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Delegation to United States to investigate gas mining

BRETT KENNEDY

MOUNT Gambier parliamentarian Troy Bell will join a delegation to America to tour rural areas impacted by hydraulic fracturing. Mr Bell and Greens parliamentary leader Mark Parnell have both "locked in" their involvement on the trip co-ordinated by third generation Kalangadoo farmer David Smith.

FIRST-HAND ENCOUNTERS: Kalangadoo farmer David Smith has organised a fact-finding trip to America following concerns over the potential impacts of unconventional gas projects in the South East. Photo: JIMMY SMITH

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By BRETT KENNEDY

MOUNT Gambier parliamentarian Troy Bell will join a delegation to America to tour rural areas impacted by hydraulic fracturing.

Mr Bell and Greens parliamentary leader Mark Parnell have both "locked in" their involvement on the trip co-ordinated by third generation Kalangadoo farmer David Smith.

Beef and prime lamb producer David Smith will lead the group across New York and Pennsylvania, visiting farms and towns where the controversial mining process, commonly known as "fracking", has been used for over a decade.

Planned for late June, the factfinding trip has already secured interest from business executives, concerned landowners and state member John Darley, who is part of the Xenophon team.

In a coup for the delegation, former Mobil Oil executive vice president Louis Allstadt will head a list of worldclass speakers that will meet with participants to discuss shale gas projects in North America.

With the unconventional gas industry showing production potential in the South East, Mr Smith said he was seeking "nothing but the truth" from the American visit.

"I'm not in this for exaggerations or mistruths," Mr Smith said.

"There are just unlimited stories over there in America about negative impacts fracking has had on some communities.

"I want to go over there to hear from people who have been personally affected and visit them on their farms.

"I just want to keep digging until I get the facts and as many of them as possible first-hand." Mr Smith said he had already been in contact with a number of farmers who had been devastated by impacts of the fracking process, which involves injecting a high pressure, high volume mixture of water, sand and chemicals into rock to release the gas trapped inside.

"One farmer I spoke to in the US had stock die after the fracking chemicals, as confirmed by the EPA, came up into the groundwater the stock were drinking," he said.

"Another farmer I spoke to had cattle die from brain tumours with his vet tracing the cause to naturally occurring toxic sulphites that came up into stock water after fracking released them from 1000 metres or so down.

"That along with countless other testimonials have led me to realise the importance of getting a group of people over to the US to see for ourselves what I can only describe as a path of destruction and report back to the people of South Australia." In addition to Mr Allstadt - who worked for Mobil Oil for 31 years - six other high-profile speakers will deliver presentations, including Cornell University professor and human health researcher Tony Ingraffea, who will discuss the alarming impacts some chemicals have on pregnant mothers and babies.

The socio-economic impacts and effects on animals will also be discussed.

"I knew it would have to be a well-presented, professional trip to encourage others to come along," Mr Smith said.

"If what has happened in America happens in the South East, it will be a big shake-up for all, not just farmers.

"I have been told that where town supply water has been contaminated in the US, water is now pumped and delivered in large bladders to landowners who have to cover the cost of heating it to stop it freezing in winter.

"This will certainly be an eyeopening trip for those who wish to attend." With the trip to be self-funded by participants, Mr Smith said it was a worthwhile investment for the future.

"I can picture what I stand to lose and the cost of this trip is negligible compared to what will be lost if our groundwater is contaminated," Mr Smith said.

He said he hoped to record each day's events to create a report on the trip that, with the endorsement of participants, would be presented to the State Government and the parliamentary inquiry into unconventional gas and fracking.

Contact David Smith on 0429 393 153 for more information on the delegation.