COAL MINING AND GAS DRILLING

A PERMANENT BAN ON FRACKING, ONSHORE GAS AND NEW COAL MINES

Land and water are vital for food production. The Greens stand with communities that are threatened by mining companies. We want a permanent ban on fracking, onshore gas and new coal mines in Victoria.

Victoria's fresh food comes from areas like Gippsland, the Otways and Bacchus Marsh that are under threat from new coal mines and unconventional gas drilling including fracking.

Farmers currently have no ability to lock the gate against mining companies that want to dig for coal or drill for gas deep beneath the farms, in a process that will damage the farm forever.

The Greens support a permanent ban on new coal mining, onshore gas and fracking, as part of a fast transition away from fossil fuels towards a clean energy future.

At risk are the most precious resources of all – our soil and water – which stand to be poisoned by coal mining, gas drilling and fracking.

Onshore gas and fracking in New South Wales and Queensland has led to shocking leaks, contamination and farm damage. The compensation to farmers falls well short of the damage done. And the damage reaches well beyond the farm gate.

We need to lock the gate to these dinosaur industries permanently as we transition to renewable energy. The policy that will secure the farm is also the one that will help prevent dangerous climate change.

VICTORIAN FARMS UNDER THREAT

Gippsland and parts of the Otways and south western Victoria are blanketed in exploration and development licences for onshore gas and coal.

In Gippsland, there are eighteen exploration licences for coal seam gas and four for tight gas and shale gas.

Lakes Oil and the company now known as Ignite Energy conducted 23 fracking operations between them in Gippsland before the 2012 moratorium.

In the south west of Victoria there are ten exploration licences for gas – mostly tight gas and shale gas.

Bacchus Marsh is threatened by a huge coal mine proposal. High impact exploration has included test drilling close to homes.

WHAT IS FRACKING?

Hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, is a mining process used to unlock methane gas from rock formations deep underground. The process involves pumping a slurry mix of sand and drilling fluids at extreme pressure to depths of up to two kilometres.

The pressure creates fractures in underground rocks formations, which are propped open with sand. Most of the liquid is pumped back up again, together with gas that was released from the rocks by the fracking.

There is no way of predicting or controlling the fractures, or the effects of subsidence and seismic activity, each of which contribute to the problem of 'fugitive' gas leaking into the atmosphere.

Methane is a powerful greenhouse gas. The impact of 'fugitive' (leaking) emissions has not been measured. CSG could be just as bad for the climate as coal.

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FIVE THREATS TO WATER

Water is a scarce resource in Victoria. Onshore gas drilling poisons our water in five ways.

1. CSG drilling produces large quantities of salty coal seam water, which is contaminated from toxic chemicals that naturally occur in the coal seam, as well as the chemicals used in fracking.

2. Fracking can open new links between freshwater aquifers and saline aquifers, causing contamination.

3. Fracking uses large quantities of fresh water.

4. Cracks and seismic activity from fracking can lead to water dropping through the fissures, drawing down the water table and causing dams and bores to dry up.

5. Methane gas bubbling up through dams and rivers leads to contaminated and even flammable water.

WHAT IS UNCONVENTIONAL GAS?

In Victoria, 'unconventional' gas is divided into three categories, based on the geology of where it is found: Coal Seam Gas (CSG), Shale Gas and Tight Gas. It's basically the same gas – methane - just at different depths below ground and in different types of rock.

CSG is found in pores and cracks in coal deposits, under high pressure, held in place by toxic water. It is deeper underground in the Otways than in Gippsland.

Drilling for CSG produces a lot of toxic water byproduct, because the mining company pumps out the water that was holding the gas in place. Once the water is pumped out, the environment that keeps the methane underground is disrupted.

Not all CSG mines use fracking. So a moratorium on fracking won't protect our farms from coal seam gas.

Tight gas and shale gas deposits are typically more than 1000m below ground, so they have to drill through many layers of saturated geological formations like fresh water aquifers, saline water aquifers and shale oil deposits before they get to the gas deposit.

Fracking is always used in tight gas and shale gas drilling, because the gas is locked in dense rock.

GREENS' TRACK RECORD

The Greens support a permanent ban on all onshore gas drilling, fracking and new coal mines, as part of a complete transition away from fossil fuels.

We have a strong voice at state and federal level across the country against coal and unconventional gas industries. We will continue our campaign alongside community campaigns like Lock the Gate to bring an end to the threat of destruction across rural and regional Australia.

Senator Larissa Waters helped to bring about the water trigger and greenhouse gas investigations.

Victorian Greens leader Greg Barber MP has used Freedom of Information requests, parliament debates and community meetings to shine a light on the potential damage to Victoria if the industry is allowed to go ahead, and the clean energy alternatives.

OTHER PARTIES

The Liberal state government moratorium on new onshore gas permissions (not existing licences or coal mining) is due to expire in July 2015, after the election. The Premier has introduced legislation that will only be needed if fracking resumes. He has also ruled out any moratorium or ban on new coal mines.

Labor say they will extend the moratorium until after a parliamentary inquiry, however the last Labor government approved 73 exploration and fracking licences without consultation.

In Federal parliament, Liberals, Nationals and Labor voted against Greens "lock the gate" laws. Pressure from Greens, country independents and the community led to a "water trigger" for Commonwealth intervention on coal and coal seam gas projects that are likely to have a significant impact on water resources. But the old parties all voted against the new water trigger applying to tight gas or shale gas.

The Abbott government is currently trying to hand off the water trigger powers to the states or local government. They don't care about the threats to water in Victoria or the reality of climate change.

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