



Centre for
Environmental Rights
Advancing Environmental Rights in South Africa

**JOINT MEDIA RELEASE BY THE CENTRE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS AND WESSA
(THE WILDLIFE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA)**

**ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS WORKSHOPS HELD ACROSS THE KAROO TO PROMOTE PARTICIPATION IN THE
KAROO BASIN SHALE GAS EXPLORATION APPLICATIONS**

25 AUGUST 2011

“Water should be for food.”

“Short-term gains – long-term poverty.”

“Some jobs are better than none.”

“Benefits will be short-term; the Karoo and people’s lives will change forever.”

“Are the disadvantages reversible.”

“Possibly the gas corporations will fund essential services underfunded or non-existent at present”

“Can public concerns really stop or lead to ‘safer’ activity by the gas companies?”

- *Participants in community workshops, June 2011*

Findings of Karoo Community Environmental Rights Workshop Series on Shale Gas Exploration

In June 2011, the Centre for Environmental Rights and WESSA held community workshops in 17 different towns across areas in the Karoo affected by current shale gas exploration right applications. The workshops drew in communities from Calvinia, Williston, Sutherland, Fraserburg, Carnarvon, Beaufort West, Victoria West, Murraysberg, Richmond, Middelburg, Graaf-Reinet, Pearston, Somerset East, Cookhouse, Bedford, Adelaide and Cradock. Community leaders from a large number of community organisations and also from political parties and local government attended the workshops.

The core objectives of these workshops were:

- to raise awareness around the applications for shale gas exploration, as well as environmental rights in general;
- to inform communities about the potential impacts that could arise during the exploration and production phases (assuming that gas is found and production rights are awarded to applicants);
- to create an opportunity for discussion, expression of concerns and questions in a neutral environment;
- to encourage communities to become involved in the decision-making processes around shale gas exploration.

Each of the workshops had a discussion and question session and those attending the workshops were given the opportunity for further input via feedback forms that were completed at the conclusion of each workshop. At the workshops, it was apparent that the majority of those present did not know about the

8A Sussex Road, Observatory, Cape Town 7925
Tel 021 447 1647 Fax 086 730 9098
Email info@cer.org.za Web www.cer.org.za

Centre for Environmental Rights NPC is a non-profit company with registration number 2009/020736/08, NPO Ref 075-863, PBO No. 930032226 and a Law Clinic registered with the Law Society of the Cape of Good Hope

Directors: Carolyn Elizabeth Ah Shene, Joanna Amy Eastwood, Melissa Fourie, Stephen Mark Law, Thomas Tseko Ratsheko, Louis Johannes Smith, Terry Jane Winstanley (Chair)

shale gas exploration right applications that are pending and had not been included in public processes that have been held to date.

The most significant concerns that emerged during the workshops and via the feedback forms were:

- **Water scarcity and potential pollution of potable water:** The communities expressed high levels of concern about the use of their scarce water for shale gas exploration and mining. They fear that this will result in increasing demand on an already severely constrained water supply. In parallel, there were fears that contamination of presently available water (especially groundwater sources) would result in a further reduction of water availability or possibly illness and disease.
- **Employment creation and job security:** Extremely high levels of unemployment and desperate poverty are much in evidence throughout the areas where workshops were held. If shale gas exploration and extraction promises secure employment on a significant scale, then this should be considered a significant benefit. On the other hand, the fear was expressed that shale gas activities would drive people off the land and to the towns, where there was already strong competition for limited employment opportunities. Repeatedly, frustration was expressed at the lack of information concerning the employment opportunities that may be lost or gained as a consequence of the shale gas projects.
- **The agricultural sector:** The emerging farmers were well-represented at the workshops and their concerns were wide-ranging. The question was asked whether private land ownership would be threatened and whether or not gas exploration and extraction would halt or slow down the land redistribution process. Impacts on water supply would have concomitant negative impacts on agricultural production and consequently lead to loss of employment opportunities in this sector. The migration of people from the farms to towns was a possibility and this would result in additional competition for the scarce employment opportunities in the towns.
- **Health and social impacts:** The communities represented at the workshops felt that if the gas exploration and extraction activities had unintended and unforeseen health impacts, the health services in the region would be entirely unable to deal with this. In much the same vein, the social disruption that would be an inevitable consequence of gas extraction activities would place too high a burden on already overburdened social services. Of particular concern was the increase in alcohol and drug abuse, HIV/AIDS infections, crime and prostitution – problems that are already rife in the Karoo.
- **Landscapes and biodiversity:** The observation was made that the unique Karoo landscapes, topography and biodiversity would be affected by the establishment of multiple drilling sites and elements that characterise the region would be lost forever. A consequence of this would be a substantial decline in the expanding tourism sector, resulting in job losses.
- **Effectiveness of public participation:** There was a general feeling that insufficient information has been made available to Karoo communities and that there were still many unanswered questions. Some doubt was expressed with regard to whether or not the voices of the poorer communities in

the Karoo would have any impact on decisions made, or whether economics and politics would dominate.

- **Role of government:** If permission was granted for shale gas exploration and extraction, the conditions of the authorisations should be extremely stringent and enforcement of conditions should be rigorous. Repeatedly, fears were expressed that thinking around the economic potential of shale gas was short-term and that long-term rehabilitation of affected areas would be neglected.

It is evident that communities throughout the Karoo are threatened by poverty and unemployment and are extremely vulnerable. It is important that this vulnerability is not exploited and that the communities are included meaningfully in public participation processes and the decision-making process around the shale gas proposals. If gas exploration rights are granted, the CER and WESSA hope to undertake a series of follow-up workshops in these communities.

Report to PASA

On 12 August 2011, the CER reported to the Petroleum Agency of South Africa on the findings and recommendations of the joint CER/WESSA Community Workshop Series.

In its letter, and based on its assessment during the Workshop Series the CER expressed its grave concern that affected communities from these extremely impoverished parts of the Karoo are being excluded from this process, in violation of their environmental rights and rights to administrative justice under the Constitution.

Urgent recommendations made to PASA included:

- that, before PASA makes a recommendation to the Minister of Mineral Resources on a decision on the Shell EMP, it requires additional consultation with disadvantaged communities in the Karoo;
- that, as requested in the CER's letter of 30 May 2011, PASA directs the applicants for shale gas to fund the production of a simple brochure to inform communities of the proposal and its potential impacts; and
- that, in any event, PASA takes into account and communicates to the Minister in its recommendations the views of communities as expressed in comment sheets collected at the workshops and delivered to PASA and Golder Associates.

A copy of the CER's letter to PASA can be downloaded from the CER's website.

CER contact: Melissa Fourie, Executive Director, Centre for Environmental Rights, mfourie@cer.org.za, 021 447 1647 or 072 306 8888

WESSA contact: Garth Barnes, National Conservation Director, WESSA, gbarnes@wessanorth.co.za, 011 462 5663