

Improving the health of local communities

Inquiry findings

The Inquiry found the development of the onshore shale gas industry has the potential to impact human health, including the risk of harm to physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Risks to the physical health of people in local communities include the potential for health impacts caused by air pollutants and the chemical contamination of aquifers where communities source drinking water.

Risks to the mental health and wellbeing of people in local communities include changes to and concerns about the natural environment and liveability of the local area, new pressures on peoples' livelihoods, and pressures on lifestyles in the regions affected by onshore shale gas industry development.

NT Government mitigations

The NT Government accepted and implemented the Inquiry's recommendations, including recommendations designed to mitigate the risks to human health.

- Since 2019, the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water Security has required all onshore shale gas proponents to complete chemical risk assessments for hydraulic fracturing fluids. The NT Government amended legislation to require human health risk assessments on flowback fluid, produced water and hydraulic fracturing fluids in accordance with best practice national guidelines.
- The NT Government requires onshore gas companies to only use drilling fluids which are not harmful to human health when drilling through aquifers. To ensure transparency and accountability, onshore gas companies must publicly disclose chemicals used in their hydraulic fracturing activities.
- The Code of Practice sets legally enforceable standards for onshore gas companies to prevent impacts to human health. This includes minimum distances between community and onshore gas infrastructure, considering traffic impacts on other road users, standards for chemical and wastewater transport, handling, storage, use and disposal, and ongoing methane leak detection.
- The NT Government introduced requirements for onshore gas companies to submit a Well Operations Management Plan (WOMP) for every well, before commencing any well-related operations. The WOMP must cover the lifecycle of the well to make sure well integrity is maintained at every stage of the onshore gas project, including after the well is decommissioned.
- The Strategic Regional Environmental Baseline Assessment (SREBA) study on environmental health:
 - o established baseline information for the current health status of the population in the Beetaloo region and identified relevant indicators to monitor change over time
 - o established air quality baselines at selected sites in the region to develop a methodology for a future monitoring program
 - o reviewed and identified information gaps in studies and work already completed to establish a risk assessment framework
 - o conducted a review and gap analysis of the SREBA water quality studies and other data, with a human health lens.
- The SREBA social, cultural and economic study produced baseline information about emerging values and the social, cultural and economic conditions in the Beetaloo region. This information can inform future planning and development by protecting areas which are sensitive to development and considering the potential impacts of multiple projects in the region.
- Onshore gas proponents must identify and assess the impacts their project may cause to social values. If a significant impact is likely, the proponent may be required to develop a Social Impact Management Plan to mitigate the impacts. Proponents must conduct ongoing engagement with stakeholders who may experience social impacts as a result of the proposed project activities.
- The NT Government developed initiatives to support the wellbeing of Aboriginal communities by supporting engagement in decision-making about onshore gas projects:
 - o The Community Engagement and Information Program (CEIP) will provide independent, accurate, trusted and accessible information about the onshore gas industry and hydraulic fracturing to Aboriginal communities over

Chapter Summary Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing Final Implementation Report

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coming years. Through community engagement and collaboration with the Land Councils and the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (AAPA), the CEIP will identify information gaps and develop resources to communicate the information requested by Aboriginal communities.

- o The NT Government worked with the Aboriginal Interpreters Service to develop the *Principles of Engagement when using Aboriginal Interpreters*, which provide guidance for anyone who uses Aboriginal interpreters in communication with Aboriginal people. The Principles support the onshore gas industry and Aboriginal communities in the process of sharing information, raising concerns and negotiating proposed onshore gas projects.

Ongoing monitoring into the future

Through community engagement, the CEIP will monitor concerns in Aboriginal communities' about onshore gas industry development, and provide information to address these concerns.

The Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security (DEPWS) will monitor community feedback on onshore gas projects and development through public submissions on Environment Management Plans (EMPs) and proposals assessed by the NT Environment Protection Authority (NT EPA).

The Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade (DITT) will monitor and maintain the integrity of orphan wells to prevent contamination of water resources and air pollution from well leaks.

Information from the SREBA studies will be used to consider and develop an ongoing regional monitoring plan. The baseline information established will also assist in the design and planning of future development at a regional scale to minimise the risks identified by the Inquiry.

Where can I find more information?

Find out more about these reforms in Chapter 6 of the Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing Final Implementation Report.

The SREBA baseline reports, technical reports and data catalogue, are available at depws.nt.gov.au/sreba

Human health risk assessments, social impact assessments, chemical risks assessments, EMPs and NT Government decisions on EMPs are available at depws.nt.gov.au

Industry compliance reports, including flowback fluid monitoring results, are available at depws.nt.gov.au

The *Principles of Engagement when using Aboriginal Interpreters* are available at hydraulicfracturing.nt.gov.au

To report regulatory breaches by the onshore gas industry, anyone can make a toll free, anonymous call to the Onshore Gas Non-Compliance Hotline. The hotline is available 24 hours a day on **1800 413 889**.