

Illusions of Transparency: The Gloucester Dialogue

This week Gloucester's Councillor Aled Hoggett resigned from the Gloucester Dialogue giving this explanation. 'The Dialogue has become a means by which AGL and the State Government provide carefully selected and manicured information to the Council and the community. It has become, in effect, a monologue directed at Council. This creates an illusion of consultation where in fact none exists. The process has also been completely opaque.' said Cr Hoggett

Cr Hoggett is joined by other Councillors, including the Mayor, in criticising the Dialogue.

Groundswell Gloucester declined to be part of the Dialogue when it was formed. The behaviour shown by the industry-dominated group since then amply justifies our cynicism about the Dialogue's motives and effectiveness.

"You have to remember that this group keeps no minutes of meetings, can gag any member from repeating things said during meetings and infrequently produces public documents that are what AGL want said and not a word more" said David Hare-Scott, Groundswell's Vice President.

In claiming that they are responsive to requests from the community AGL is carefully glossing over the most important feature of the Dialogue's operation. The examples given by AGL of questions answered are of matters that they consider harmless to their interest.

Given the huge publicity about it, you would think any consultation worth the name would address the Waukivory fracking project, specifically how it came about. The Dialogue is like AGL and government agencies in that not once has any of them explained how AGL got the goalposts moved by the government so that AGL could frack their wells without holding an EIS. Why is that?

Minister Roberts, his staff from the Office of Coal Seam Gas and AGL PR speakers all tell us at every opportunity how they are for truth and transparency. Yet OCSG keep refusing to release documents to the community when requested through Government Information Public Access or any other way.

Recently strong evidence appeared that OCSG had approved the Waukivory project despite the lack of essential chemical analysis of AGL fracking mixtures. OCSG claim they did have the required analysis before approval but has since refused to show a copy. Why is that?

AGL claim to have a social license for their gas project. They conduct regular surveys of public opinion in an effort to support this claim. In 2012 and 2013 their surveys returned 12% and 13% supportive of CSG exploration in NSW. Their 2014 survey, which asked the same question, has not been published. Why is that?

Mr Hare-Scott said, "You will get reams of material from AGL and the government if it passes AGL's test of commercial interest and not a word otherwise. In this respect the Dialogue is no different".

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