

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**Question on notice****Tuesday, 6 May 2014**

1103. Hon Robin Chappie to the Minister for Mental Health representing the Minister for Environment.

I refer to the proposal by Australian Worldwide Exploration Limited (AWE Ltd) to carry out an onshore unconventional gas tracking operation called Drover 01 in the Shire of Coorow in the Mid-west, and I ask:

- (a) can the Minister confirm he has approved the proposal;
- (b) is the Minister aware that the proposed fracking operation is close to a proclaimed, Priority 1 public drinking water source area, called the Mount Perron bore field (or well field), operated by the Water Corporation;
- (c) can the Minister confirm how close the proposed Drover 01 frack well is to the Mount Perron public drinking water supply bore field and water storage facility;
- (d) in making its decision not to assess the Drover 01 fracking proposal, was the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) specifically aware that the proposed fracking operation is close to a proclaimed public drinking water source bore field and water storage facility which supplies the community of Green Head with drinking water;
- (e) if yes to (d), how and when did the EPA become aware of this;
- (f) if no to (d), why not;
- (g) if the EPA was aware of the proximity of a proclaimed public drinking water source bore field and water storage facility, why was there no reference to this important information in any publicly available EPA report on this proposal, including its public advice released on 18 November 2013;
- (h) if and when AWE Ltd carries out a full horizontal drilling and fracking campaign based on the Drover 01 well, how far might that extend in any given direction, given overseas experience;
- (i) is the Minister aware of the 2008 Department of Water report on the management of the Mount Perron facility which refers to the Mount Perron well field area as a "leaky semi-confined aquifer";
- (j) is the Minister aware that a meeting was convened on 31 October 2013 between officers from the Department of Water (DoW), Department of Mines and Petroleum (DMP), Office of the EPA and the proponent to discuss the proposal;
- (k) at the meeting in (j), did the Office of the EPA officials ask any questions about the Mount Perron public drinking water source area and facility;
- (l) if no to (k), why not;
- (m) will the Minister conduct a transparent investigation to establish whether the EPA either failed in its statutory responsibility to alert the public about the proximity of the frack well to a proclaimed public drinking water source area, or, alternatively, colluded with the proponent to ensure this information was withheld from the public;
- (n) if no to (m), why not;
- (o) given the proximity of the proposed frack well to a proclaimed public drinking water source area and the non-disclosure and non-assessment of this by the EPA, will the Minister cancel his approval of the proposal and insist the EPA carry out its statutory functions lawfully; and

(p) if no to (o), why not?

Answer

(a)-(p) AWE's proposal for the Drover 01 exploration well was referred to the Environmental Protection Authority for it to decide whether the proposal requires an environmental impact assessment. The Environmental Protection Authority determined not to assess the proposal and provided publicly available advice on this proposal. The reasons for the Environmental Protection Authority's decision are detailed in the Public Advice for the proposal which is available on the Environmental Protection Authority website. In this document the Environmental Protection Authority provided comment on the potential impacts of the proposal on hydrological processes and inland water quality.

I am advised that one appeal was received on the Environmental Protection Authority's decision not to assess the proposal and that the Minister for Environment dismissed the appeal. The Minister's decision, and the reasons for that decision, are available on the website of the Office of the Appeals Convenor.

In accordance with the provisions of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*, the Environmental Protection Authority did not assess the proposal and the Minister for Environment is, therefore, not required to approve it.

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