

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION NOS. 311, 312 & 329

Dáil Eireann

To ask the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on whether there is presently no integrated approach to monitoring or regulation of any onshore gas extraction process, for example hydraulic fracturing, under current legislation, and if licences are granted in the future to proceed to exploration stage, if he will become proactive rather than reactive; and his plans to set up a working group to explore the impact of such a proposal on the landscape of the north west..

- Tony McLoughlin.

For WRITTEN answer on Tuesday, 27th September, 2011.

Identical Question(s): Agriculture

Ref No: 26419/11

Proof: 489

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To ask the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on whether there is presently no integrated approach to monitoring or regulation of any onshore gas extraction process, for example hydraulic fracturing, under current planning or environmental legislation..

Tony McLoughlin.

For WRITTEN answer on Tuesday, 27th September, 2011.

Ref No: 26421/11

> Proof: 585

To ask the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources his views on whether there is presently no integrated approach to monitoring or regulation of any onshore gas extraction process, for example hydraulic fracturing, under current legislation; and if he will now become proactive rather than reactive if licences are granted in the future to proceed to exploration stage..

- Tony McLoughlin.

* For WRITTEN answer on Tuesday, 27th September, 2011.

Ref No: 26418/11

REPLY

I can inform the Deputy that my Department has not received applications for, nor licensed

the use of exploration drilling or hydraulic fracturing in the Irish onshore and accordingly the monitoring of this activity does not arise at this time.

Earlier this year, my Department granted onshore Licensing Options to three companies over parts of the North West Carboniferous Basin and the Clare Basin. The Licensing Options are designed to allow the companies assess the natural gas potential of the acreage largely based on studies of existing data from previous exploration activity. This work is largely office/desktop based and does not involve exploration drilling or hydraulic fracturing.

By the end of the Option period in February 2013, the companies will have to decide whether to apply for a follow-on exploration licence or relinquish the acreage. I have made it clear that in the event any of the companies involved decide to apply for an exploration licence that proposed the use of hydraulic fracturing, the application would have to be set out in detail and be supported by an environmental impact statement. The application would then be the subject of an environmental impact assessment which would include a public consultation phase.

The environmental impact assessment would be broad and consider a range of potential impacts including an assessment of the potential visual impact of the proposed works on the landscape.

My Department would also consult with other relevant statutory authorities such as the environmental Protection Authority, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and local authorities before reaching any decision.

In the event of a commercial discovery, the principal authorisations required from my Department for a gas production project would be a Petroleum Lease and approval of a Plan of Development.

The Plan of Development would set out the basis for the project and the rationale for the selection of the appropriate development option.

The Plan of Development would also be subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment, including a public consultation phase. A future petroleum production project would also likely involve consents from other statutory authorities including the Commission for Energy Regulation, the Environmental Protection Agency and the planning authorities. This consent framework provides for a comprehensive assessment of such a project.