

Fracking threat to Berg

Fracking of the Karoo poses a clear and present threat to the Drakensberg, which is a World Heritage Site.

Jonathan Deal, chairman of the Treasure Karoo Action Group (TKAG) spelt out the dangers at a series of briefings held over the weekend in the city.

“The threat to the Drakensberg is simply this – if we lose the fight in the Karoo, fracking will arrive in KZN without brakes on”.

“The spectre of fracking is a national concern, and not just for the sheep farmers in the Karoo. The knock-on effects of transport, health, law enforcement and environmental degradation will impact on all South Africans,” he said.

Deal explains that shale occurs underground across South Africa, and if the technology of fracking is licenced, it will come to KZN and spread across South Africa as it did in the United States.

“Even if it doesn't start in KZN, the taxpayers of this country will pay for the extra costs of damage to our roads, health effects, loss of agriculture, meat and tourism jobs. In one sentence - fracking is the concern of every South African,” he said.

Fracking, or hydraulic fracturing, is a highly controversial technology that extracts natural gas from the Earth's crust. It involves drilling holes up to 6 km deep, followed by a series of horizontal shafts that are then blasted under

high pressure with a mixture of thousands of litres of water and a cocktail of lethal chemicals.

The objective is to fracture the subterranean shale beds and free the trapped natural gas that is then collected and piped off.

Deal said that the benefits of fracking must be proven to outweigh all of the costs, and until such time, “we cannot support the issue of even one licence for exploration”.

In his talks, Deal spoke of how the introduction of fracking will affect the sensitive Drakensberg environment and its diverse ecosystems, but also touched on the implications fracking has for the country as a whole.

Deal said that, at a time when South Africa is hosting an international conference on climate change, and when science tells us that the world has reached a point where we can't afford to burn even half our known fossil fuel reserves without tipping the scale of global warming past the point of recovery, “it is remarkable that governments are even considering the plans of the fossil fuel industry to explore for more, extract more, sell more and encourage the world to burn more.”

TKAG's view is that when you consider fracking against that backdrop, shale gas – frequently touted by industry executives as a positive ‘game changer’ – it is, in fact, the opposite.

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Expert warns of knock-on fracking effects

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“Being firstly an energy source that perpetuates our consumption of fossil fuels, and secondly a technology that has been proven to impact negatively on the natural environment on which we depend to sustain life on earth,” he said.

Deal said that Royal Dutch Shell – who consider themselves industry leaders – base their arguments on four pillars, jobs; revenue; energy and carbon emission reduction.

“In advancing these arguments, Shell remains true to industry practice of overstating positive

benefits and trivializing risk and consequence. In other words, governments and their citizens are told what the oil and gas industry want them to hear,” he said.

Deal said that he understood that government has certain responsibilities such as job creation and electricity supply, and it is even more understandable that government would reach out eagerly for a technology that appears, with relative ease, to be able to address some of these challenges.

“But, is our government at risk of being misled? For every

industry claim about the benefits of shale gas as a resource, there are an equivalent number of scientific opinions and peer-reviewed papers, which hold an opposing view,” Deal said.

“There can be no debate that the sharing and explanation of truthful information to educate South Africans about shale gas mining is the responsibility of our government, and that this critical process may not be left to the paid consultants of oil and gas companies,” Deal said.

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