

# TRANSCRIPT

## STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING

### Inquiry into unconventional gas in Victoria

Sale — 30 June 2015

#### Members

Mr David Davis — Chair

Ms Samantha Dunn

Ms Harriet Shing — Deputy Chair

Mr Shaun Leane

Ms Melina Bath

Ms Gayle Tierney

Mr Richard Dalla-Riva

Mr Daniel Young

#### Participating Members

Mr Jeff Bourman

Mr James Purcell

Ms Colleen Hartland

Mr Simon Ramsay

#### Staff

Secretary: Mr Keir Delaney

Research officer: Ms Annemarie Burt

#### Witness

Ms Elizabeth Balderstone.

**Necessary corrections to be notified to  
executive officer of committee**

**Ms BALDERSTONE** — Thank you for the opportunity today. I am Elizabeth Balderstone from [REDACTED]. I have had a long involvement with Landcare, the VFF — I am actually on a VFF mining and gas task force with Alex. I have also been on ERMAC, which is currently I think still an official body but we have not met for some time under the new government.

I am very aware that I am speaking as an individual today. I have discussed with Alex Arbuthnot earlier that we have to be so careful with our hats, and I do get concerned — and I think a lot of people share this — that someone of Alex's great reputation, who has done lots of terrific things, has become a bit of a spokesperson for the farming community in Gippsland, but there are a lot of farmers big and small who have an opposing view and have huge concerns about this industry.

In terms of my own family, I am on a farm that has been in the family for over 100 years. I have been there 40 years. My own family background is both primary industry and the mining industry in a big way, but I see so many people even involved with the mining industry who have great concerns about this industry. We live in an area which has a strong agricultural background, but also in our landscape on the coastal plains down near Woodside there are a huge number of lifestylers, hobby farms and thriving seaside towns as well. They are all equally affected by this industry; it is not just the farmers.

Agriculture is here for the long term. It has been here for the long term, and it will continue to be so. I was in Chinchilla recently. I drove through that area, saw the huge impact. I flew over that area, but we were told by the motel owner in Chinchilla that already numbers are dropping after four years. They have passed the expansion and the building phase, and already the numbers are declining. A lot of the people came in from other areas; FIFO obviously is a big factor. It is not just going to be local jobs, and they are short term.

I get upset when we are told we are, and people talk of us as being, affected by vocal groups. That is basically saying that Friends of the Earth are getting in the ear of farmers. That is not true. We are all educated, learning, listening, reading. We are exposed to a lot of information, and to be fair onshore gas had a pretty bad reputation before it came to Gippsland.

There is a lack of trust in the industry. I happened to be on the fire truck that day at Seaspray when Lakes Oil was flaring off at Seaspray. We are a very depleted community of very few people, and to go out to those sort of burns is not appreciated. A number of us, especially some farmers around Yarram, worked for years trying to prove the connectivity between dropping groundwater levels in the Latrobe aquifer around the Yarram area, used by a lot of the dairy farmers there. For years Esso BHP said there was no connectivity with the offshore gas extraction, offshore oil extraction, but finally it was acknowledged. We stood in a room in Sale and CSIRO and Esso admitted that there was connectivity. So how can we as a local, regional community have faith or confidence in some of these things? No wonder we are wary.

Simon mentioned coexistence with mineral sands — such a different industry to an onshore gas industry, which spreads across enormous areas.

**The CHAIR** — Yes, I get that.

**Ms BALDERSTONE** — Sorry, I am just finishing up. As a farmer, like so many farmers and landholders, I believe we are the custodians of the land and in anything we do, we need to hasten slowly. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

**Witness withdrew.**