

TRANSCRIPT

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING

Inquiry into unconventional gas in Victoria

Hamilton — 23 September 2015

Members

Mr David Davis — Chair

Ms Harriet Shing — Deputy Chair

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Witnesses

Ms Bernadette Tapscott (affirmed),

Mr Bob Hodgets (affirmed),

Mr John Coverdale (affirmed),

Ms Pat Nesbitt (affirmed), and

Mr Kevin Cotter (affirmed), Protect the West Alliance.

The CHAIR — If I could ask for one, two, three, four, five to present briefly, and then we will ask a few questions.

Visual presentation.

Ms TAPSCOTT — I did have some articles that I was going to have presented. Thank you. I do have a PowerPoint as well. My name is Bernadette Tapscott, a resident of Bolwarra and a ratepayer in the Glenelg shire. As a casual relief teacher and a civil celebrant, I travel 5000-plus kilometres annually around the Glenelg shire, the Southern Grampians and the Moyne shire, which you see on the screen. My issue today is that our road infrastructure is not suitable for this industry. Can our roads support the additional heavy vehicle movements of the unconventional gas mining industry? How will it affect the roads and the residents' safety? On the screen you can see what one of our main arterial roads looked like four weeks ago.

The CHAIR — Which road is that?

Ms TAPSCOTT — Portland-Nelson Road, Portland to Nelson, 35 kilometres out of Portland. The stretch of road like that was 3.5 kilometres long. In last Friday's edition of our local paper the Glenelg Shire Council expressed their fears about our roads for the next 10 years. 'Roads to ruin — fear highways will collapse under increasing traffic'. Not the increasing traffic of the unconventional gas industry but our current, very lucrative industries operating out of the port of Portland. How many trucks and vehicles travelled to and from this gas field during its exploration and construction? I do not believe that unconventional gas mining is viable on our roads. That picture took a lot to create.

The next slide we are showing you, down the side to where there is a house, anybody else building a residence or starting a business is asked to submit specific planning procedures. My question is: the mining industry must have asked if there is appropriate infrastructure for them to be able to come into our shires to operate, how will they impact on the existing industries those shires have and how will it impact on the communities? The unconventional gas industry requires hundreds if not thousands of heavy and light vehicle movements. Our roads have been under stress for many years, it is not something new, and they continue to face stress from our existing successful industries. There is no quick fix for this. The Glenelg shire economic development and tourism manager has said it is a question of when, not if, our roads fail. That was in the front-page article that you should have.

How can the Victorian government add the gas industry to our failing roads? We do not have adequate road infrastructure. What consideration has been given to my safety, to all of the residents' safety and the safety of our children, who travel on school buses on these roads, and the visitors that we have, and tourists? It is not a hidden secret that our roads are in a big dilemma. We have had visits from past and present premiers. The port of Portland understands, politicians understand. The major roads being reduced to 60 kilometres an hour is from a local resident who put this into the newspaper, 'Roads to ruin'. The evidence is there and clear to everyone.

There is plenty of industry already operating in Portland that uses many heavy vehicles, as well as a lot of residents using our roads, many, many tourists, your average person and school buses. These are the main roads identified that lead in and out of Portland. We are led to believe that the Victorian government and VicRoads are responsible for these transport corridors. Have a quick look at the road that we just saw in the headline that leads from the Victorian border at Nelson to Portland. I travel this road regularly. These pictures were taken on Monday. There are 12 'Rough surface' signs in a 68-kilometre stretch of road.

These are the sides of our roads, constantly falling apart, being repaired, falling apart. This is the Henty Highway, leading to here, the mineral sands road. This picture was taken on Monday. It is not uncommon within our area to see 60 'Drive safely' signs, speed signs just constantly being reduced. 'Roadwork ahead', and often there is no roadwork happening there. Lots of ruts and marks into the roads where the bitumen has shifted from the heavy vehicles that are already operating on them. I spoke with tyre dealers in both Portland and Heywood and they have all indicated a huge increase in the number of people presenting with damage to their vehicles, so it is having a financial burden on the local people. Another concerning thing was one of the tyre dealers said in his 20 years of operation he had never seen four-wheel drives presenting with issues but now he is, from potholes in road surfaces.

This road leads us to Casterton. The same issues: rough surface, lower speed limits. Roads are just breaking down, patching up, breaking down. School buses are on those same roads. This is Digby to Casterton. The

issues are the same on every main road in and out of our area. Potholes, patches, potholes come back. In the dark you cannot see where they are. How can the Victorian government consider adding to our failing road system, regardless of anything to do with the industry? It requires hundreds of heavy vehicle road movements.

This is my own area of Bolwarra. Trucks pass through here constantly. The sides of the road are constantly in a state of disrepair. Some of the signs have been there so long you are barely able to really read the warning that is on them. Our roads are constantly being used as an election promise here and there, but it is only temporary fixes that we get from these promises.

Unconventional gas mines and existing industries equals unsustainable. In addition to the limited supply of road base material, such as limestone and gravel, required by the industry so that they can create all-season track access on farms and forests, this would divert its use from our major public roads — that as you can see are in disrepair — for road infrastructure, with consequent supply and added cost issues being created.

To end on a little bit of a high note, this particular road appeared in my research just yesterday, where there has been a grant allocated to fix this particular part of the road, where our mayor, Robert Halliday, has declared that that 14-kilometre stretch of road has been seeking funding for a considerable amount of time, and describes it in the article as being dangerous to the truck users, the residents and the kids on the school bus. Take note of how wide that road is. It is not a dual carriageway. This industry has trucks in excess of 80 tonnes using the roads. These roads are not able to sustain this industry. To conclude, I ask you which has the more weight, which is the most important issue here: the residents, their safety and wellbeing, the existing industries and our long-term security, or introducing the unconventional mining industry that we do not have any adequate road infrastructure to support?

Mr HODGETS — My name is Robert Hodgets. I am an ex-construction worker, and I own a block of land which has got a PEP 150 covering it. I have got what I consider my little slice of heaven and I do not want it destroyed, so that is what has brought me to all these things.

During my investigations with antifracking and everything, at one particular meeting a man called David Smith was organising a tour to America to find the facts. David is here at present. I went with the tour to America to see what I could see and what I could find out. We had meetings with several people. We started off in New York State, right in New York itself. We listened to some lawyers and people who brought about the banning of unconventional gas mining in New York State itself. After it was all finished, she said it is definitely not necessary, they can get enough gas with conventional drilling. What was driving this was described with three words: greed, greed and greed.

We travelled on from New York State out through the country to see people and have a look. We tried to get a look at a gas drilling rig. For obvious reasons we were not allowed on it, because it is a safety issue and for insurance reasons. Working in the construction industry, I fully understand, but they did come to the gate and talk to us. They started a spiel of it being all about safety. I have worked on a rig in Bass Strait run by the Americans, and that is their common phrase, it is all about safety, but I know very well from practical experience it is all about the dollar.

To carry on, we went to another community where a lady went to take us to places. She is that frightened to be seen by any oil person because they will take her to court and have her locked up. Her only thing is to have complained about the wells and the fracking. That is all she does, just complain about it, and because of it she has actually been declared a terrorist, so they can get public money to lock her up.

The environmental dangers and things that happened were well programmed by various meetings in Pittsburgh and in Ithaca. The common theme is that the pollution is uncontrollable once it has started down there. How do you go down 7000 or 8000 feet and plug a gap? You cannot. What leaks out of the ground can come out today or in 40 or 50 years time. These things are definitely not safe.

Going to another university we talked to a person called Elaine Hill, who is a medical person. She has conducted surveys quite extensively and found that for anyone who lives within 2 kilometres of a well, their babies are likely to have a low birth weight. These particular people are going to be a major drain on the public health system for the rest of their lives. She explained the facts to us, which probably went over my head because I am not a medical person; but I believed everything she said. For the health reasons alone, it is an enormous risk and a large burden on the state government for the costs.

You are well versed in all the environmental disasters and things that can happen. I have got a book here which tells you, *Shalefield Stories*. This is the only copy we have, but we have sent to America to get more, so we can pass some around at a later date. I think John here has been in charge of the copies, so if anyone wants one, just let us know and we will do our best to get it to you so you can read about it.

After my trip to America I am convinced it is not necessary in America either. They have got other ways to provide energy. They have got large areas of the Midwest and areas of desert, the same as Australia. One of the comments from a university professor in America was: why have not you got solar farms? She said, 'You have got masses of area'. She has been to Australia. She said, 'You have got masses of land out there that is not very productive but would produce a lot of electricity and would solve a lot of energy sources'.

She also suggested that, seeing we are short of water, electricity could power desal plants for agriculture and various other reasons. She was quite good at explaining what can happen. A lot of it probably goes over my head. She also said that hydrogen is fairly easily produced by passing an electric current through water with certain salts in it, and hydrogen can power most of our gas needs. You can convert engines to run on hydrogen or gas plants. It is hydrogen with carbon that is the main source of our fuels. To go into the future using that is to completely recycle the thing. You are using the sun's energy to produce hydrogen and oxygen. When you burn the hydrogen it combines back with your oxygen to form water, so it is a complete cycle

The CHAIR — I am just conscious to make sure that everyone gets a chance, Bob.

Mr HODGETS — Just to cut things short, you have got the message about what I think of what has happened in America. The environment we live in is the most important thing we have got. You do not get up in the morning and have a bowl of dollar coins topped with a bit of shale oil and drink it down with tailings water out of a dam, do you? You like to have clean, green. To get that we have got to preserve what we have got now, and everything that comes in the future should have a sustainability put on it. If it is not going to be a good thing in 50 or 100 years time or have a mess today, do not put up with it. Just think about asbestos. They knew 70 years ago what it did, but it has taken a long time to put a stop to it and the effects still roll on. I think I had better pass on to someone else.

The CHAIR — I am just conscious that we have got five and we are on a short time fuse.

Mr COVERDALE — My name is John Coverdale from Portland. I have been living there for about 13 years now, and I thank you guys for coming over here, because there was word that you were not going to come.

Ms SHING — I do not know where you heard that.

Mr COVERDALE — This is a really hot spot, trust me. The Otway Basin is hot, right into South Australia, which has an inquiry as we speak. I am a plumber by trade. That is my background, so when you go digging trenches et cetera, you do not know what is there. You have to find little pieces of apparatus that will help you locate cables, but that does not count for the unknown.

I would like to touch on a couple of things. Industrialisation of landscape, and I would like to refer to this paper here, *Potential Geological Risks Associated with Shale Gas Production in Australia*, written by Frogtech in 2013. On page 27 it states the Otway Basin area is 44 000 square kilometres. That is onshore only and that is the total land area, and there is a proposal of 3446 wells. I can get a copy of this to you. It is not in there unfortunately, I am sorry.

In this report here, this portfolio from Somerton Energy, on the very front page you will see this is Cooper Energy — or Somerton Energy — put this together in 2011. Cooper Energy now owns Somerton Energy, and they have got six tenements, as you can see on that very front page. They have got six tenements with various exploration permits, and there it is reaching into South Australia. They have got an exploration area of 9066 square metres. If you multiply 3446 wells by 9066 square metres, you have got a lot of wells.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — That is square kilometres.

Mr COVERDALE — Square kilometres, sorry. Did I say metres? That is an issue in itself. Some of this subject was touched on by a few people beforehand. Darrell talked about the complexity of the Otway Basin. If you turn to a couple of pages, it shows you some graphics of the fault lines in the Otway Basin. There is the

Penola Trough and the Ardonarchie Trough, which it talks about as being a very risky area. Again, referring to this paper, *Potential Geological Risks*, page 15 says the Otway Basin is structurally complex which may increase the potential for fluid flow between gas shales and other units including aquifers. It has multiple users — conventional gas and oil, carbon capture and storage, groundwater, geothermal and of course shale gas. Also referring to another paper, there is a little photocopy of a paper by C. D. Cockshell. You will see some highlighted asterisks. It is just a plain piece of A4 white paper by C. D. Cockshell.

C. D. Cockshell is part of Geoscience Australia. If you read down to the very bottom part that I have highlighted, he uses words there like rupture, brittle and significant risk. He is talking about the Otway Basin. If you are a plumber, you dig under the ground and you do not know what is there. These guys do not know what is there. They have an idea of what is there, but the Otway Basin is telling us from two reports that it is risky — significant risk, brittle, prone to rupture — so why bother? Why are they doing it?

They say that the shales are well below the aquifers and that there will be no effect to the aquifers. They use the term ‘aquatard’, whereby the impermeable rocks will not allow the escape of emissions et cetera. But if you are talking about the Otway Basin which, as we have just discovered, is very complex and brittle, prone to rupture and has significant risks, who knows what is going to happen? You will see a little news article that I photocopied there of an earthquake that happened recently — some earth tremors — that was mentioned before. Why are we risking it? Why are we doing it? Also the produced water coming out of these wells is highly saline.

I will finish up on this furphy. The mining industry keeps telling us that they have been fracking since 1949 and it is been around for 60 years, and they are quite right. I refer to the long skinny piece of paper which I have given to you. It says that vertical fracking begins in 1949, and horizontal fracking is carried out in shale gas for the first time in 1991. If you go to 1998, Mitchell Energy — now Devon Energy — developed what is called slickwater fracturing, reducing the cost of horizontal hydraulic fracturing into shale. On that big piece of A3 paper there is a description of what slickwater is — a concoction of chemicals, massive amounts of water, sands and additives to reduce friction.

Kevin will touch on this whole aspect of fracking, so I do not want to take away from his spot, but now they are talking about intense hydraulic fracturing. They say fracturing has been around for a long time. In 1998 they started to do the horizontal drilling with slickwater, and now, as Mecrus told us, they can drill down and go out multiple ways, so we have this minefield, as it were, of horizontal lines, laterals, going out with chemicals et cetera, and it is all being fracked. How can that be safe?

To finish up, page 6 of the geological risks says,

Shale gas production ... is in its infancy —

in Australia, and bearing in mind this multilateral heavy fracking is in its infancy —

with just 12 exploration wells drilled as of March 2012. Australia has one shale gas production well which is located in the Cooper Basin.

There may be more since that time, but it still is in its infancy. That is why you get heroes like Bob, who spends his own money to go over to America to find out what is going on. That is why we refer to America. That is our test case, and it is going wrong. We do not want it in Australia.

The CHAIR — I am conscious we have got five.

Mr COVERDALE — I am wrapping it up. With the Otway Basin complexities and risks, best industry practice cannot guarantee there will be no serious issues now and into the future. To quote an ex-fly-in, fly-out worker from Portland who worked out at Queensland on the Tara and Chinchilla gas fields, he simply said, ‘I would not want this industry for Victoria’. Thanks for your time.

Ms NESBITT — I will be very quick. We are not finding it easy to criticise the gas and oil industry. They provide us with our comfortable lifestyle, do they not? However, we cannot ignore the threat to our water and food security. Unconventional mining has polarised attitudes within our communities, not just here but throughout the world. For example, this has occurred in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, France, Luxembourg, Bulgaria, Romania, the Czech Republic, certain areas of Switzerland, Germany, Italy, the

Netherlands temporarily, parts of New Zealand, and parts of the US. Vermont was the first US state, in 2012, that declared itself fracking free. In 2015, Maryland is the latest state to join the cause. In Canada, the list includes Québec, New Brunswick and Newfoundland. Nova Scotia and northern British Columbia are presently contesting the use of fracking, and the First Nation people are driving that cause. This also includes most of Argentina. South Africa is a bit of a grey area — we are not too sure about it. In Australia, it includes Tasmania.

As demonstrated by the rally on Sunday, many communities throughout Victoria are against fracking, and in particular they are looking at unconventional gas mining as being quite dangerous — something that we should view with caution. We call upon the Victorian government, who were given a mandate to provide a safe environment for the community. You know a healthy community is a productive community. If you have ill people, productivity is going to drop. The health of our population is dependent upon the outcome of this committee. You have a real responsibility to look at the situation in a fair and constructive manner and to provide us with some hope.

Mr COTTER — I am a farmer in the south-west, just out of Heywood. There is a mining lease on my property. That is not why I am involved, though. I care about the food supply of this country. I left it in 1996, came back in 2009 and was shocked beyond belief at the health of the nation. It was incredible. I do not need to go into the details of cancer rates et cetera. We all know what is going on. My project is to build a local food network — growing food without chemicals, with clean water, and encouraging and training other people to do the same, and then have food processing to add value. That is me.

Why I have come here today is that I put a general submission to the inquiry, but also a submission for an expert witness. This witness is an American, and I have heard the spin coming out of the oil company releases that Australia is not the United States. But the fact of the matter is, as John has pointed out, this high-tech hydraulic fracturing is not what Mecrus says has been around for 50 years. America is the country on the globe that has done it the longest. It would make perfect sense to go to a place which has the experience. For rational decision-making we would all agree that the top priority is evidence. The evidence already exists in the United States. It does not matter that it might be coal seam gas in Colorado, and shale gas in Pennsylvania. In fact we have tight gas in the south-west. That is even more dangerous because it is hard sandstone and very deep.

My plea to you is that you hear Professor Anthony Ingraffea. I do not know if you were given a copy of my submission about him. My plea is that you hear him by video link. I understand there is facility for you to be able to that. He has agreed, in communication with us, to make himself available to the inquiry. The time difference is not so bad — 11 o'clock for you in the morning, which is coffee time, and 9 p.m. for him. He will wait to have his gin and tonic until after it. That is what I am asking the committee to do: to hear this man, because this man is the most internationally acclaimed expert on high-tech hydraulic fracturing.

To that avail — I thought there were five only of you, sorry, so you will have to share them — we copied these DVDs. This lecture he gave in Pennsylvania — —

Mr HODGETS — Kevin, put that in. That is the triple divide that shows what goes on.

Mr COTTER — I am sorry, but my friend did these. Do not take any notice of the colours — green, red, there is a blue — —

The CHAIR — We have a large number of submissions and we are working through these in a systematic way and will continue do so. My question is back to Bernadette. It concerns the road issue that you have raised. This of course is not unique. This particular heavy vehicle impact on roads issue that you raised is not unique to this industry that is being discussed through the inquiry. It applies also to a number of other industries. I have had representations, for example, in relation to wind farms and the impact of trucks on local roads when building wind farms. I could go through a long list of other industries. So the principle would be some mechanism to ensure that whatever industry is involved that there is a fair contribution to the upkeep of roads. Is that a broad principle that you would accept?

Ms TAPSCOTT — It is an understanding that I have that the truck owners pay certain amounts to use the roads in addition because of the types of their vehicles and the impact they have on the roads. In Victoria, though, we do not see the roads improving. We see some roads and some sections of roads will be improved — hopefully, like the one I showed you in the article — but it is not sustainable. It just does not seem to be happening in western Victoria that our roads continue to get better and stay better. They keep on deteriorating.

If you drive into South Australia, the roads change. They have heavy vehicles on them. Whether it is our maintenance or not enough maintenance, I cannot specifically say, but I do not believe in the short term anything can be done to allow this industry to come and wreck our roads even more when we cannot sustain our existing profitable industry.

The CHAIR — Did you support the recently finished country roads and bridges program? Do you know about that program?

Ms TAPSCOTT — No.

Ms SHING — I have a further question. Thank you everybody for your contributions today. In relation to the roads issue, would it be correct then to say that you do not support any expansion of industry for western Victoria that creates a further burden for regional roads?

Ms TAPSCOTT — No, I do not think that is correct. In previous years there has been 4.4 million tonnes of timber product leave the port of Portland. I would rather see their investment in allowing that industry to grow; it is expected over the next five years to be further increased to 10 million. I am happy to see that happen. I am not saying that we should not have it. I am saying that we should continue to support the current growth industries that we have, such as Iluka that has been mentioned today — the mineral sands coming to Portland. We need to have a road infrastructure that continues to support those continuing industries that are showing definite increases.

Ms SHING — So putting the issue of roads to one side, if it were to be fixed and roads were all to be serviceable and able to take increased loads and haulage of B-doubles, B-triples, whatever you want to call it, in terms of traffic, what would your position be in relation to an unconventional gas industry for Victoria?

Ms TAPSCOTT — I do have other issues that I believe are reasons we should not continue with unconventional — —

Ms SHING — So your position is to oppose any unconventional gas industry in Victoria?

Ms TAPSCOTT — It is.

Ms SHING — Finally, I invite anyone else to comment on the level of community consultation that has been undertaken by proponents of the industry — by private operators or on behalf of private operators. What has been the extent of your engagement with them?

Ms NESBITT — Just with our group, we have invited people who we know work in the industry to come and speak to us to better inform us of the issues. We do not have enough information. The response has generally been, 'Well, look, I can't speak publicly. I'll lose my job'. We have not approached the CEOs. That is perhaps our next step.

Mr HODGETS — On our trip to America, as Mr Smith there behind us will verify, he spent hours on the phone trying to get in contact with gas companies to come and talk to us to explain their operations. The best we could get was one person in the foyer who told us how good it was, and when we asked questions, his reply was, 'I'm not right up to speed on that'. His email address I will get back to you on. He brought his father along to back his story up. His father caters food for the drilling companies and thought it was great, naturally. I would too if I were his father.

Ms SHING — Thank you.

Mr COVERDALE — Lakes Oil distributed flyers around Portland just recently. Beach Energy had a public day in Penola about 12 months ago. Beach Energy are the main players in the Otway Basin, as you would probably be aware. The consultation has been that: Lakes Oil with some flyers. They have flown into town a couple of times but met with council and not had general public meetings. Beach Energy have done their thing, but other than that, no.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Thanks, and thanks for the submission. I am just trying to get an idea, because it is Protect the West Alliance, and you mentioned, 'Our group does this'. I do not know if it was mentioned at the start when everyone went into their area, but can you just give us an overlay of the group you represent and

what the interest is. I think it is important for us to understand and for me to understand how it is formed. Maybe somebody could just explain how you formed together as an alliance, to give us some understanding.

Mr COTTER — We are made up of many different areas. For example, I am at Drumborg, then there is Lyons — this is working towards the South Australian border — Warrnambool, Kororoit and Hamilton. Each of those groups meets every six weeks to have an alliance meeting.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Who are those groups?

Mr COTTER — All the districts.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Is it district based?

Mr HODGETS — We call ourselves Gas Field-free Glenelg, and we are based in Portland. The three of us come from that group.

Mr COTTER — Gas Field-free Drumborg.

Ms NESBITT — Gas Field-free Warrnambool, Kororoit, Woolsthorpe and around those areas.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — How many groups are there that make up the alliance?

Mr COTTER — In the west?

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Yes, Protect the West.

Mr COTTER — There are 67 in the state.

The CHAIR — Just following up Richard's point there, is this coordinated by the Friends of the Earth?

Mr COTTER — No. Protect the West is separate.

The CHAIR — There is no organisational link?

Mr COTTER — There is support with Lock the Gate.

The CHAIR — Lock the Gate, we have established at previous hearings, has two paid workers — one on the west and one on the east — who are paid for by the Friends of the Earth.

Mr COTTER — No, they are paid for by us. We crowdfunded it.

The CHAIR — The evidence that we have got on both is different to that, so we have got two lots of evidence.

Mr COTTER — They did run out of money and needed \$18 000 last year, and that was crowdfunded.

The CHAIR — But I am just trying to understand this point here. What is the logistic support that comes from Friends of the Earth?

Mr COTTER — Signs for the farmers — the yellow triangles — and fundraising. We are now raising funds within ourselves to employ our own facilitator and coordinator within the group so that we start to wean ourselves away from Melbourne.

The CHAIR — So there is a link in fact, and you are trying to reduce that reliance on the Friends of the Earth link.

Mr COTTER — Yes, on Melbourne.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Ms TAPSCOTT — Can I also add that the very first meeting that was had in Portland was just a group of concerned locals who heard about this industry, brought each other together just through hearsay.

Ms NESBITT — That is how the Warrnambool group started as well. It was just a group from the community getting together. They were concerned about the issues and wanted to know more about them, not really having any set opinion about them until we gathered that information.

Mr COTTER — In Drumborg there was an information night, and 70 farmers turned up. Out of that the surveys take place, and then a group is formed for fundraising et cetera.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Mr LEANE — I appreciate your time, thank you very much.

Ms DUNN — I just want to pursue further in terms of membership of the group. You are saying gas field-free declared towns make up the Protect the West Alliance

Mr COTTER — Not necessarily towns. Rural districts.

Ms DUNN — A few people have mentioned a rally on the weekend that talked about various communities with various percentages of people against, so is it different to that or the same?

Mr COTTER — No, that is where the surveys took place, amongst those communities.

Ms DUNN — So they are the same.

Mr COTTER — Yes.

Ms DUNN — If we are talking about them being the same, that is going to be an enormous cross-section of that community in terms of their participation in the community.

Mr COTTER — It is huge.

Ms DUNN — You are going to have people across a broad range of sectors that make up those townships and districts, anywhere from service provision to farmers and anything else.

Mr COTTER — Correct.

Ms DUNN — Have you got any idea of the scale of how many people that is? You might not have actually done that work, and that is okay.

Mr HODGETS — As you drive around the district it is quite common as you come to some small communities to see a big sign up there telling you the percentage. As you already know, it is very high. Across the board it is definitely not wanted in this part of the world.

Ms TAPSCOTT — I recently conducted a survey in our local area, of an area called Cashmore. My survey team and I knocked on doors and spoke to 167 people, and we had 98 per cent of those people say that they did not want gas fields on their land or on the road they live on. Another survey was conducted at Cape Bridgewater, where there were 196 people. They had 99.8 per cent. It is huge. Not everybody in Cape Bridgewater lives in Cape Bridgewater; it is an investment property area. Those people were contacted. We did our very best to contact every possible person. We are not looking at one demographic. There is a broad range of people in those surveys. Nearly 400 people were surveyed.

Mr COTTER — What is really exciting is how it is bringing people of all political persuasions together in rural communities. They are sitting down to talk about what you are very aware of now because of all your research: the risk that we need to look at here if we allow this to happen. Third and fourth-generation farmers are coming together with people with long hair. It is fantastic. I only have long hair because I have skin cancer and it is better than a hat.

Mr LEANE — You do not have to explain yourself to us.

Ms DUNN — That is a piece of evidence we did not expect to hear today.

Mr RAMSAY — Thank you, Bernadette; I enjoyed your presentation. I was thinking that it would have been good to have it this morning when we were doing the rate capping inquiry. It is an interesting point because I think Moyne indicated about \$50 million worth of damage to local roads through the construction of the Macarthur wind farm, so maybe a works plan in relation to a permit might be an appropriate place to put in safeguards for roads.

I have to say I am troubled by these different groups. You talked about being gas free in your submission. A lot of regional Victoria relies on gas. We have natural gas, we have conventional gas and a lot of factories that are related to agriculture use gas. There are ‘No fracking’ T-shirts, there are ‘No coal seam gas’ T-shirts and there are ‘No unconventional gas’ T-shirts. There are hundreds of alliances all running around with different agendas. From our perspective we need to be very clear about what the community is saying in relation to the moratorium that is currently in place, the inquiry’s terms of reference and your particular position and issues. I have got to say there is a lot of confusion out there, and I previously mentioned that. I just want to be very clear: you are not gas free, you are gas field free.

Mr COTTER — Correct.

Mr RAMSAY — You said gas free, and that will be reported if you are going to run those lines.

Mr COTTER — You are quite correct; it is gas field free.

Mr RAMSAY — You are totally opposed to any sort of extraction of gas in an unconventional manner.

The CHAIR — Or even in a conventional manner, some of them, I think.

Mr COTTER — I cannot speak for Drumborg, but no unconventional gas.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — You like gas heaters.

Mr COTTER — I do not use them myself.

Mr RAMSAY — You need to separate that from the conventional — —

Mr COTTER — I would not deny anyone else that, no, of course.

Mr RAMSAY — Just be careful that you separate the conventional and the unconventional.

Mr COTTER — I made it very clear when we first started our group — when people started talking about that — that no, it is not coal seam gas; it is unconventional gas. It is tight gas in one lease and shale gas in another. It is very important to be exact in your words. That is why it is gas field 3. You could argue that that is a bit obscure as well, because that relates to the photographs, which I am sure you have seen at Tara and at Pennsylvania, of the thousands of wells and all the pipelines hooking up. So that is a gas field, and that is why we use that word. But you are right; it could be seen as being opposed to all forms of gas.

Mr RAMSAY — As a supplementary then, what if the science indicates that in fact there is minimal risk to unconventional gas extraction and we have the regulatory frameworks in place — —

Mr COTTER — Then bring it on.

Mr RAMSAY — You would support then a condition — —

Mr COTTER — Yes, but I know that once you have watched that DVD and you have heard Professor Ingrassia as a witness — in fact, I would put my life on it — that nobody could conclude that.

Mr HODGETS — It is a very damning thing that shows you footage of what actually goes on in America and how they treat people. It shocks you once you have watched it.

The CHAIR — I am just conscious of our time, Daniel.

Mr YOUNG — John is dying to say something.

Mr COVERDALE — Yes, I am, sorry. As I stated before, this paper — the geological risks — mentions 3446 wells. Is that not industrialisation? I am not opposed to conventional gas whereby you drill straight down, find pockets of gas and extract it. It has been around in Timboon for quite a number of years. It is offshore of the Otway Basin. That is fine, but this whole concept of renewables — we need to be working to the future and to transition. Let us use the conventional gas that we have and start transitioning to and start using new technologies. I am not opposed to conventional gas.

Mr YOUNG — Just as a last question then, you would support lifting the moratorium for conventional gas?

Mr COVERDALE — Lifting for conventional gas? I personally would, yes, because as I said, there needs to be that transition. But they would have to guarantee themselves that it was going to be conventional gas, and be watched, because the gas market report tells us there is 30 years of it left in Victoria and there is still heaps of it happening offshore in the Otway Basin.

The CHAIR — I thank you all for your presentation. We very much appreciate it.

Witnesses withdrew.