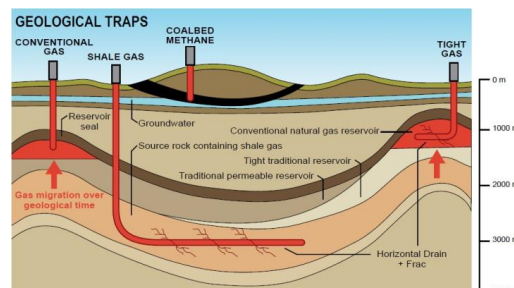


Fracking is too risky?

The Social Justice Awareness Group of the Catholic Church of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Central Australia welcomes increased awareness, discussion and action around fracking for gas energy in Central Australia.

DEFINITION: Fracking (hydraulic fracturing) is using water, chemicals and other additives under pressure to break up the underground horizontal shale rock in Central Australia to release gas for burning for energy in Australia and overseas. This is not coal seam gas, coalbed methane, conventional gas or other tight gases.

(Slide Source NTG Department of Mines and Energy)



SUMMARY: Fracking is too risky. The short term social, economic and political benefits of fracking such as investment, jobs and a stronger economy are outweighed by the negative impacts and potential long term risks to our families and communities. Why risk our future health, environment and finances when there are renewable energy options that create jobs, cheaper power and a safer, healthier future for all Central Australians.

Our concerns about fracking are shared by many people, organisations and leaders in similar situations including:

- * Pope Francis (Photo Eco Watch 12/1/2015);
- * Eight European countries have banned fracking (including Germany who now lead the world in solar energy usage with Australian researchers); and
- * Fifty local councils across Australia including Katherine in the Northern Territory.



Unfortunately many government, business and media reports, including the 2014 NT Fracking Report by Alan Hawke, focus on the short term self-interest benefits and minimise or ignore the negative impacts and serious risks to our community and environment. While acknowledging that there are risks, the Hawke Report misleads us into expecting that the government can regulate away these 'low' risks. Currently there is NO regulatory framework in the NT, yet fracking approvals have been given. Where fracking has occurred around the world, regulation has been ineffective and insufficient to protect people's health and safety. Complete towns now bring in water, children with ongoing nose bleeds, are examples of well documented world-wide evidence of the social and health impacts of fracking.

RISKS: Fracking risks contaminating our primary water source. Unlike most of the world that stores rainfall, Central Australia is heavily dependent on underground water for ourselves, our animals, our food, our farms, our land and future generations. Millions of litres of precious water and thousands of litres of chemicals are used in every frack. 20% of all chemicals stay underground. The rest goes into holding ponds. Some have leaked. Some of the 600 chemicals known to be used are carcinogenic and 'a few present concerns of extreme toxicity' (NTG Hawke Report)

Fracking regulation may minimise, but does not remove, many of the risks to our future health and safety. Many regulations risk being weak, meaningless, unenforceable or not enforced in practice. There is a risk that compliance and monitoring will be limited because of the expense of covering large inhospitable areas. There is the risk that fines or prison terms are insufficient to deter unscrupulous companies going for quick profits by avoiding regulations. Sadly fines or prison terms cannot remove polluted underground water.

(Please Turn Over)

RISKS (continued) There is a risk of companies using 'commercial in confidence' arguments to prevent full public scrutiny and assessment of all chemicals pumped underground for fracking. There is a **risk** of companies, contractors or workers taking short cuts, covering up spillages and leaks, and avoiding accountability, especially in remote areas. There is a risk that any contamination will not be able to be sufficiently measured or attributed to those who did the fracking or have benefited from it. There is a risk of contamination claims being tied up for years of legal wrangling about who is responsible for it and who pays. There is a risk of future governments being left to use future taxpayer's money to deal with the economic, social and health consequences of contamination. There is a risk that underground contamination of water may never be able to be decontaminated. Perhaps it is 'humpty dumpty' thinking that 'all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't... make the water clean again. Not only is prevention better than cure, prevention may be the only cure. We need to practice the precautionary principle.

There is a risk of public interest concerns being undermined or distorted by the self-interest views of those who will benefit from fracking. There is a risk that the vulnerable and voiceless will not be heard, especially around remote Aboriginal and other communities both now and in the future. There is a risk that remote Aboriginal communities have given consent or may be asked to give consent without being fully informed of the impact and risks of fracking on them and future generations in their local area and across our world. There is a risk that many people especially health, education, welfare & business professionals who are deeply concerned about fracking, feel unable to speak because they are in government funded jobs or benefit from government contracts.

There is a risk that fracking and burning this fossil fuel gas here in Australia and overseas will increase climate change impacts on Alice Springs and our world.

We encourage all Catholics, other Christians and people of faith and the wider community to prayerfully and carefully consider both the benefits and the negative impact and risks of fracking in Central Australia, especially on the vulnerable and voiceless, for those living in remote communities and our future generations in Central Australia.

We encourage everyone to also consider supporting other safer healthier options for our energy needs that will also create jobs and benefits for our community in Central Australia. Money spent on building a gas pipeline to the Eastern States could provide free solar power to every home in Central Australia. Mining company skills could build a geothermal power station to provide renewable energy for homes businesses and electric cars for years to come.

You may wish to prayerfully consider some of the following websites and links: www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au
www.hydraulicfracturinginquiry.nt.gov.au dontfracktheterritory.org www.lockthegate.org.au alec.org.au
<http://www.alternet.org/environment/pope-francis-says-no-fracking> reprinted from Eco Watch 12 January 2015

We encourage you and your friends to ask the NT government to withdraw all approvals, financial support, incentives, concessions and associated infrastructure spending until fracking is considered safe and healthy for us all.

We encourage everyone to take action to keep our communities and environment safe and healthy. Talk with family, parents and grandparents, friends, work colleagues, social friends, those who work in the industry, those who do not support fracking and those who support renewable options. Carefully consider how you vote, how you spend your money, what you choose to invest in, who you choose to invest with and how you can use your knowledge, skills and contacts to build a safer and healthier community for us all in Central Australia.

May God's loving creative Holy Spirit be with all of us as we continue to search for the truth of how each of us can best love our neighbour as we live in our own family, next door, across Central Australia or around our world,

OLSH Parish Social Justice Awareness Group Contact details: Sr Kathleen Leahy 0400123540,
Chris Hawke 0499034225, George Tetteh 0409357323, Louise Patel 0439701952.

Catholic Parish of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Alice Springs, Central Australia olshparishalicesprings.org.au