

Metgasco and Bentley: The untold story

A Letter to the Editor

4 April 2014

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To date, Metgasco has a 100% rate of serious failure for tight sands gas wells. The Rosella well at Bentley is Metgasco's second attempt to successfully drill a well more than 2,000 m down into a tight sands formation. Kingfisher, Metgasco's other tight sands well leaked from the start, failed dramatically during decommissioning when 200m of bore pipe was blown high into the air, and is subject to ongoing investigation by the NSW Trade and Investment Mine Safety Investigation Unit.

Peter Henderson says that 'It is premature to speculate, the investigation process needs to be allowed to be concluded without hindrance', but the Investigation Unit has already found that throughout its life the Kingfisher well's 'loss of integrity' allowed gas under pressure to migrate between the inside and outside of the well casing. The Kingfisher well is now capped, but this failed well will forevermore allow gases and fluids from different geological strata to mix in an uncontrollable and unknowable manner.

Metgasco does not yet know what went wrong with their Kingfisher tight sands well, and now they plan to drill a similar well before the Mine Safety investigation is completed. If the gas is good, they will build a gas field from Lismore to Casino as quickly as possible.

According to the Office of Coal Seam Gas, gas extraction from Metgasco's tight sands gasfield is likely to require 'unconventional' techniques such as fracking and aquifer depressurisation. But did you know that because the Bentley well targets a sandstone formation rather than a coal seam, Metgasco's operations are exempt from all NSW Government CSG regulations?

Forget the hoopla about 'World's toughest regulations', '2 km exclusion zones', Environmental Protection Agency oversight, Aquifer Interference Policies, Gateway Processes, 'Water Triggers', and the rest – none of that applies in Bentley. This operation only requires the approval of Minister Anthony Roberts.

Commonsense and good governance demand that the NSW Government immediately suspend Metgasco's operations at Bentley. Metgasco should not proceed at least until the Mine Safety Investigation is completed and this company can prove that it has achieved the technical understanding, engineering expertise, and corporate risk management culture necessary to successfully and safely undertake such a dangerous operation.