# T R A N S C R I P T

# STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING

## Inquiry into unconventional gas in Victoria

Melbourne — 22 July 2015

Members

Mr David Davis — Chair
Ms Harriet Shing — Deputy Chair
Ms Melina Bath
Mr Richard Dalla-Riva
Ms Samantha Dunn
Mr Shaun Leane
Ms Gayle Tierney
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Participating Members

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Secretary: Mr Keir Delaney

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Witnesses

Ms Sharon Davis (affirmed), Executive Director, Water Resources,

Ms Kate Houghton (sworn), Deputy Secretary, Water and Catchments, and

Mr Chris McAuley (affirmed), Director, Water Entitlements and Markets, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

**The CHAIR** — I welcome Kate Houghton, Chris McAuley and Sharon Davis to the hearing. While Keir is sorting out the swearing in, I note that the department has a submission, which I understand is a whole-of-government submission, coming forward in a week or so, and we look forward to seeing that. But there is a range of background questions that we would certainly like to ask today.

**Ms SHING** — Before we swear in the next witness, I ask the witnesses to be sworn in in absolute silence please, including from the gallery.

**The CHAIR** — I ask Kate to lead the presentation, and in the presentation you might at some point address the role of the department and its regulatory and other roles with respect to our terms of reference.

**Ms HOUGHTON** — Thank you for allowing us to appear today. Today's presentation is going to focus on the state's water entitlement and market framework and groundwater management in Victoria, key areas that relate to onshore unconventional gas production. The presentation today is a factual and background piece on the water management framework. Relevant departments across government are finalising a submission to the inquiry on broader factual matters relevant to the terms of reference. This cross-departmental submission will be expected at the end of July, so we are focusing on groundwater, not these broader matters, particularly water and catchments as they relate to the Water Act and its framework. Relevant officers from other departments will be available to appear and talk directly to the broader submission as it relates to your terms of reference. Sharon Davis and Chris will take you through the presentation, and then we are in your hands.

**Visual presentation.**

**Ms DAVIS** — Thank you for your time today. As Kate indicated, it will be a bit of tag team between myself and Chris. The intention of the presentation we put together today is to give you an overview of the state entitlement and market framework that covers both surface and groundwater. We will particularly focus on the groundwater management framework, which is of obvious relevance, and we will give you an overview of the information that is currently available in relation to Victoria's groundwater extent and use.

As an overview, just to explain the arrangements for water in the state, water is managed under the Water Act 1989, and the state government retains all rights to use water — so it is held at that state level — over surface and groundwater on behalf of all Victorians, and then the department manages and allocates the use of water resources in accordance with that act. At a broad level the water entitlement and planning framework has a number of key outcomes, and this really relates to how water is shared, held, used and traded. It covers both surface water and groundwater resources and all phases of the water cycle, so a holistic approach. It balances the demands of consumptive use and the environment and non-consumptive uses, so again a holistic approach, and allocates water to cities, towns, agriculture and industry, while also making sure that rivers remain healthy, so balancing that use from an environmental perspective. That is the overarching framework.

To put it another way, in terms of the tiered approach that exists in Victoria, at the top level, as I indicated, the water rights are held by the Crown. At tier 2 these rights are given to authorities and split into broad categories. We have an environmental water reserve that includes environmental entitlements and obligations in relation to achieving environmental outcomes. Sometimes this is referred to as 'above cap' water. This is really the water that is in the system either as a consequence of our planning arrangements, where we cap in diversions, or as a consequence of explicit environmental entitlements it is clearly part of the environmental water reserve. Then we have a series of bulk entitlements which essentially provide the source entitlements at a wholesale level. Then at tier 3 we have a range of different types of rights that might be granted to individual users. There are a range of those different types of rights. They may be water shares; different types of licences, in terms of take and use licences; section 8 licences, which relate to domestic and stock use; supplies to urban customers; and supply by agreements.

We will talk a little bit further in our presentation specifically about some of the licensing arrangements that relate to the groundwater elements. We think that would obviously be of most interest to the

committee in relation to the issue at hand. I will just step through this to give you an overview of the different roles and responsibilities across that framework.

From the state government level perspective, the Water Act obviously describes the overarching management framework. The state issues the entitlements. It is responsible for leading policy development at that broad scale. The state leads the interstate negotiations with other jurisdictions — the Murray-Darling Basin, the Murray-Darling Basin plan and authority clearly being a specific example of that. There are also other examples in relation to border groundwater issues between South Australia and Victoria and the Snowy River. The state also has oversight of groundwater resources and a monitoring and reporting function. Again, we have some information available in our presentation to give you a bit of a sense of the information that is available for the state.

In Victoria we have water authorities. They have responsibilities in terms of the overall management framework. Urban water authorities are responsible for urban supply, supply and demand strategies and community consultation. Rural water authorities are responsible for headworks, management and delivery systems, and stream flow management. Importantly they are responsible in the groundwater management context for planning, licensing and monitoring groundwater activities and also running processes of water service and customer committees to work with communities there. We also have in Victoria catchment management authorities that are responsible for regional health strategies involved in drought and flood response and a range of implementation committees. So that is the key framework beyond specific departmental activities.

To get a bit more specifically into the groundwater resource, groundwater is obviously the water that sits beneath the surface. It is in a zone where we have lenses where the water is fully saturated, so that can occur at different depths through the system. On a long-run average basis, it represents about 10 to 15 per cent of Victoria's total water use. Where we use the term aquifer, that really relates to parts of the profile where there is sufficient water held that is in usable quantities that we can pump out and use for different things. We have aquifers beneath all parts of Victoria, and the water quality of those aquifers is quite variable. Obviously that then has implications for the extent to which it is used for different purposes across the state.

Just to give you a sense here, these are the geological basins of Victoria, so obviously the groundwater resource and the way it is characterised does not match surface water catchments. Groundwater has different boundaries both spatially and as you go down through the profile there are different layers of groundwater. We will talk a little bit more about that.

This is one of the largest sets of categorisation of the system we have in the state. Just broadly, in the groundwater management framework that exists there are three broad types of management frameworks. Water supply protection areas apply in areas where there is generally quite an intense area of use. There are caps in place. That is the highest level of use, metering and monitoring, and that is done in quite an intensive way.

Groundwater management areas are areas that are also actively managed where there are generally caps and local plans, but it is a less intensively used area and generally, as you can see, the monitoring is not as intensive. For all the bits that are not in water supply protection areas or groundwater management areas, we refer to those as the unincorporated areas. Generally there is limited use in those areas, and that is usually because the water quality is quite poor. When I say that, that is generally an issue of salinity, when I use that sort of terminology, or there is not much resource that you can extract in a way that can actually be used for any particular purpose.

To give you a sense of what that looks like across the state, this is a map of the groundwater management units covering water supply protection areas and groundwater management areas.

**Mr McAULEY** — I am going to continue on providing a little bit more information about elements of the Water Act that we use to regulate groundwater and also a bit more information that we have at hand to be able to inform the processes and the decisions that we make in the context of the act.

To start off I am going to go back quickly to this slide. This map shows the geological basins across the state. The geological basins generally contain layers of material, and they form the bulk of the aquifers which are used, effectively, as groundwater supplies within the state. They are also geological basins, so there is a whole range of other elements to it which are of interest from a geological perspective, but from our perspective we are interested in the layers that actually make up the water supply system.

Recapping on that, there are three main ways in which we effectively break up the state to approach it from a groundwater management perspective. This map basically shows where those areas fundamentally are. So, basically, on that one there we have the solid colour pink, which is representing our groundwater management areas; we have the hatched areas, which are the water supply protection areas; and effectively all of the white area is what would be described as an 'unincorporated area'.

As we looked at on the previous one, a water supply protection area and a groundwater management area are characterised by having a cap and having varying degrees of management and rules that apply to that cap. An unincorporated area does not have a cap; all of the rules still apply from the Water Act perspective, but it does not necessarily have a cap. There is a caveat I would put on that: in the whole northern part of the state at the moment, so the part that actually forms the Murray-Darling Basin, with the implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin plan effectively all of that northern area is now capped. So even the unincorporated area effectively has a cap on it. In the southern part of the state, so outside the Murray-Darling Basin, the unincorporated area does not necessarily have a cap.

There are a range of instruments within the act which we actually use to basically regulate the take and the use of groundwater across the state. I will touch on some of those going through this slide, but then we will also come back and revisit them as we go through some of the other elements as well. In terms of some of the key parts: a licence is basically the mechanism by which groundwater can be taken. There are two main parts to that. The first part is effectively the works component, or the mechanism by which the water is taken. That falls under what we call section 67, so for groundwater specifically that is where a groundwater bore is effectively licensed to be constructed. That is where the construction standard elements are addressed within the requirements of the act.

The second key part is then the take and the use of the water from that constructed work; that is under section 51 of the act. There is a process where you need to actually go through a process to actually assess the implications of taking that water, and that is very much where we do the assessment part of saying: how do we take the water and what are the implications of taking that water on a range of other users but also a range of other considerations as well? There is a third part. The bulk of groundwater use within the state of Victoria is covered by the works licence and the licence to take and use. There is also a provision — which is not a licence; it is actually an approval — for the discharge of matter underground. So this is where, if you are actually putting something back down a bore, you would need to seek an approval in order to actually be able to do that. The approval once again has criteria for assessing the impacts.

They are the three main parts I guess that we would talk about in terms of the tools we have. In the context of onshore unconventional gas, in the context of the Water Act, it is just another use of groundwater, so therefore all of the provisions of the act would apply to it as they would for any other use of groundwater within the state. The individual elements of the act are sufficient for actually making a decision about how you might actually take and use groundwater from any part of the state. There are other tools that we also bring in, or the act provides for other tools that can actually assist us, in helping make some decisions upfront which then guide how you might make decisions about the take and the use of groundwater.

A key part of that is the development of management plans. There are fundamentally two main types of management plan, and they are associated with the different types of areas that we talked about before. The water supply protection area effectively is a ministerially declared area and it would actually have a statutory groundwater management plan attached to it — that is a plan that is approved by the minister. That is probably the highest level of regulation of the activity within a particular area. We then also have local management plans, where the water corporations, as the delegated authorities under the act, can

actually form a plan for an area. That is basically a set of rules which basically say how the water will be taken and used within that particular local management plan area.

**The CHAIR** — What the phrase that you used at the start there? What was the title?

**Mr McAULEY** — Local management plan?

**The CHAIR** — Local management plan.

**Mr McAULEY** — A statutory plan would apply to a water supply protection area, local management plans generally apply to groundwater management areas. In all the other parts, the provisions of the act still apply, so there is no part of the state which is actually unregulated; it is just that we use the planning instruments to help inform decision-making and also provide I guess confidence and certainty around the use of the water within those areas.

In terms of how caps are set, we have talked about how the water supply protection areas and the groundwater management areas would have caps. The caps in the act are referred to as permissible consumptive volumes. The permissible consumptive volume is just a volume, usually expressed in a volume per year, although it can be expressed as a total volume over a period of time. There are different ways it can be expressed, but it is a volume over time criteria. In terms of the act, it is just a number. How that number is derived is determined by a range of things which feed into it, including the historical uses of the water in the area, current processes. They are supported by technical studies to inform what the number would be, and so it is the cap effectively. That is a limiting cap, so you cannot allocate more water above that cap.

In the majority of places across the state, so within our water supply protection areas and with our groundwater management areas, the cap is fully allocated. There are licences for the full volume of the permissible consumptive volume. There are some parts of the state — the prominent one being over in the far west of the state — where there is some additional water available, and there are other parts where there are little bit either side, but for all intents and purposes where there is a water supply protection area or a GMA and a PCP applied, the entitlement is actually allocated for that full cap. So the system is capped, and all of that use, all of that water, is allocated to users. In the unincorporated areas, as I say, there is no cap per se, but they still need to go through the licensing process and they still need to go through the same tests.

As I mentioned before, the Murray-Darling Basin plan provides another overarching management framework over the northern part of the state — the Murray-Darling Basin part of the state. In that particular context, as I say, the headline or main implication for that is that within the Murray-Darling Basin plan they have sustainable diversion limits, which effectively are their caps, and they do apply to the full north of the state, so any of the unincorporated areas of the state, as I expressed before, actually now effectively capped by the Murray-Darling Basin plan.

In terms of how we actually demonstrate that the caps are being met, there is a program of metering across the state, so any bore that takes greater than 20 megalitres a year is required to have a meter which is read annually. There are some exceptions to that, but certainly the metering coverage within Victoria is one of the highest across the country. It is something which has been worked on over a period of years to ensure that we actually do have adequate metering, because we do need to know what the actual usage is.

We also have a series of observation bore points, and I will put a map up of that shortly and will talk to it at that point, and there is a range of reporting activities as well. Certainly where planning activities are undertaken and administered by the rural water corporations, they need to report back on water supply protections on the groundwater management plans annually. They also report through that annually. We also have annual water accounts, so the water accounts for the state are also summarised. That is just the last point on the slide.

I am not going to dwell too much on this because I think I have gone through most of the elements of this already. This really is just characterising elements of the section 51, which is the take and use part of the

licence, and the section 67, which is the bore construction part. This description is a little bit more generic. It applies to both surface water and groundwater, so in the groundwater context it is very much as I talked previously. Basically, with the take and use, there is a process to assess the impacts of the take and use of water. The works licence is where construction standards are applied for how the bore, which accesses the groundwater, is actually constructed.

That is giving the overview of some of the key elements of how the take and use of groundwater is effectively regulated under the act. I am just going to spend a little bit of time talking about some of the information we have to hand to be able to make those assessments.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — You do not have long to go. You only have 10 minutes — 15 minutes.

**The CHAIR** — Keep going.

**Mr McAULEY** — I will quickly go through this. Within the state of Victoria we actually have mapped all of the aquifers across the state in three dimensions. We are the first state to do that in Australia; other states are catching up, but my understanding is that we are still the only state that actually has this level of coverage. Why do we need to do that? Because we need to understand our resource so we can manage it, consequently the mapping of that resource was a key objective. This is basically mapping all of the usable parts — —

**The CHAIR** — That is now publicly available?

**Mr McAULEY** — Yes, that is publicly available. In fact on the previous one there was a reference to an online resource report tool which allows you to go to any point in the state, click on it and it will give you a report on what is beneath the ground at that point. That is underpinned by this. Consequently this one does give us that framework around saying that we at least understand where the aquifers are across the state. Of course these can continually be improved, but it is a very handy tool to have from the outset.

For each of those layers we also basically know what the salinity of the water is within each of those layers, so we actually have the capacity to know roughly what the quality is. We use salinity as a bit of a surrogate for quality. It is not the only measure of quality; we understand that. But it is a good surrogate for a lot of the uses, so consequently that is where the mapping has been focused to date in terms of looking at the salinity aspects of it.

If we actually look at where water is used, so from a licensed water user perspective, this is the density of use across the state. It does show that the actual use of groundwater is very often focused in localised areas, and if you overlay that management framework over the top of that, you would see that all those dark red areas in particular are all covered by management framework. So the management framework we have in place very much focuses on those areas where the resource is most extensively used.

You will not be able to read any of that, but each one of those dots is a town which depends on groundwater. It is just emphasising that there is a range of towns across the state that actually have some or total dependence on groundwater, and that is certainly a key consideration when we are considering impacts.

I will also talk briefly about the state observation bore network. Basically there are over 2000 points at which groundwater levels and pressures are measured across the state. That is by far not the whole dataset; there are approximately 220 000 bores drilled across the state and we have varying degrees of information on all of those points. These are the ones which are basically across the state to give us information, predominantly on levels and pressures but we can also measure the quality at those sites as well.

The focus of this system is towards the resource management, so it has been the use of the water primarily for things like agriculture and urban water supplies et cetera. Nonetheless, it is a fairly comprehensive set of points of information, which we now have over a fair degree of time period, and they are maintained.

**Ms DAVIS** — Thanks, Chris. The concluding remarks there are really about confirming that in the state we have an entitlement planning framework that covers surface and groundwater, that covers the whole state and that builds on the knowledge that we have in terms of the resource. The groundwater management arrangements that exist, as Chris stepped through in detail, apply to all activities, so would be relevant in this instance. As I think we have demonstrated with a few good slides, we have a reasonably good starting knowledge base in terms of the resource that we have in this state.

**The CHAIR** — I will be very brief and leave some of the questions for later. I think it is helpful for us to have that framework for water management. The department of course does a lot more than water management, Kate, I think catchments with biodiversity and species matters, also planning instruments and also I think a role with greenhouse gas abatement. I wonder in the submission that comes forward whether those matters will also be covered and we will be in a position to question about this material but also other material later.

**Ms HOUGHTON** — Yes. The other parts of the department, as you have described, will feature within the whole-of-government submission, so we can talk in detail around that once that submission has been submitted.

**The CHAIR** — I should place on the record at the moment my general lack of enthusiasm for whole-of-government submissions, and that goes through previous opposition and in government and into this period, noting that different departments often have different interests and sometimes it is important for information to be provided which is not filtered at a cabinet level. But anyway.

**Ms SHING** — Thank you very much for the presentation today. I note the scope of the presentation insofar as the extent to which it has been necessarily confined to water use and the operation of the act and the regulations. I am wondering whether the submission will in fact look at water — not just water use as far as unconventional gas is concerned, but the effects potentially insofar as the department might consider them to be of unconventional gas and onshore exploration and/or further activity on the way in which not just from a regulatory perspective the department does its work but also from the perspective of the other responsibilities of the department insofar as ensuring quality, managing risk, again looking after that biodiversity and various other related considerations. The terms of reference are intentionally broad enough to capture that sort of consideration, and I would just like to see whether there is going to be some consideration given to including that in the submission if that is not already happening.

**Ms HOUGHTON** — I will comment from a water and catchments perspective. The department has been doing work on water science studies, which is going to increase our technical knowledge about the potential impacts on the water resource from this type of activity. That will be part of the whole-of-departmental submissions, and then once that is submitted we can talk in detail.

**Ms SHING** — I am not wanting to speculate on what will be in it, but just to make sure that that will be part of the submission will be very helpful.

**Ms HOUGHTON** — Yes.

**Ms SHING** — Yes, thank you.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — If an unconventional gas industry did proceed in Victoria, why do you think it is important to conduct water studies in target areas prior to production starting?

**Ms HOUGHTON** — There are a number of obviously decision points before that decision is made, including the outcomes of this inquiry. The Water Act and the regime that we have just gone through is asking a number of questions in terms of any water user over and above, and they look at the considerations around water quality, adverse impacts on existing water use et cetera. There is always a need to know more about system. Victoria has a really strong grip and handle on the water resource, as you have seen — we have got 3D mapping of the groundwater resource et cetera — but actually understanding more in terms of impacts is always essential in terms of government considerations moving forward. So from a technical perspective, expanding our knowledge on potential impacts is a valuable thing.

**Mr DALLA-RIVA** — Right. Clear as mud. Thank you.

**Ms HARTLAND** — During our hearing in Sale, the issue that was raised again and again with us, especially from farmers, was that they were very concerned about the effects it would have on the aquifer et cetera. What kind of regulation did you think would need to be in place to make sure that those farmers' water was not affected?

**Ms HOUGHTON** — I might hand to either Chris or Sharon in terms of how we are protecting the system now within the regulatory system.

**Mr McAULEY** — As outlined, from the act's perspective, any onshore unconventional gas development will be considered just another use of groundwater, and so in that context the act would apply, so they would be required to get a licence within the context of the act. The act provides a framework for assessing the licensing process. As part of that it actually covers off on a whole raft of particular issues, a lot of them focused around impacts on other users in particular, particularly those users who are already in the system. But it also covers off on a broader range of impacts associated with the environment, with surface water impacts and a range of other things. So part 4 of the act is where all of those things are primarily listed. In terms of a new licence they will still have to go through that process of assessing against each and every one of those things, and so existing users of groundwater would absolutely be considered in terms of impacts on them within that process.

At the end of that process, then there would need to be a decision around the actual licence itself, but the way the process is outlined in the act, it is pretty robust in terms of making sure particularly concerns of existing users are covered off in making that decision around the licence. So it is a process, and the process would apply to an unconventional gas application as it would for any other application, whether it be a large user for an urban use or something like that.

**Ms HARTLAND** — So in the scenario that the licence has been sought on a productive farm and the farmer does not want this to go ahead, is there any other balancing between the damage that this could do to a productive farm versus the ability to be able to extract the gas?

**Mr McAULEY** — The provisions of the Water Act do focus on effectively the implications of taking that water on others who also utilise that same resource, but also on — I will use the broad term — the other users of the water, such as the environment et cetera. So the licensing requirements for the actual bore licence to take the water would actually focus on those particular elements, so part of it will depend on what the concerns are in terms of the impact on property. If it is a water-related impact, then the provisions of the act would ensure that they were actually covered off.

**Ms HARTLAND** — This may be a question you cannot answer, but how would the regulations actually protect? We have heard a lot about once the aquifers are damaged they are damaged. What would you see as the requirements — or the government sees as the requirements — needed to make sure that that damage does not occur? And how will it be regulated, and how would it be overseen?

**Mr McAULEY** — Once again in terms of the process of getting a licence to take that water, that would absolutely have to be considered as part of making that decision. So the provision to make the decision and understand those implications is clearly within the process of licensing within the act as it currently stands.

**Ms HARTLAND** — They have got the licence, they are drilling. Who oversees to make sure that the damage has not occurred?

**Mr McAULEY** — Licences generally will be issued with conditions, and those conditions will usually require, particularly for large volumes of take, monitoring of the activity to ensure that I guess the things that the decision was based on are actually observed to be occurring within the field. So those conditions can require monitoring, can require a response to monitoring, so in other words if there is particular outcome observed in monitoring, then it can require a response to that, whether it is a cease of activity or some other change in activity.

**Ms HARTLAND** — So the department does that monitoring?

**Mr McAULEY** — The licence will be issued by the rural water corporation. It is actually a delegated function. The monitoring requirement is usually on the actual proponent to undertake the monitoring. They would be required to report on that monitoring, so there will be oversight of the information through reporting, but the actual licence-holder in most circumstances is the one who is responsible for undertaking monitoring itself and reporting against that.

**Ms HARTLAND** — So this is self-monitoring?

**Mr McAULEY** — And reporting, yes.

**Ms HARTLAND** — So it is self-monitoring by the industry to say whether they have actually damaged the aquifer?

**Mr McAULEY** — In the context of a groundwater license — an actual licence — and whether it is an unconventional gas or an urban supplier or even an irrigator, if there is a concern about an impact that might come from that activity, then monitoring could be a part of that licence, and yes, in most cases it is actually up to the holder of the licence to make those decisions in the context of a licence. It does not mean there may not be other things that sit over the top of that, but in terms of a groundwater licence that is often the way.

**Ms HARTLAND** — So unless the company was scrupulous — and my experience is that some companies are not — if they are allowed to self-monitor, the government and the community will not actually know whether damage has occurred?

**Mr McAULEY** — As I say, within the context of a groundwater licence, if they were required to monitor, they would also be required to report, so there would be a reporting mechanism. How the information is reported would be something that could be actually put into the condition, so the condition could be around that.

**Ms HARTLAND** — So if a company put in an adverse report, who would then follow up that report?

**Mr McAULEY** — Certainly there are penalties for breaching licence conditions. Unfortunately I do not know off the top of my head exactly what they are, but there are penalties for breaching of a licence condition, and so regulatory action would need to be taken if they actually breached their licence conditions. So it is a condition of a licence, it is a requirement, so if they breach that, there is a penalty provision.

**The CHAIR** — Perhaps, Colleen, the department submission could address the mechanism that operates there.

**Ms HARTLAND** — I have just never seen self-monitoring work. It just has massive flaws, so I would be really concerned about that.

**Ms HOUGHTON** — Yes, we can come back on that.

**Ms BATH** — With respect to water, a company has drilled in, they have done some fracking, shale gas, they have removed the water to the surface, and they are processing it. Just some comments — and it may come out in your submission report — with respect to how we would deal with that wastewater: how would that wastewater be dealt with in terms of salinity problems or the chemicals, on the surface once it has come to the surface?

**Ms HOUGHTON** — I will hand over to Sharon.

**Ms DAVIS** — So the issue of the disposal of that water would be a matter for the EPA to regulate. So it would be in that context.

**Ms HOUGHTON** — Yes, so there are state environment protection policies, which look to protect the beneficial uses of water, including groundwater, so that is part of the EPA's regulatory framework, and there are also obviously licence and works approvals under the EPA framework. So that is a question for the EPA.

**Ms BATH** — Good, thank you.

**The CHAIR** — Colleen has one more quick question.

**Ms HARTLAND** — This you may not be able to answer, but when we were at Sale with Lakes Oil's Mr Annells — I am probably not pronouncing his name correctly — there was a discussion around community consultation. The statement was:

> With communities, after the fracking ban came in it was suggested that we should not conduct community consultation ourselves but should take part in the government-sponsored community consultation.

Lakes Oil said that they had been told by the department not to consult with the community. It is unclear as to which — or who within which — department made that statement, and I do not believe that we have had that information from Lakes Oil at this stage. Is that something that you can shed any light on?

**Ms SHING** — Perhaps that can be addressed in the submission.

**Ms HARTLAND** — I think they can have a chance to answer now, and then otherwise in the submission.

**Ms HOUGHTON** — I am not aware, so I cannot answer that question now, but I can take that back.

**Ms HARTLAND** — That would be fantastic, thank you.

**Ms HOUGHTON** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Kate, and departmental representatives. We look forward to your submission and appreciate you appearing today.

**Ms HOUGHTON** — Thank you.

**Witnesses withdrew.**