

Media Release

Date 28 October 2014

Office of Coal Seam Gas chemical check blunder with AGL fracking plans

In what seems to have been a major blunder, the Office of Coal Seam Gas (OCSG) gave final approval to frack in Gloucester, despite holding no evidence that AGL had tested all fracking chemicals as required by AGL's licence. Condition 21 of the licence (being PEL285) requires that all fracking fluid additives must be tested at a NATA-accredited laboratory, against Australian drinking water guidelines. This is a crucial condition relating to public health and safety.

It seems that the OCSG failed to check whether AGL had complied with this condition before giving final approval for AGL to frack within a few hundred metres of Gloucester homes. The community is now asking "How do we know which requirements have been met and which have been missed?"

The OCSG was still unable to provide evidence of compliance with chemical testing requirement; seven days after Groundswell Gloucester raised the alarm.

Jenni O'Neill, local resident says:

"It beggars belief that when we asked the OCSG if AGL had complied with this essential condition, they could not provide an immediate answer. Why can't the OCSG say with confidence that all conditions have been met and that the evidence is publicly available?"

The OCSG's initial response, on Thursday, 23 October 2014, was simply that there was no evidence that a breach of policies or codes of practice had occurred. However, the response did not address the issue of the chemical testing condition, nor provide evidence that this condition had been met.

Following a meeting of Groundswell Gloucester and the Minister for Resources on the Thursday afternoon, the Minister's chief of staff stated by phone that test results would be available early on Friday. He confirmed that the OCSG was not in possession of test results at that time.

A further letter from the OCSG on Friday, 24 October 2014 said only that AGL had provided the necessary test results. The letter still did not provide evidence of testing, nor when it was completed.

Today, 28 October 2014 Minister Roberts' office advised that the OCSG only received the results of chemical testing from AGL on 24 October 2014, which was after they were given the final approval for AGL to start fracking.

Groundswell spokesperson John Watts asks:

“These events demonstrate that neither AGL nor OCSG can be trusted to ensure compliance with the conditions imposed on AGL. In relation to the serious matter of the testing of fracking chemicals neither AGL nor OCSG took any steps about compliance until Groundswell Gloucester raised the issue. This validates Groundswell Gloucester's concerns about the way fracking at Waukivory was approved without a proper Environmental Impact Statement and open scrutiny. We have no way of knowing how many other conditions may have been overlooked. It seems that both the OCSG and AGL are again adopting a laissez faire attitude to the health and welfare of the Gloucester Community.”

Groundswell Gloucester has asked the Minister for Resources, Mr Anthony Roberts, to keep his word that he will ensure regulations are adhered to and to suspend all works until a full, open, independent audit of AGL's Waukivory Pilot application process is held. This is essential to determine what other evidence of compliance may be missing.

Further information:

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