

I want to tell you a story. There lived a little girl with her family, on a beautiful farm. On this farm, the little girl and her family were able to enjoy all the assumed benefits of growing up on a farm, these being: to swim freely in the clean creek and dams, eat the clean, fresh meat and vegetables grown on the farm, and most importantly, breathe in the fresh, non-polluted air. At the time, the little girl and her family thought nothing of this; it was just the way things were.

The little girl grew up and was lucky enough to build a house on the family farm, and have three beautiful children of her own. These children have the same privileges as their mum, but with one difference; someone is threatening to take away all these wonderful things. Not because they want it for themselves or can see the value of what the little girl grew up with; on the contrary. This someone is purely driven by greed. This someone doesn't understand that you can't put a price on childhood memories, on being able to stand outside at night and only be able to hear the frogs and crickets, on being able to see every star in the Milky Way. But more so, this someone doesn't seem to understand that you can't put a price on human welfare.

The little girl in this story is me. I am a mother, I am a wife, I am an ag scientist and I am a farmer. As I learnt more about the threat facing my farm and livelihood, and all those surrounding me for hundreds of kilometres, I knew I had to do something.

While these licenses have been hanging over us, I have faced numerous tragedies at a personal level, the worst of these being the loss of both my parents. The legacy my parents left for me was part of the family farm, the farm that my children are now enjoying. My family has cared for this land for decades and the thought that a faceless corporation could destroy that is devastating for me and my family. The anxiety I have experienced over the last 18 months has been like nothing I have ever been through before. To think that the land that made my parents so proud could be taken away from us is unbearable.

I have spent the last 18 months trying to work out how anyone can possibly think that they can come onto someone else's land and say "there's gas here, and we're going to drill for it. You need to sign this access agreement".

The feeling of landholders and citizens being powerless to prevent the imposition of this industry is a telling psychological burden. People in agriculture have enough trouble coping with the usual pressures they face, and the added stress and anxiety caused by fighting this industry is taking its toll on the entire community.

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I urge you, the Environment and Planning Committee, to look around the room and reflect on everything that has been presented to you over the last few months, and stand up for what is socially acceptable, for families over profits and for communities over multinational companies.

You have heard evidence from experts who have told you the risks we see are real. More importantly, you've seen the human face of this issue, like me and the people before you today. This is our lives. This is our future. This is our children's future.

But I tell you what, the only thing these gas companies have done is unite communities. We've come together over this issue like we never have before.

I implore you the committee, and the Victorian Government to not be the villains in this story, but to be the heroes, so we can all live happily ever after.