

Fracking concerns MPs hear evidence from scientists

Fears well up after US fact-finding trip

By CATHERINE MILLER

A WEEK-LONG trip to areas in the United States which have been heavily fractured to extract shale gas has strengthened the resolve of some to ensure the South East does not replicate this development.

But Member for Hammond Adrian Pederick has criticised the itinerary as highly biased towards "fractivists" and organised with pre-conceived ideas.

The 11-member group which recently returned included SA MPs Greens Leader Mark Parnell, Independent John Darley, Member for Mount Gambier Troy Bell, Mr Pederick and SE community members.

They visited gas fields in Pennsylvania and neighbouring New York State, which has banned fracking, and also heard evidence from scientists, public health experts, farmers, economists, lawyers and industry representatives.

Mr Parnell said the trip had vindicated his decision to push for a ban on high-volume, hydraulic fracture stimulation in farming, conservation and urban areas in SA.

"It is one thing to see a couple of

Pederick seeks industry views

MEMBER for Hammond Adrian Pederick said he wanted to get a balanced point of view and took pro-active steps to find out what the industry was doing.

"Without doing that it would have been farcical," he said.

Through Mr Pederick's contacts the group met a woman outside Pittsburgh who was receiving regular payments for having a well pad on her property, and Jeff Heller from Steuben County, New York State, who is president of a coalition of 1700 farmers campaigning to lift the fracking moratorium in the area and benefit from the mineral royalties.

Mr Pederick, who acknowledges his

Key points

- Shale gas dividing US communities
- Fracking banned in New York State
- Some water supplies contaminated

test drills at Penola but in Pennsylvania there are thousands upon thousands of gas wells," he said.

"Interestingly, next door New York State – a state of 20 to 30 million people – has banned fracking for gas in the Marcellus Basin. They have looked at the evidence and said the price is not worth paying.

"The lesson for SA is simple – don't do it and follow New York State's lead."

Mr Parnell said the area of great concern was not underground contamination of aquifers but dealing with high volumes of water once they returned to the surface and were contaminated.

"One fracking operation we passed had a sign saying they used 5 million gallons of water per day. They have had huge problems taking away this waste water including leaks from ponds and lines falling," he said.

Mr Parnell said that although

they did see evidence of landholders making money, in many circumstances payments were far less than promised.

"I don't doubt there is money to be made but it doesn't mean that we should do it," he said.

"Everywhere we went local people had come together and local communities had been supported by academics. The message was that it was too dangerous to exploit the resource.

"We also saw large numbers of people where their water supplies were contaminated and the gas companies were paying for fresh water to be delivered to their houses."

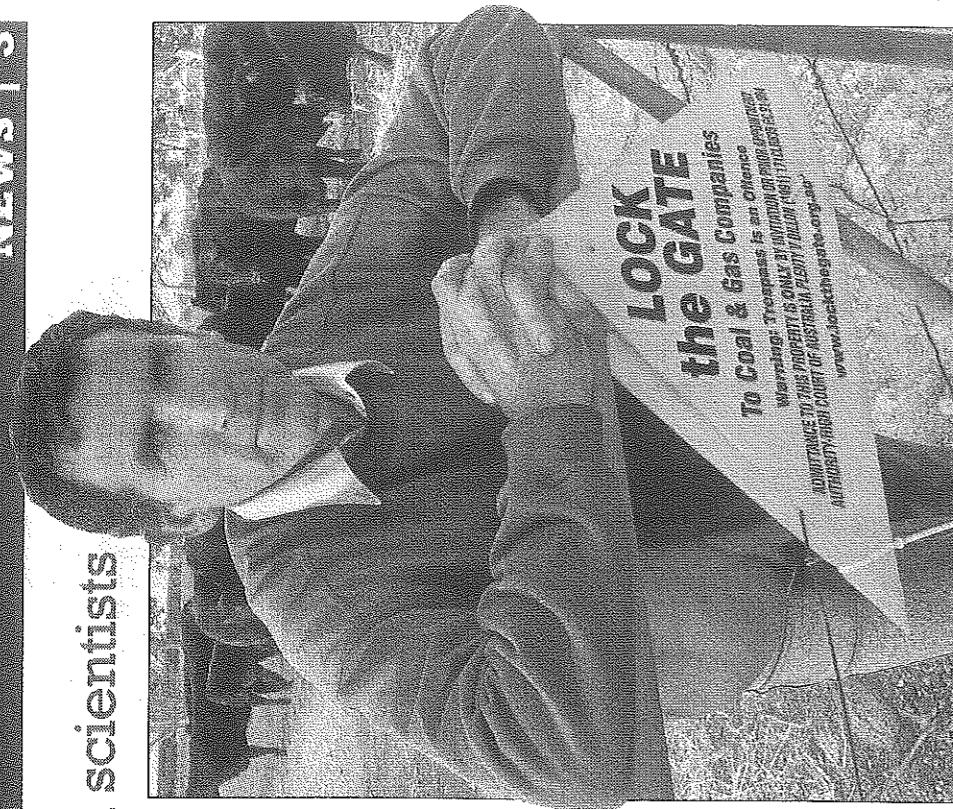
Mr Darley was yet to adopt a position on fracking but said it was undoubtedly a divisive issue across all the communities they visited.

"The two sides are on polar opposite ends of the spectrum and it is clear that the US lacked any sort of appropriate regulation which would have given landowners more rights and provided greater transparency," he said.

He said the situation was also very different to SA because the landowners own the mineral rights in the US.

"We can certainly learn from their experience," Mr Darley said.

Facts gleaned from the trip will be presented to the State Parliamentary Inquiry into Fracking, which could help determine the future of fracking in SA.



'Crazy' idea not worth risk for region

KALANGADOO farmer David Smith (pictured) spent hours randomly calling residents of the United States when he heard about the potential for unconventional gas projects in the South East but now that he has visited these areas, he is more determined than ever that high-volume hydraulic fracturing should not be allowed in the region.

"To see it and talk first-hand with professionals has confirmed my original thoughts that it looked too risky in the SE, in an area where we have intensive agriculture and closely settled population," he said. "It would be crazy to bring it into this region."

The organiser of the week-long trip to the US said he was deeply

concerned about underground water and human health and seeing families who were unable to turn on the tap in their houses close to well pads had confirmed this.

The group also heard research indicating lower birthweights in babies in heavily fractured areas.

"If far more people don't want it than want it, it shouldn't go ahead," David said.

"Our community has just had a ceremony where 96 per cent stated they want to be gas field-free. "We hope our concerns are being heard."

David has defended the itinerary saying he and Troy Bell tried to access various US mining company officials but to no avail.

Behind the headline

FRACKING may breach multiple international human rights laws, according to a new United Nations report released last month. Agricultural Advocate and Member of the Round Table for Unconventional Gas Projects in SA Anne Daw is one of three Australians quoted in *A Guide to Rights-based Advocacy, International Human Rights Law and Fracking* released by the Sisters of Mercy, Mercy International Association and prepared by Aine O'Connor, coordinator at the United Nations for RSMI Mercy Global Action. The 73-page report highlights situations across the world including the South East, and the multiple channels available to exercise these human rights laws. "The world is aware that there is a Parliamentary Inquiry through the Natural Resources Committee on the impacts of fracking in the SE, and possibly watching for the outcome," Ms Daw said. She is unsure what the outcome of the inquiry will be but is putting together a team of people from Australia to take the fight further to secure the region's underground water if necessary.

By COLIN BETTLES

NATIONAL Farmers Federation President Brent Finlay said the Abbott government's Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper could boost farm sector confidence by setting a bipartisan business planning agenda that individual farmers could align with.

The paper was a key election commitment from the Coalition, aimed at acknowledging and building the industry's standing as one

of the nation's key economic pillars.

A draft green paper was released at the NFF annual congress in October last year, outlining a range of proposals including expanding visa arrangements to overcome labour shortages, changes to taxation arrangements and improved access to finance.

The final document is due to be released on a dairyfarm at Warrnambool, Vic, on Saturday by Prime Minister Tony Abbott and

federal Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce in the Wannan electorate of Liberal MP Dan Tehan.

Mr Joyce is scheduled to speak at the National Press Club in Canberra on Monday, July 6, where he will outline the government's vision for Australian agriculture and highlight the white paper's finer details.

Mr Finlay said some Australian farmers had been "smashed" by ongoing drought and were missing out on high commodity prices and subsequent profits.

"Hopefully, when we see this policy document come Saturday, it'll actually give farmers confidence to know which way the government is going and what the government's thinking and then they can align their individual business plans or operations with that thinking," he said.

In his speech to the Liberal Federal Council meeting at the weekend in Melbourne, Mr Abbott said: "we'll soon release the Agriculture White Paper and –

again – there'll be more money for dams because you can't grow things without water".

Mr Abbott and other senior ministers – including Treasurer Joe Hockey – have also said the Northern Development White Paper, which was launched last month, contained items that would overlap with the Agricultural White Paper, such as the \$100 million for beef roads and \$75m for a Northern Australia Cooperative Research Centre.

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