

Hydraulic fracturing report

The Taranaki Regional Council welcomes the release of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment's interim report on hydraulic fracturing. The Council will study this report carefully and make a detailed response in due course, with a view to informing her second report. In the meantime, the Council makes the following initial observations:

- The Commissioner concludes that the environmental risks associated with hydraulic fracturing can be managed effectively provided, to quote the UK Royal Society, *“operational best practices are implemented and enforced through regulation”*. This has been, and continues to be, the Taranaki Regional Council's position. This Council also notes the Commissioner's view that a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing is not presently justified.
- The Council's monitoring of oil and gas activities is extensive. In the past 30 years, there have been thousands of site visits and inspections, analyses of thousands of air and water samples, and hundreds of bio-monitoring surveys associated with oil and gas activities. The Council has detected no significant adverse environmental effects attributable specifically to hydraulic fracturing.
- The Council notes the Commissioner's statement (p44) that *“to date, there is no evidence that fracking has caused groundwater contamination in New Zealand, and at the current scale of operations, the risk appears low”*.
- The Council also notes the Commissioner's statement (p47) that although the most common method of disposing of liquid waste, deep well injection, could result in the wastewater migrating into aquifers, *“there does not appear to be any evidence that this has occurred in New Zealand”*.
- The commissioner also refers to the landfarming of waste solids, saying these may contain heavy metals and hydraulic fracturing fluids. In Taranaki, landfarming is a consented and monitored activity, with operators required to meet specified loadings and concentrations to comply with recognised environmental standards and guidelines. For example, levels of any heavy metals must and do meet New Zealand agricultural guidelines at time of application.
- This Council, of its own initiative and more than a year ago, sought a detailed legal review of its regulatory approach to hydraulic fracturing. Since July 2011, it has required resource consents for the discharge of water-based fluids deep into the earth's surface. The Council has also commissioned a number of investigations into associated issues, including the possibility of freshwater contamination and