledge rather than being in the dark.

After hearing the plight of an Australian farmer, the late George Bender, fighting for the rights to protect water on his land from fracking made me more concerned about our water, air, land, and all Australians and our future generations. A new property development of 18 five-acre blocks was proposed in close proximity to the Berry Springs waterhole. I was concerned of the potential risk to the waterways and what the kind of effect could do to the aquifers after 18 bores were installed and extracting water. There's a large concern with numerous other concerns that will affect our beautiful waterways, run off from residential water use, septic tanks and soil washer.

At present in the territory we have issues of water contamination: the McArthur River Mine, Mount Todd, and the Katherine PFAS issue, just to name a few. These issues have not been rectified, and it seems it may take many years before a solution is found, if ever. In Australia, we already have the Condamine River as an example of destruction from fracking. The water can be lit up on fire as escaping gas leaks in the form of bubbles. Two wells have been placed beside the Condamine where most of the gas is bubbling to release the excess of leaking gas. It is being burned off in the atmosphere to alleviate the issue, but leakages into the river from the underground pipes has also become an issue.

This has caused numerous mass fish deaths as well as having the flow on effects to other fauna and flora in the area. This needs to be monitored, controlled, and fixed for many years to come. A farmer from Wyoming in the USA, John Fenton, once believed fracking was more efficient and less



invasive way to extract underground resources, and previously had no issue living near a fracking field. His wife has since developed consistent nosebleeds and severe medical conditions as does his neighbours. The family have to open doors and windows when showering as there is excessive levels of gas that is contained in the water they used. He is concerned for his family and community's health. The water in the area is unusable and the surrounding land has suffered.

We are still looking for scientific evidence that fracking is safe. So far I only see negative impacts it has made on the land, air, and water. Fracking is not good for the environment nor human health. Pipes can and do split over time from ground movement. There are no guarantees this won't happen. Monitoring the pipes is impossible and only obvious after the damage is done. Fracking has already been deemed unsafe throughout the world. The United States EPA warns of gases and fluids moving to underground resources. Queensland has had an increase of health issues to people that live close to fracking wells. Tests revealed that heavy levels in humans, animals and water are increasing.

Fishing in the NT is a big industry, as is tourism, industries that rely heavily on natural escarpments and waterways of our beautiful territory. If our natural resources are diminished or deemed unusable not only will these industries be greatly affected but our farming industry and lifestyle will also be greatly affected. The recommendations. The recommendations are not secure. There are no assurances to protect the water. I do wonder if there is rehabilitation funds set aside in trust by the company. Farmers and their land rely on clean, fresh water and it's a human necessity and should be prioritised. Farmers and pastoralists should have priority over the land, not the mining companies.

With the current heavily allocated water in the NT, there needs to be a thorough overlook of water allocation, as some groundwater resources are already known to have limited capacities for further allocations of water. Fracking will need to use a significant percentage of the unallocated water. Fracking uses over 10 million litres with each injection. If they are successful in gaining an exploration or extraction licence companies should be carefully monitored to ensure that they have the correct water licence to extract. Cement cased pipes are only a short-term fix, and the deterioration of the pipes will eventually lead to contamination. The pipes are under a lot of pressure, and the earth moves with seismic activity causing friction and damage.

Continual monitoring should occur prior to all fracking and mining activities. Monitoring should be prioritised prior to and be ongoing throughout the life of fracking and beyond. Monitoring must be completed by a range of professionals, government agencies or independent consultants to ensure the risk of corruption is minimised. Higher taxes should be compulsory for any mining company due to the high risks of destruction to the Australian landscape. Rehabilitation costs should be compulsory and paid by the company into a fund for the future prior to the start of any production. There are more than enough alternative energy sources: wind, hydro,



geothermal, and solar power. Fracking should be the last alternative on the list as an energy source for Australia.

I hope the federal government will not approve fracking as a quick fix to get the economy back on track to the detriment of us all, our water, our beautiful country, our culture, our children, our superb NT. Who'll be responsible and accountable for failing the duty of care to Territorians? Fracking is not worth the high risk. There's overwhelming evidence that damage will occur. Once the damage is done by fracking, it'll be irreversible. People will not be able to live healthy in the Northern Territory. The people and the land will suffer. As Isaac Newton once noted, for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. This statement is to action before a tragic reaction. All of Australia should be frack-free. Water is essential for life. It is imperative that we say no to fracking to protect our unique territory. Thank you for listening.

Hon. Justice Pepper: Thank you very much Miss Jennings for coming here and making the considerable effort and time for a comprehensive submission. Thank you for that. Do we have any questions? Yes, Dr Jones.

Dr. David Jones: I've noted down one of your comments which was to the extent that our recommendations are not secure. Would you care to elaborate on that?

Heidi Jennings: Just with a few recommendations in chapter four, the risk assessment. 20 risks to the waterways, the ecosystem and aquatics. Chapter seven was the water. There's insufficient information on the Northern Territory. Chapter five's got groundwater contamination may go into shallow aquifers. I hope that answered that.

Hon. Justice Pepper: Yes. Thank you. Any further questions? Miss Jennings, thank you again for coming and presenting today. Thank you.

Heidi Jennings: Thanks very much.