

TRANSCRIPT

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING

Inquiry into unconventional gas in Victoria

Sale — 30 June 2015

Members

Mr David Davis — Chair

Ms Samantha Dunn

Ms Harriet Shing — Deputy Chair

Mr Shaun Leane

Ms Melina Bath

Ms Gayle Tierney

Mr Richard Dalla-Riva

Mr Daniel Young

Participating Members

Mr Jeff Bourman

Mr James Purcell

Ms Colleen Hartland

Mr Simon Ramsay

Staff

Secretary: Mr Keir Delaney

Research officer: Ms Annemarie Burt

Witness

Mr Andrew Harrison.

**Necessary corrections to be notified to
executive officer of committee**

Mr HARRISON — My name is Andrew Harrison. I am from [REDACTED]. I am a hydrogeologist with 22 years of experience, 16 of which have been here in Gippsland. Until a couple of weeks ago I worked for a large environmental engineering consultancy firm, and in that capacity I was involved in part of the Victorian water science studies, looking at the impacts of coal seam gas.

My point today is that unconventional gas is a very technical area, and the impacts are very difficult to determine. I have seen the rest of my community trying to grapple with these technical issues without too much information. The consultation that has been undertaken so far has, in my view, all been one way — that is, the community back to government. There has been very little information coming from government back to the community on some of the science studies that have been undertaken in terms of the impacts of coal seam gas. It is very difficult for the community to try to grapple with these issues without that proper scientific information. In my view it would be much better for all that scientific information to be tabled so we can all debate it from an informed position.

I have two questions for the committee. I did ask these questions of the secretariat before this meeting, but I did not get an answer; they could not provide me with an answer. My understanding is that the Victorian water science studies have now been completed. My question is: will those Victorian water science studies be available by the due date for submissions from the community? I think that is 9 July. The second question is: will those Victorian water science studies be available to you as a committee to help you to grapple with some of these issues by your reporting date of early December?

The CHAIR — I can answer that only in part. We have had an initial briefing out of the department. That was quite a lengthy and detailed briefing, but it was incomplete, and we are proposing that there be further briefings from the department. You can rest assured that we will ask exactly those questions, and we will seek that information. Whether it will be available by 9 July, I am not sure. I think I am able to speak on behalf on the committee when I say that if people have further material to put in front of the committee as information becomes available, we are certainly receptive to that information.

Mr HARRISON — Is it the plan for those Victorian water science studies to become public eventually?

The CHAIR — There is a long list of items and this is not the area we were briefed on the other day by the department, but there is an understanding that the department will continue the briefing process of the committee and some of those hydrological matters, I understand, will be part of that.

Mr HARRISON — Okay, because it is a very technical area. Just to give you one example — I would really love to talk to you about the science but I cannot — there is a massive difference between the scale and types of impact of tight gas versus coal seam gas. I think both tight gas and coal seam gas have been amalgamated into this one big melting pot, and I think that — —

The CHAIR — You can certainly make a submission, although he may have some other issues; I am respecting that aspect. But Richard, I think, did try to make a little bit of that point at several points during the day: for people to unpack those different types, and response and details — I do not think I am speaking out of turn for the committee on this. It is not the same; there are differences.

Ms SHING — I might also add, and this may provide some assistance, that the Victorian Auditor-General is in the process of conducting an inquiry in relation to the operational effects of coal seam gas/unconventional if it were to go ahead, so not trying to pre-empt the outcome. That has involved a great deal of very specialised work that goes right back to the primary source material. That will be made available to the committee. I understand the Auditor-General is providing that report in August. That report will then, presuming it gets tabled in Parliament, be made publicly available as well. That goes right to the heart of those very technical issues that you just raised.

Mr HARRISON — Okay. Thanks.

Witness withdrew.