

Fracking impact warning

Campaigners call to 'lock the gate' on unconventional drilling

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RAQUEL MUSTILLO
journalist@setimes.com.au

COONAWARRA vignerons Dennis Vice was among campaigners against unconventional gas drilling in the region who spoke at a Millicent meeting on Friday night to build awareness of community concerns about the mining industry's potential impact.

He called for a moratorium on the controversial fracking mining method as he expressed concern about the use of South East water during the impending extraction process.

"Around 11 million litres of water is used for a single gas frack and wells are often fracked multiple times, multiplying the water use," he said.

"If the State Government has the ability to allocate any amount of water they see fit to the mining industries and they override our water plan to allow them full access, something is very wrong in this country."

If gas is found at the Jolly-1 site at Penola, envisaged benefits for the South East include increased employment, improved infrastructure and stimulated economic growth.

The meeting came as exploration drilling continues outside Penola and has been planned at Kingston.

A crowd of about 60 watched a documentary in the Millicent Civic and Arts Centre on the negative impact gas exploration has had on Australian communities before speakers answered questions.

Members of the Limestone Coast Strike Out Alliance and Mount Gambier general practitioner Dr Catherine Pye addressed issues relating to mining.

"Fracking is a new method of extraction and the companies are using such new technologies that we're not aware of the environmental and health risks associated with it," Dr Pye said.

Hydraulic fracturing - commonly referred to as fracking - is a gas extraction technique involving high-pressure injection of sand, water and chemicals into the gas-bearing rocks and rock formations.

The process creates larger channels within the rock, allowing the



SHALE STRIKE OUT: Limestone Coast Strike Out Alliance members Sue Westgarth, Dennis Vice, Charmaine Taylor-Symes, Dr Catherine Pye, Huck Shepherd, Heather Heggie and Pip Rosenberg led the Millicent demonstration against hydraulic fracturing in the South East.

gas to flow to the surface of the well. "The current non-compulsory chemical disclosure is very concerning for doctors, particularly regarding the chemicals that are used during the process," Dr Pye said.

"The chemicals are often standardised and generic and the companies themselves don't often know what they're using to fracture the rocks."

Dr Pye detailed known health risks from the process, including possible impacts on drinking water from the contaminated aquifers and polluted air.

"The impacts physicians have seen so far are neurological, res-

piratory and ear, nose and throat problems," she said.

"Health should always be the first thing that's considered when doing something like this and that's why it's important to have an independent inquiry and moratorium so the long-term effects are properly observed."

Lock the Gate Alliance member Fiona Dearman is apprehensive about the benefits to the region and said expenditure will not remain in the region, with 84pc of profits heading offshore.

"This is one of the most important agriculturally productive regions in Australia and if we industrialise it, we'll lose it," she said.

"The mining industry isn't worried about keeping jobs local and rentals will sky rocket because of the increase of fly in and fly out positions."

Ms Dearman said the proposed gas extraction could be a blessing in disguise for the South East as it provided an opportunity for residents to reconnect as a community.

"We've got to get on the streets with pickets to show that we're concerned about the effect this has on the environment and the Limestone Coast," she said.

"A lot of us live separate and it's a chance for us to use our power as individuals to make a difference as a whole."

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