

Drilling compliance (published in TDN 11 June 2013)

Cessation of drilling and removal of the “great wall of sidewinder” will bring relief to adversely-affected locals, and indicate that New Plymouth District Council is taking regulations seriously. Industry threats to “walk away from the region” sound a lot like spoilt children, and appear at odds with PEPANZ spokesman David Robinson’s comments that “We’re actually a very compliant industry - if the officials say jump, we say how high”. These comments in turn are inconsistent with revelations that rushed national legislation prohibiting protests at sea in the vicinity of oil operations followed meetings between senior Shell Oil executives and government ministers.

Recent changes to key legislation, including those governing NZ’s Exclusive Economic Zone, Crown Minerals, and Resource Management suggest that we have a very compliant government—it seems if industry says jump, our government asks how high.

On the related issue of “land farming”, a wonderful euphemism for spreading drilling wastes on agricultural land, certain fracking chemicals remain industry secrets, “commercial in confidence”. It is known, however, that some constituents are highly carcinogenic in minute quantities, at or below detection limits, belying claims of the veracity of monitoring.

Industry spin doctors were in full swing at their talk-fest in New Plymouth last week, extolling “environmental credentials” while ignoring culpability for massive pollution in Alaska, the Gulf of Mexico, Niger Delta and elsewhere, or indeed, for driving climate change. It’s just business as usual - privatize profits, socialize losses. Is this NZ’s future? Viable alternatives in clean, renewable energy do exist.