

Dear Commissioners

I would like to make further comment on the Rocky Hill project now that a recommendation has been made by the Department.

It is my submission that if this recommendation (one I agree with) is adopted by the Commission, then that adoption should be further enhanced rather than just rubber stamped to fully end the ten years of division wrought on the people of Gloucester by corruption.

My wife and I moved to Gloucester three and a half years ago from a long term home base in Melbourne. We had, however, been so called 'grey nomads' for nearly two years when doing so. The choice of moving rural and to Gloucester was made in a surprisingly easy fashion. In that two years of travel we had found ourselves here a few times, and both the warmth of the people and easy self-confidence of the town in general had made strong impressions. As you might expect, there was some trepidation in making such a life changing decisions but within just a few months those initial fears seemed made redundant. Indeed; the general warmth in the community had made it that we had been easily adopted easily into parts of the community that we would never had countenanced for ourselves back in Melbourne.

What we had not known, however, was that Gloucester hid a secret. Indeed; that significant fractures (pun intended) existed in the social bedrock of the town regarding attitudes to the extractive industry technique known as fracking.

The decision to give AGL and its CSG test wells - in what eventually would be seen as a flawed decision by the Department, I add - the right to begin this fracking process in the valley opened up significant internal conflict in the community. Little more than overnight, warm Gloucester amended to conflicted Gloucester. Families, friendships and neighbourliness were split. Attending an information session on the potential health impacts of CSG and fracking, some long term locals confided they were even taking a risk being at the gathering. Their adult children had been told that jobs would be forfeit by any becoming involved in the protests that had by then begun.

The implication was pretty specific for us. We were to choose a side and be in it. So we did.

I personally think it is stupid for this country to be so glib about our water. My birthplace is actually small town NSW where my father was a stock and station agent. In my dozen years before Melbourne I got to see what plentiful water meant for general community optimism in rural environments, and the part its lack played for wide spread pessimism.

I also think that any company should be handed rights that destroy the real estate value of other peoples' homes without need of full compensation is indefensible. You notice when 'for sale' signs sit long without 'sold' on them. That is what happened during that time.

And then, whilst attending protests, we found out that the fracking situation was just the latest division that had taken place in the township. Some years before this trialling of CSG wells in Gloucester there had been an application to construct a coal mine all the way up to the very edge of this town. Indeed; the very same application now morphed as the amended EIS we are discussing now; Rocky Hill. The first thing my history teacher told me then was one name; Ian MacDonald. Being from Melbourne it did not ring any bells but that man is now in prison for ministerial corruption. It was he who granted the exploration license but he was certainly not the only one

involved in subterfuge at the time. The company itself had purchased land by stealth. To quote my most significant teacher at that time.

"Those bastards didn't care a toss that a town of three thousand people already existed within the breathing, hearing and seeing distances of WHERE they wanted to dig their bloody hole."

But that teacher then ended that history lesson on a happy note.

"They were so uncaring they couldn't even be bothered to get the 'how' right. Got thrown out as laughable for how they wanted to do it. Conveyor belts and an industrial skyline; coal dust drifting across the town when the wind was blowing the wrong way, dust just from digging the earth doing the same. Deafening machinery, water degradation in the valley, toxic explosions, night time mining, and industrial strength lighting turning night to dusk. The Department knocked it back on their 'how' almost as much as on 'where'."

I asked if there had been anyone in the town that supported Rocky Hill if it was so significantly bad.

"Apart from the opportunists in the Chamber of Commerce and those that have now formed Advance Gloucester, no one wanted it. I mean, with the gas we're fighting now, those usual suspects plus a few more extra want that, but with the mine no one else wanted it."

That should be noted. Those now supporting this Rocky Hill EIS had been on record as supporting the previous EIS as was, the one not all supported by the Department.

The town did even itself out internally with the CSG issue whilst it continued. Some surface civility did return to the factions after those first few dreadful months, but that never approached anything similar to the phenomenon of Gloucester warmth my wife and I had first encountered. But; then. BTEX was found in tests being done on water taken from around AGL's site.

Even those most strident of Gloucester's proponents of CSG had to mitigate their language with this discovery, although one scientist employed by AGL at the time did suggest that the BTEX was naturally occurring so breathing it in would be less injurious than if it had been manmade. Go figure! Eventually, after its own internal investigations and consultation with both Groundswell Gloucester and Advance Gloucester, Andrew Vesey chose to basically accept Groundswell Gloucester's analysis of the inappropriateness of CSG in the valley. On that day, it was a privilege to sit at the edge of the group and watch their celebrations. Joy and relief mixed as a drink make a powerful cocktail, and especially if you have fought your fight with integrity.

And you know what else had happened by the day after? The air was changed in Gloucester. Warmth had been returned to strolls taken along the high street. And. Painted FOR SALE signs had stickers on them as extra: SOLD. Renewal seem almost at hand. I even met the agent who'd sold us our house and she even offered the anecdote; "things have picked up".

Alas.

That quick flourishing disappeared with the second Rocky Hill EIS. Suspicions grew immediately in the town amongst the ranks of the objectors. Everyone remembered the secrecy and corruption of the past.

Those suspicions seemed well founded when the Department came to town to explain the processes to now take place with the application. It was admitted by the representatives present that the Department had counselled the proponents of the mine on what should be changed of 'how'.

To be fair. The Department was then also thorough in its counselling to people such as myself on how to make our objections known.

But; battlelines were drawn again and more so when Gloucester's eternal opportunists began loudly proclaiming that all of the problems that they alone had failed to see in the Rocky Hill 1 proposal, were now 'fixed' in Rocky Hill 2.

Certainly the town has dealt with division better this time. There was both greater initial civility and a profound sense not of patience, but of vigilance. Warmth has not been quite as hard to come by on the High Street as it was with CSG. But it has not been general in nature.

Ok; vigilance has now been rewarded for most. The Department has recommended that 'where' is to be the only relevant consideration, and John Turner is a hero to many who feared him a villain.

And. Warmth is tentatively back in Gloucester and many of us are now hopefully awaiting that the Commission's final ruling will be in our favour. Who knows! If the Commission follows the path recommended by the Department maybe that real estate agent will get to say "things have picked up" again soon too.

But only if the Commission follow the Department's thoughts.

Which leads to my request for an 'extra' recommendation if that is the case. Please find a legal mechanism to enshrine Gloucester's power of 'where' forever. Nobody trusts that these Rocky Hill people won't come back in another few years with a whole new set of 'how' and start this misery all over again. It should be enshrined in all planning issues. Two 'where' strikes, and you are out.

One final addendum of my own. No government refund of the license fee should be countenanced in this particular case. The amount paid at the time for it was egregiously low. It is shameful to think that all of this anxiety and division in Gloucester was brought about from an initial outlay of just \$60,000 (so much less than one very plain house) by a company hoping to make a final net profit of many billions. Not sure how that could have come about.

Thank you for your consideration.

Peter Moon

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