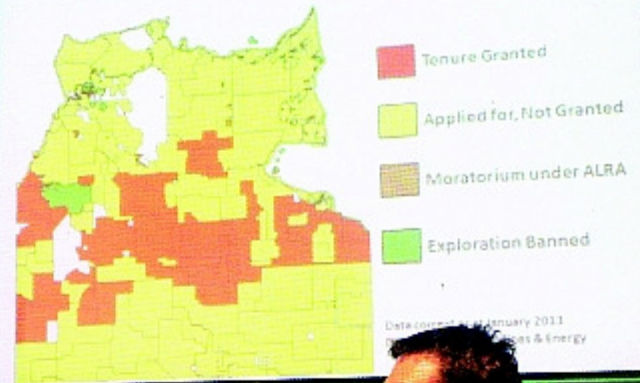


Status of shale gas exploration
in the Top End

Shale Gas and Oil in the Territory

By Stuart Blanch, Director

The shale gas and oil industry is exploring tens of millions of hectares of the Territory's most remote, and ecologically intact ecosystems, Indigenous lands and seas, and valuable pastoral lands. Regrettably there seems little interest within the Territory Government, or amongst any Members of the Legislative Assembly, in opposing this damaging industry or at least ensuring our laws and policies were modern and reflected best practice.

The NT Mines and Energy Minister Willem Westra van Holthe seems to have ignored the well founded concerns of Territorians to date about the industry, rather choosing to see only the royalties and jobs from more polluting fossil fuels.

No members of the Country Liberals Government, including those MLAs who are supposed to represent the concerns of constituents in their electorates currently being targeted by the shale gas industry, have spoken out against the industry.

NSW Labor Opposition Leader John Roberston has repeatedly called for a moratorium on coal seam gas to

protect farmland, high conservation value ecosystems and water sources.

Territory Labor Mines spokesperson Kon Vatskalis supported calls by ourselves, pastoralists and Land Councils after the August election for a moratorium on fracking. Of course, it would have been helpful if he'd done so before the election when he actually had the power to enforce a ban, but I guess it is better late than never.

So when will Territory Labor Opposition Leader Delia Lawrie listen to Territorians and follow suit?

The intransigence by our leaders comes despite the known major risks and impacts of the shale gas and coal seam gas industries in Australia and abroad. These include water pollution, drawdown of aquifers, carving up landscapes with roads and seismic exploration tracks, worsening health of families living amongst gas fields, falling property prices and often an inability to sell properties with gas wells, and worsening climate change through the release of methane and combustion of fossil fuels.

Rather, our elected leaders and the business leaders seem to be in thrall to the industry and unquestioningly accepting the lies and arguments of the industry's well paid spin doctors and executives.

That's why we continue to call for a moratorium on exploration for shale gas and oil, including fracking, until there is adequate scientific information about risks, our petroleum and environment laws are modernised, and landholders are given the right to say no to the industry on their land.

The recent *4 Corner's* expose of rushed environmental approvals for coal seam gas projects in Queensland must serve as a warning to Territorians. Gas companies do not provide enough information for regulators to allow them to make informed and impartial decisions. They pressure Ministers and senior government officials to approve massive damaging fossil fuel projects in spite of community and landholder opposition.

And they make promises they know they cannot keep. For example, the industry knows it has real problems

Above image: Shale gas public meeting in February. From left to right are the following people: Drew Hutton, President, Lock the Gate; Craig Ingram, NT Amateur Fishermen's Association; Eddie Mason, Spokesperson for Protect Arnhem Land; Stuart Blanch, Director, ECNT.

regarding well integrity, with many examples globally of wells cracking and causing pollution. But despite the pollution to water and the climate this causes through releasing frack chemicals and methane, they continue to spin their industry as low risk.

But thanks to the support of our members and donors we have been busy building a shale gas campaign in the past six months. Given the vast onshore gas resources in the Territory we expect this to be a very long campaign.

We're talking to various groups and developing partnerships with many to highlight the major risks from shale gas and oil in the Territory. We've been working with Traditional Owners in Arnhem Land, NT Cattlemens Association, Amateur Fishermens Association of the NT, NT Seafood Council, Land Councils, NT Farmers Association and the Arid Lands Environment Centre.

On 20 February we held a public meeting in Darwin that allowed the community to hear from a range of organisations and landholders about their concerns. We hosted Drew Hutton from Lock The Gate Alliance who talked to the meeting about how farmers, pastoralists and environmentalists have refused to cooperate with governments and the CSG industry in NSW and Queensland by refusing gas companies permission to come onto their land. They've locked the gate,

which has seen the CSG industry all but fall over in NSW.

We have appointed Emma Murphy as a part time shale gas community campaigner to help the community get information about the industry, understand its risks, and take action to oppose it. Following a strong response from the public meeting we are supporting a new community campaign, which is affiliated with Lock The Gate.

And I have travelled twice to Maningrida to support Indigenous landowners from north Arnhem Land, and members of the Protect Arnhem land community campaign, to learn about the risks of oil exploration in coastal waters. I plan to visit Borroloola and Croker Island to meet with traditional owners regarding shale gas and oil.

In March senior Indigenous leaders gathered from across north Arnhem Land in Maningrida to talk about the threats to their sea country from Paltar Petroleum's plans to explore for oil. The meeting was loud and angry, and the men ended it with burning the response from Paltar to their earlier concerns. You can hear their concerns in a YouTube posted on our website.



Images from top to bottom: Stuart with Helen Williams; Maningrida Traditional Owners burning the response from Paltar; Audience at shale gas public meeting in February.



Take Action!

Tell Chief Minister Adam Giles you want a moratorium on exploration by the shale gas industry until an independent inquiry into the science, legislation and community concerns is conducted.

Contact the Chief Minister on:

Ph: 08 8928 6500

Email: Chief.Minister@nt.gov.au

Facebook: www.facebook.com/adam.giles.9693

Twitter: @adamgiles

Did you know unconventional oil and gas companies have their sites set on exploring about 90% of the Territory, including our coastline, national parks, pastoral land and almost all of Arnhem Land?

The Northern Territory is rich with shale oil and gas deposits. To extract it, companies use technologies like hydraulic fracturing –fracking - which pose serious threats to drinking water, air quality and human health (check out the film Gasland if you want to know more).

But we can stop it! It's not too late to stop the NT from becoming the

next gasland. A new campaign group, "Don't Frack the Territory", has launched to spread the word about the risks fracking poses to the cultural and environmental heritage of the NT.

On May 22, Don't Frack the Territory joined forces with the Anti-Nuclear NT collective to protest outside the Australia-China Mining Investment Summit, to say: "Stop uranium mining, lock the gates on shale oil and gas, go solar!"

To get involved, support the campaign or find out more about the issue, contact Emma at the Environment Centre NT, or email shalefree@ecnt.org