

B. C. TAP WATER ALLIANCE

Email – info@bctwa.org

Website – www.bctwa.org

Stop Fracking British Columbia – www.bctwa.org/FrackingBC.html



April 14, 2011

For Immediate Release

PUBLIC INQUIRY NEEDED TO ADDRESS HUMAN HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS POSED BY SHALE GAS DRILLING, COALITION SAYS

VANCOUVER - The B.C. Government should follow the lead of other Canadian provinces, individual U.S. states and the U.S. Federal Environmental Protection Agency in launching a full, public inquiry into the threats posed by an expanding shale gas industry, a number of British Columbia's prominent environmental organizations say.

“Given the growing concerns associated with contaminated waterways and dangerous migrations of deadly gas associated with shale gas developments, the time has come for the province of British Columbia to conduct a full public inquiry into the environmental and social impacts of the shale gas industry,” says Will Koop of the B.C. Tap Water Alliance.

The Alliance has made a formal request for an inquiry in a letter sent on April 13th to Energy and Mines Minister Rich Coleman, Environment Minister Terry Lake, and Forest, Lands and Natural Resource Operations Minister Steve Thomson. It is supported in its call by the Western Canada Wilderness Committee, the Council of Canadians, Sierra Club of BC, Georgia Strait Alliance, and Dogwood Initiative, with many more organizations expected to endorse the petition.

The call follows an earlier request by citizens living in the midst of shale gas industry activities in northeast B.C. for a formal public inquiry under the provincial Health Act to address the public health and safety risks associated with “sour” gas - natural gas containing hydrogen sulphide, a potentially deadly toxin. Some sour gas leaks in northeast B.C. have been associated with the controversial gas stimulation technique, hydraulic fracturing or fracking, which is commonly used by the shale gas industry.

Last year, the province of Quebec held a public inquiry into proposed shale gas developments. It released an initial report in February 2011, and currently has a quasi-moratorium in place banning shale gas developments pending further study. The province of Nova Scotia has signalled its intention to hold a similar inquiry process.

In the United States where hydraulic fracturing operations have resulted in contamination of well waters and aquifers, many State agencies are holding similar reviews and a thorough public review by the federal Environmental Protection Agency is underway.

The B.C. Government has so far resisted doing anything similar.

“We are concerned with the province's indifference to this issue. Despite calls from its own Ministry of Environment staff to conduct cumulative environmental assessments of gas industry activities in northeast BC since 1991, the government has failed to do so,” Koop says. “Given the impacts on our environment, human health and significant increases to greenhouse gas emissions over an area that represents about 15 percent of BC's land mass, we believe the government should immediately implement a rational public review and planning approach to energy developments in B.C.”

“I am very concerned about the impact of fracking on human health, from the use and disposal of chemical toxics from drilling fluids to fracking processes with water, and the release of deadly gases,” said Ben West, Healthy Communities Campaigner for the Wilderness Committee. “To make things worse, increasingly it seems that some of these projects are meant to provide natural gas to the tar sands to facilitate increased extraction of dirty oil. These fracking projects should be stopped until we take a long hard look at them.”

For more information contact:

Will Koop, Coordinator, B.C. Tap Water Alliance: (email) info@bctwa.org
Ben West, Western Canada Wilderness Committee: 604-683-8220

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April 13, 2011

Honourable Rich Coleman,
B.C. Minister of Energy and Mines

Honourable Terry Lake,
B.C. Minister of Environment

Honourable Steve Thomson,
B.C. Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations

REQUEST FOR A PUBLIC INQUIRY OF DEEP SHALE GAS DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTHEAST BRITISH COLUMBIA

Over the last 14 months, the B.C. Tap Water Alliance (BCTWA) investigated and reported on issues related to the controversial development of deep shale natural gas activities in northeast BC.

Such developments, and attendant public controversies, are occurring in other provincial jurisdictions, and in many parts of the United States.

Due to public concerns about new technologies related to the life cycle of hydraulic fracturing (fracking) and their cumulative environmental and social impacts, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has held numerous public hearings as part of an ongoing investigation. Numerous U.S. State agencies have, or are in the midst of, conducting their own environmental and social assessments.

Here, in Canada, the province of Quebec recently undertook a public hearing process and has issued an initial report. The province of Nova Scotia is also about to undertake a public review process.

In early February, 2011, the BCTWA appeared before the federal Standing Committee on Natural Resources (the presentation is available on our website). In particular, we questioned earlier statements

made to the Committee by the BC Oil and Gas Commission in which the OGC stated that shale gas activities were being conducted in a “responsible” manner and with negligible environmental and social impacts.

As of this date, the B.C. government has yet to reveal how, if at all, it will address the significant social and environmental cumulative effects associated with increasing shale gas industry activities.

Mr. Ben Parfitt, who has been actively engaged in the deep shale gas developments in B.C., has provided numerous critical comments to the public about shale gas developments and deficiencies in how water is allocated to the industry and subsequently tracked.

A report he wrote, published in October 2010 by the Program on Water Issues at the University of Toronto’s Munk School of Global Affairs and titled *Fracture Lines: Will Canada’s Water be Protected in the Rush to Develop Shale Gas?*, concluded with 13 recommendations on how to better protect water resources from shale gas industry activities.

Four of the recommendations called for:

Any proposed water withdrawals exceeding a threshold established by environmental regulators should be subject to environmental impact assessments. Given the extraordinary size and scale of shale gas plays in Quebec and British Columbia, government should immediately establish commissions to examine the potential and cumulative impacts on water resources, energy use, government revenues and carbon emissions.

No-go zones should be established where hydraulic fracturing operations are banned outright or subject to more stringent reviews and approvals.

Natural gas companies should be required to: 1) file electronically all water withdrawals from surface and groundwater sources, 2) where such water is subsequently used, and 3) how much toxic flow-back water is generated at each gas well site. All such reporting should be publicly accessible.

Full public disclosure of all chemicals used in fracturing fluids should be required before any approvals to hydraulically fracture gas wells are authorized. Before authorization, fracking companies should also be compelled to demonstrate that they have selected the least environmentally harmful fracture fluids available.

Given the growing concerns associated with deep shale gas developments in B.C., the B.C. Tap Water Alliance is calling upon the province of British Columbia to immediately appoint an independent commission to conduct a full public inquiry and hearing process into the environmental and social impacts of shale gas developments, and to lay out clear recommendations to reduce the cumulative impacts on the environment, human health, and water resources.

Sincerely, Will Koop, Coordinator.

Initial Petition Signatories:

Western Canada Wilderness Committee
Council of Canadians
Sierra Club, B.C.
Georgia Strait Alliance
Dogwood Initiative