

**TITLE: Fighting back on gas claims**

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In his recent article, Fighting false claims in the gas debate, Peter Reith got an impressive amount of things wrong. In fact, it would seem that the only thing he got right was when he referred to "false claims". Unfortunately for him, he seems to be at the centre of some of those claims.

The government has released the report of the Victorian Gas Taskforce, which Reith chaired. With Reith getting so much wrong in his article, it is not surprising that the report recommended that the moratorium on fracking be removed. But let's have a close look at the claims he has made to see why CSG is not going to benefit the people of Victoria.

Reith claims that greater use of coal seam gas (CSG) could significantly reduce carbon emissions. This is a claim that the industry regularly makes. It is also a claim that it simply can't substantiate. It involves the half-truth that, when consumed, gas produces less carbon emissions than burning coal. What it ignores is the other emissions that are involved with the extraction of CSG, including methane leaking because of CSG extractions, known as "fugitive emissions".

Methane is an incredibly potent greenhouse gas, up to 86 times more potent than carbon dioxide. There has been very little study done on the actual rates of fugitive emissions in Australia but it is likely to be significantly higher than what the industry has been claiming. Studies in the US have shown that fugitive emissions from unconventional gas are significant, with some studies showing that it is high enough to mean that its emissions are similar to that of coal.

Another claim that Reith made was that the response to rising prices or an imagined shortage was to boost gas supply. This myth has been debunked many times before. The idea that more CSG will stop gas prices from rising completely misunderstands what is causing gas prices to go up.

Gas prices are going to rise because the gas industry is building export facilities. The gas industry is building export facilities because the gas price it can get overseas is far higher than what it's currently getting in Australia. The rise in price is not an unfortunate by-product but it is an industry objective.

The gas industry is within its rights to try and sell to consumers that are going to pay it the highest price but for the gas industry to effectively claim that Australians should ignore the health and environmental concerns they have about CSG because that will stop the price rise is simply nonsense.

With the gas price about to skyrocket, it might be far more profitable to produce gas, but that is not going to convince people to put aside their concerns. The industry knows this and that is why it has invented this gas crisis and is desperate to sell its non-solution.

Finally Reith raised the prospect that the opposition to CSG is coming from "greenies".

*Whereas most Victorians are concerned about the rising cost of living, the greenies are campaigning to shut down the use of all fossil fuels.*

A significant part of the protest against the expansion of the CSG industry is coming from the farming community. Groups such as Lock The Gate are made up of landholders who will be most affected by CSG. They are people who make their living from the land and are worried about the environmental and health impacts that CSG poses.

You only need to look at the political reaction to CSG to know that concerns are widespread and not just centred on a fringe group. With the release of the report, the Victorian Coalition government is clearly in no rush to lift the moratorium. It has announced 18 months of consultation. Even before the report, the government showed a reluctance to lift the ban on CSG. The NSW Coalition government has introduced new restrictions on CSG including a two kilometre exclusion zone around residential areas and, more recently, the banning of CSG in the Sydney water catchment area.

These Coalition governments would not be introducing restrictions on CSG if the only group that was against it were "greenies". The political reality is that it is National party voters who are very concerned about CSG and this is why there are new restrictions on CSG.

The fact that one article from the chairman of the Victorian government's Gas Taskforce had so many things wrong helps explain the Taskforce's recommendations. But the response of the government is to wait and consult which shows it has not swallowed the gas industry's propaganda that invents and exaggerates CSG benefits and does nothing to address people's concerns.

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