

Comments on the PEI Water Act

I am writing on behalf of the New Brunswick Anti-Shale Gas Alliance (NBASGA), a coalition of community, environmental and non-profit groups from across our province. Our dual mandate is to oppose the development of unconventional oil and gas and promote the move to a clean energy economy in order to prevent climate change.

We believe our activities of public education, lobbying, activism, and the filing of a lawsuit against the provincial government, all contributed to the current New Brunswick moratorium on shale gas development. The common denominator in all of our efforts was the reliance on peer-reviewed research.

As Nova Scotia and Newfoundland also have moratoria of some kind in place, we are puzzled that PEI's proposed Water Act does not address this issue. We call your attention to two other jurisdictions that have recently chosen to legislate permanent bans on fracking, after multi-year moratoriums during which they studied the issue.

In the USA, the Governor of Maryland (a Republican, once in favour of shale gas) signed a ban, while stating that, "Our administration has concluded that the possible environmental risks of fracking simply outweigh any potential benefits." (1)

The Australian state of Victoria enacted its ban, "To ensure its clean green reputation of its agricultural sector, and to guarantee the health of rural farming communities in Victoria." (2)

The stated reasons for the bans included the obvious threats to water supplies and public health, but also singled out threats to agriculture and tourism. It is hard to imagine anywhere in the world that would have more to fear from groundwater contamination, loss of tourism and threats to agriculture than PEI.

These foundations of PEI's life and economy are the very things that would be lost to damage from an unconventional oil and gas industry. On such a small landmass as PEI, all of the industry's normal activities, accidents and spills will have exaggerated impacts.

Places, where shale oil and gas have been extracted, have now also learned that even successful wells last only a few years, but problems from decommissioning and abandoning wells can affect potential land use for a long time, with expenses lasting well into the future.

During their moratoria, the two states above, as well as the province of New Brunswick, learned that as the amount of peer-reviewed scientific research expanded from almost no studies to many hundreds, the huge preponderance of evidence consistently pointed to a growing number of new threats, and the increasing severity of those already known.

This is particularly true in the areas of most concern. The Final Report of the USA EPA on water contamination found problems at every stage of the industry, with instances of pollution by fracking chemicals, flowback water and wastewater. NBASGA brought in world-renowned groundwater expert, Dr. John Cherry, to speak to our province's Commission on Hydrofracturing. He stated that nowhere in the world have the effects of shale development on groundwater been adequately studied, and that there was no scientific basis for any government's regulations concerning groundwater contamination.

The management of toxic, sometimes radioactive, wastewater also remains a problem with no acceptable solution. The industries primary practice of injecting it into deep wells has, along with fracking itself, caused earthquakes in places as varied as Alberta, BC, Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas and Pennsylvania.

Public health research has unearthed a steady stream of serious ailments and illnesses associated with unconventional oil and gas extraction, particularly illnesses affecting children and the unborn.

In 2011, the American Public Health Association acknowledged potential health problems with fracking, but took a wait-and-see attitude, as research was new and limited. In 2016 they updated their position, citing 700 studies, and sounded an alarm.

"Environmental and health impacts are evident at every stage of unconventional gas development."

"Mounting empirical evidence shows harm to the environment and to human health, and we have no idea what the long-term effects might be."

"Ignoring the body of evidence, to us, is not a viable option anymore."

Likewise, new studies have found that the fugitive methane emissions from unconventional oil and gas have been greatly underestimated,

and are now considered to have negative effects on climate change that equal or are worse than coal.

We submitted a comprehensive commentary with citations of the science to The New Brunswick commission in 2014, which helped secure our moratorium. It can be found on our website. But much science has been done since then, so we refer you to two places where all of the peer-reviewed science to back up our above statements is readily available and easy to access. (3)(4)

We note that the comments and recommendations in your public engagement certainly cited much of the new scientific knowledge.

So, we close by urging you to reference the two sources we provided to see the current state of the science. Once having done so, we believe that you will agree that any government considering a Water Act must address the issue of hydrofracking in order to make any sense, and to provide any comfort to its citizenry that the government is protecting its water and health.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our thoughts.

Spokesperson
New Brunswick Anti-Shale Gas Alliance

References

- 1.) <http://grist.org/briefly/surprise-this-republican-governor-now-wants-his-state-to-ban-fracking/>
- 2.) <http://nofibs.com.au/community-campaign-wins-permanent-fracking-ban-in-victoria-reports-takvera/>
- 3.) PSE Study Citation Database on Shale & Tight Gas Development
<http://psehealthyenergy.org/site/view/1180>
- 4.) The Compendium of Scientific, Medical, and Media Findings Demonstrating Risks and Harms of Fracking
<http://concernedhealthny.org/compendium/>