Gloucester Coal Seam Gas Update

17 January 2015

In This Issue

Coal seam gas well at Gloucester being fracked (Photo: Ryan Osland)

(continued from 'Blame the cows')

Either the results are right, pointing to contamination of our water, or they're wrong, pointing to sloppy procedures. Both would be a clear sign that AGL is far from being technically competent when it comes to coal seam gas extraction. AGL got results on the first fracked well about 10 days after fracking, yet AGL says they didn't get the more worrying results of the water sample from 20 November until 19 December…. very conveniently after they'd finished fracking the last two gas wells in Gloucester.

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Source documents are available on our website.

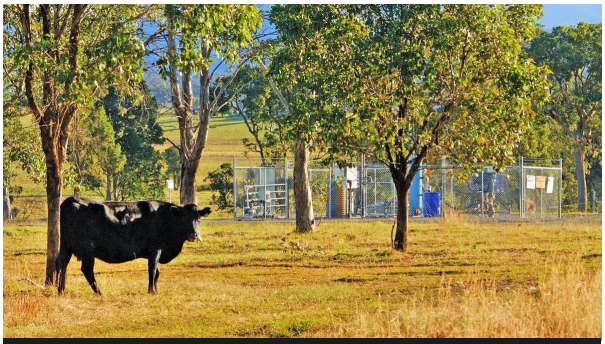
Fracking waste water dumped in the Hunter Water Area by AGL's contractor

AGL and their preferred wastewater carrier are both under investigation over the disposal of AGL's contaminated fracking fluid from their Gloucester gas wells. The debacle has also revealed AGL's duplicitous actions in ignoring directives from Hunter Water.

Hunter Water specifically directed AGL on two occasions not to transport flowback fluid or coal seam water into the Hunter Water Area. Hunter Water also told AGL not to use any subcontractors in the Hunter Water Area. Hunter Water even told AGL to remind all the tanker companies employed by AGL about Hunter Water's position on wastewater from coal seam gas. AGL ignored the directives and employed Newcastle's Transpacific to remove the fracking wastewater.

Amid great secrecy, Transpacific removed the fracking waste & reportedly dumped it into the Newcastle sewer system as treated industrial waste. This is now being investigated by the EPA. Transpacific had previously paid extra charges of $30,000 for operational issues. Meanwhile AGL has since dumped Transpacific, a company they had previously promoted as "professional and reputable contractors".

AGL's new wastewater carriers are Worth Recycling at South Windsor, so now the fracking waste is headed to the Hawkesbury River area, to the anger of that community's members. AGL has still not provided written responses to Groundswell's questions around exactly how the fracking waste is being dealt with. The Office of Coal Seam Gas and the EPA's approval of fracking, when AGL did not have a valid way of disposing of the waste, raises serious questions about gaps in the so-called world class regulation of coal seam gas in New South Wales.



WHAT AGL SHOWS YOU: Coal seam gas well? Isn't that just a tennis court for the cows?

THE TRUTH YOU SHOULD SEE: The actual footprint of AGL's four pilot wells for coal seam gas near Gloucester. Now imagine 330 of these in the scenic Gloucester valley.

Fracking chemical found in groundwater: Blame the cows. Blame the farmers. Blame the lab.

What AGL tells you:

"Monoethanolamine is a naturally-occurring chemical which can be found, among other places, in the urine of mammals including humans. It is also used as a bonding agent in the production of detergents, emulsifiers, polishes, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics & corrosion inhibitors." (YourSayAGL.com.au)

"Monoethanolamine is associated with agricultural land and bush areas. The sites where it was detected were quite remote from the actual fracture stimulation. And we think it is probably just a bit of a sampling error or laboratory quirk" (John Ross, AGL's Chief Hydrogeologist, to ABC 16 Jan 2015)

The truth you should know:

Monoethanolamine is a chemical used in fracking and it's considered an "indicator chemical" which means the presence of other fracking chemicals is likely. The detection of this chemical at the water monitoring sites at Gloucester is a sign that the fracking chemicals may have escaped into the groundwater and surface water, possibly via faults linking the coal seams and water systems, new fissures caused by fracking or unexpected behaviour of faults.

AGL says that the chemical was there all the time. But AGL's own reports show the chemical spiked from less than 4 parts per billion before fracking, to 60 parts per billion the day after completion of fracking the 2nd well. This largest spike happened very close to fracking: in a groundwater monitoring bore midway between the two wells, which are just 800 metres apart. You can't explain this away with a lot of cow's pee! The same report, which lists spikes at another 7 monitoring sites, including in the Avon River, says the testing procedures are strong. AGL's chief hydrogeologist seems to disagree and blames the spike on faulty procedures. (continued over page…)

Zero levels are a licence condition. EPA investigation too late?

Don't forget the Tolcide

Tolcide is probably the most toxic fracking chemical used by AGL and may be present in water samples including river water. Tolcide is listed as hazardous and is harmful to aquatic life so its potential presence in groundwater is serious.

However AGL didn't even have an approved testing method to monitor for Tolcide until 19 December, after all four wells were fracked. Oddly, the EPA are OK with that. Apparently, if you don't get test results quickly, you can just ignore potential problems until there is an approved method, and get away with it.

AGL's licence requires a zero detection of Tolcide & also Monoethanolamine. AGL's report admits this zero limit was exceeded on 20 November, yet the only action taken was to continue with the fracking and not tell the EPA until 15 January. So what's the point of monitoring if you can't take prompt action?