



Northern Land Council accused of poor consultation in providing consent for gas exploration in Roper regions

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A major stoush is brewing over the rights to explore for gas on **Indigenous** land in the Northern Territory's Roper region, with the potential for legal action against the Northern Land Council (NLC).

In 2015 the NT Department of Mines and Energy granted Jacaranda Minerals and Minerals Australia, subsidiaries of Gina Rinehart's Hancock Prospecting, the right to explore for gas on the Mangarrayi and Alawa Land Trusts after the Northern Land Council gave consent on behalf Traditional Owners.

Mangarrayi and Alawa Traditional Owners, pastoralists, tourism operators and anti-fracking activists yesterday protested a Northern Land Council meeting in Mataranka, which was scheduled to discuss the gas exploration.

The group presented NLC CEO Joe Morrison with a letter from a lawyer representing over 300 people who disputed the way in which consent for the gas exploration was given.

Mangarrayi woman Shirley Thomas was involved with the initial process giving consent to exploration and said the NLC did not do a thorough job of assessing consent.

"I don't think [the NLC] contacted all the families to inform them of what was going on, they do select a few but they forget to mention they are not really looking after the whole of the Mangarrayi tribe," she said.

"We are supposed to make sure no exploration goes ahead without everyone fully knowing what is happening, this is the failure of the NLC, they do not come back and explain to the whole of the tribe.

"We are very disappointed about what is happening and we do not want mining on our land at all."

There is currently no application for drilling using hydraulic fracturing, commonly known as fracking, within the exploration areas.

The exploration permit does not automatically approve for Jacaranda Minerals and Minerals Australia to conduct fracking; further approvals need to be given if they wish to extract gas via fracking.

Phillip Watson said he represented the Alawa people and claimed the NLC did not properly explain the fracking process.

"They said a lot of things, they wanted [gas exploration] so we could get royalties but royalties are nothing, we want that land as it is," Mr Watson said.

"The NLC did not explain things properly from the start."

People were 'well-informed', NLC says

The NLC disputes claims the consultation process for consent to allow oil and gas exploration was not conducted properly.

Mr Morrison said there were extensive consultations from 2010 to 2012, with a final consultation meeting in 2013.

"That provided consent and it also provided the NLC with instructions to not consent to over half the Mangarrayi Aboriginal Land Trust and portions of the Alawa and Kewulyi Land Trusts," Mr Morrison said.

"There were extensive consultations, site surveys and obviously lots of areas excluded out of what was granted in the end by traditional owners in those land trusts."

Mr Morrison said he had reviewed the consultation material and was content proper information about the potential risks of gas exploration were provided to traditional owners.

He said the fact exploration exclusion zones were places around waterways by traditional owners "tells me that people were very well-informed and had made a decision under the traditional decision making process as they have instructed the Northern Land Council to".

Mr Morrison blamed the outside involvement of anti-fracking activists for disrupting the Northern Land Council's information session on the gas exploration.

"I am an advocate of Aboriginal traditional owners making decisions by themselves without anyone interfering or polluting their decision making process," he said.

Concern among tourism operators

The Mangarrayi Land Trust is currently leased in several portions by different pastoralists.

Jade Roberts runs Warloch Station on the land trust and said she was in the dark about the gas exploration on the land.

"We really haven't been told anything about how [gas exploration] is supposed to affect our lease," she said.

"The drilling that is supposed to be going on is not very far from us, which will affect us water-wise.

"We don't really know what is in store for us and our lease."

Ms Roberts said she had had no contact with the NLC about exploration on the Mangarrayi Land Trust.

Tourism operators in Mataranka are also concerned about the potential impacts of fracking in the region.

Deborah Moore owns the Mataranka Tourist Resort and believed groundwater in the region could become contaminated by fracking.

"We have spoken to many tourists here and the reason they come up here is because of the pristine country and the clear waterways," she said.

"We would lose all our tourism [if fracking went ahead].

"We have invested millions of dollars in the Territory, if we even thought [fracking] would go ahead we would not have even considered doing that."