

FRACKING IN THE KAROO 18 SEPTEMBER 2012

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Shale gas extraction brings significant risk of ground and surface water contamination.

South Africa has a problem of subterranean water already and it is common knowledge that shale gas extraction requires very significant amounts of water. It is reported that to carry out fracturing operations on a six well pad takes between 54 – 174 million litres of water and the impacts of climate change may exacerbate the problem.

The noise caused by the traffic as the construction of each well head will require between 4300 – 6500 trucks. This will have an impact on roads and traffic in the locality of the shale gas well heads.

Damage to roads not suited to levels of truck traffic associated with gas drilling has been an issue in the United States.

The argument that shale gas should be exploited as a transitional fuel in the move to a low carbon economy seems tenuous at best. It is difficult to envisage any situation other than shale gas being used in addition to other fossil fuel reserves and adding a further carbon burden.

During fracking millions of litres of water, sand and numerous chemicals most of which are toxic are pumped into boreholes at high pressure to release natural gas tapped in layers of underground rock.

In the USA where fracking has been used extensively there are hundreds of documented cases of this process resulting in:

- *Catastrophic pollution of drinking water
- *Air pollution
- *Health concerns for humans and animals
- *General environmental degradation

The envisaged area for fracking is already extremely water-stressed and cannot afford any water to be either wasted or contaminated by the fracking process which, once in full production, may involve tens of thousands of boreholes and billions of litres of water.

To what extent will the exercise affect the SKA which we host jointly with Australia?

Perhaps government can take advice from Esme Senekal who warns against fracking in the Karoo as follows:

“This is the last piece of holy nature in this country. No money is worth this. You can’t replace pristine nature with money”.

The UCDP is opposed to fracking in the Karoo.