

Background to Own-initiative Opinion on "Local and Regional Authorities perspective on Shale/Tight Gas and Oil (unconventional hydrocarbons)"

[Brian Meaney \(Greens\)](#) of Clare County Council and the Mid West Regional Authority has been nominated as the **rappporteur** of an opinion entitled "**Local and Regional Authorities perspective on Shale/Tight Gas and Oil (unconventional hydrocarbons)**". This is an Own-initiative Opinion within the Commission for the Environment, Climate Change and Energy (ENVE) at the Committee of Regions (CoR), as reported in the minutes of the ENVE Commission meeting of February 19, 2013.

Mr Meaney has been assigned a Polish expert for the Opinion. Her name is **Katarzyna Starmach**. Ms Starmach is an adviser to [Polish MEP Boguslaw Sonik \(EPP\)](#).

An **exchange of views** is planned for the ENVE Commission meeting of **April 24, 2013**. Note that the European Commission plans to issue its "best practice guidelines" for the "safe extraction of unconventional hydrocarbons" by the end of 2013, echoing statements re. "Best Practice" in our own [EPA's draft terms of reference in January 2013](#). In Ireland, I believe our stance is clear: we are against any best practice guidelines being developed because we do not want this industry in our country hence why five county councils have voted unanimously on a ban or moratorium, Mr Meaney's own council included.

The timing of this CoR opinion is interesting and deserves our attention and input.

Key dates

April 24: Meeting at Committee of the Regions, Brussels.

September 2: First discussion and adoption of the draft opinion (under Lithuanian presidency so likely to take place in Lithuania)

November 28-29: Adoption foreseen at the plenary session (in Brussels, need civil society present to protest at event, suggestion by Mr Meaney)

Comments on Working Document

Mr Meaney has drafted a short report. It is only a working document, but I feel it necessary to point out some shortcomings:

- **Focus on hydraulic fracturing (p. 2)**

- Overemphasis on HF stage instead of focus on entire lifecycle of HVHF

- **European institutions activity (p. 4)**

This section is incomplete and the information selective.

- Too much importance attached to European Commission DG Energy policies
- No mention of the European Parliament report [Impacts of Shale Gas and Shale Oil Extraction on the environment and on human health](#) of June 2011
- No mention of Greens/EFA MEP Cathérine Grèze's [Opinion on the environmental impacts of shale gas and shale oil extraction activities](#) of June 2012
- No mention of the fact that a third of all MEPs voted in favour of a moratorium on shale gas in November 2012
- No mention of the PETI shale gas petitions heard in April 2012

- **Economic and social impacts (p. 9)**

- No mention of jobs it will displace, the fall in property values or the financial strains it will place on (already underfunded) local authorities to repair rural roads damaged by the heavy truck traffic, etc.
- In Ireland's case, any UFF development would only prolong our economic recession as it would harm our economy through displacement of jobs and revenue in our strongest performing industries of agriculture, agri-food and tourism. We need sustainable growth, not a another boom and bust. Other countries find themselves in a similar position.

Further comments on the working document: I suggest that [Good Energies Alliance Ireland](#) and other groups who have been researching UFF comprehensively at national level would be in a better position to advise Mr Meaney further on many of the above aspects. I can facilitate the communication, if necessary.

Main discussion points at meeting of Friday April 12

1. **Position on fossil fuels:** Mr Meaney stated quite firmly how the further extraction of fossil fuels is not compatible with our transition to a low-carbon economy but expressed reservations about whether that transition will be successful.
2. **Position on energy saving:** He also emphasised the importance of energy conservation. You can read more about his views in this [interview](#).
3. **Difficulties accessing reliable information on topic of SG:** He mentioned conflicting studies. I agreed that it can be difficult to access reliable information. After the meeting I emailed the link to the [Good Energies Alliance Ireland website](#) where many of the more reliable scientific studies can be found, and I also informed him of the new [book](#) on UFF in Europe published by Claeys and Casteels. Some of the authors of this book also worked on the European Parliament June 2011 report.
4. **Meeting with NGOs:** Last week he met with Antoine Simon of [Friends of the Earth Europe](#), which is one of two NGOs here campaigning against UFF. Antoine communicated our concerns. Mr Meaney said he feels quite shocked by some of what Antoine said. I explained that sadly the reality and the impacts of the industry are quite shocking.
5. **Meetings with industry:** Last week, he met with ExxonMobil. I explained how these companies have nothing but lies but they keep pushing their propaganda regardless.
6. **Boom and bust nature of industry:** He mentioned how UFF may be boom and bust. I said it is. (If necessary, we can forward on relevant reports such as [David Hughes'](#) which detail the boom and bust nature of UFF.)
7. **Relevance of Opinion:** I made our stance very clear that in Ireland fracking is highly unlikely to go ahead because of **strong local opposition** so this report seems quite irrelevant, but given how fracking has already started in Poland and Scotland for example, I pointed out how this Opinion could be used to offer advice to LRAs who are already faced with difficulties managing the industry. However, my stance is unequivocal: this industry should not be facilitated in any way. Mr Meaney went on to mention that he may have to explain UFF to **local authorities in Ireland**. I feel that any report he uses to do so would need to be much more comprehensive in its scope, and that it would need to outline how incompatible the impacts of the industry are with life in any community where development is proposed.
8. **Need for relevant studies:** I was asked if I could send on any relevant studies. I asked if those would include health but I got the impression that health was not relevant. Since local health authorities would have to deal first hand with patients suffering from the impacts of the industry, many campaigners believe health should be included in any report.

Next steps

1. Since Antoine of FoEE will probably provide Mr Meaney with reliable environmental studies, perhaps we should best focus our efforts on providing relevant reports and studies related to the **economic and social impacts?** I expect the different campaign groups will want to discuss this further first.

2. The meeting takes place at April 24. Antoine of FoEE will attend, along with others (see Agenda attached for details).

DISCLAIMER

I am a member of no specific group or organisation and I have no party political affiliation. I aim to be as independent and critical as possible of all actors in the shale gas debate.
