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EPA report undermines anti-gas scare campaign

The scare campaign against shale and tight gas exploration in Western Australia has been further undermined by the state's independent Environmental Protection Authority.

In its latest [annual report](#) tabled in State Parliament, the EPA has set out its priorities in assessing the environmental impacts associated with hydraulic fracturing of onshore gas reserves.

It also reaffirms the EPA's view that WA's regulatory framework is sufficient to manage any risks associated with current onshore gas exploration activities.

The report says six "low-level, proof of concept" proposals involving hydraulic fracturing have been assessed in WA.

In each case the potential impacts were not sufficient enough to warrant formal environmental impact assessment because:

- The hydraulic fracture stimulation is proposed to occur at significant depths (well below aquifers), ranging from 1,500 m to 3,500 m across the proposals. In each case, there is significant vertical separation with impermeable barriers of rock, shale or other layers that do not transmit water between the fracturing zone and fresh water aquifers.
- The EPA is satisfied with the regulation of well drilling, casing construction, and well rehabilitation and closure by the Department of Mines and Petroleum (DMP). In particular, it is confident that there is a negligible risk of leakage between aquifers, introduction of contaminants to other aquifers, and from abandonment of wells.
- The management, storage and disposal of produced water, which contains contaminants associated with fracking fluid, is appropriate to manage risks, given the quantities involved and the toxicity of the materials.
- Through DMP's regulation, each proposal is subject to the approval of Environment Plans that are required to demonstrate that environmental risks of the activity will continuously be reduced to as low as reasonably practicable.

APPEA's Chief Operating Officer Western Region Stedman Ellis said the report highlighted work being done by government agencies, including the EPA, to ensure that Western Australia had robust regulation for any development plans in coming years.

He said the EPA report was confirmation that current exploration proposals involving hydraulic fracturing in the Kimberley and Mid West regions posed minimal risk to the environment.

Mr Ellis said it was time activists opposed to natural gas accepted the facts.



“Current exploration has the potential to develop a new onshore gas industry for WA, which would provide energy security for our economy along with much-needed jobs and investment in regional communities,” he said.

“These exploration programs are already subject to strict regulation and, as noted by the EPA, any proposals for commercial development will be subject to even greater scrutiny and tougher safeguards.

“I urge those with any concerns as a result of environmental campaigns against the onshore gas industry to look to the EPA’s independent advice for a more rational, objective and fact based discussion of the concerns and regulatory approaches.”

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