

Strategic Planning Division

Ms Geraldine Ring
Geraldine.ring@gmail.com

3rd Floor
Millennium House
17-25 Gt Victoria Street
Malone Lower
BELFAST
BT2 7BN

Telephone: (028) 90416995
Facsimile: (028) 9041 6976
Email: simon.kirk@doeni.gov.uk

Your Ref:
Our Ref: TOF/347/2013
Date: 20 August 2013

Dear Ms Ring

Thank you for your e-mail of 12 August addressed to the Minister of the Environment, Mark H Durkan MLA, and regarding proposals to extract shale gas by means of high volume hydraulic fracturing (fracking). Minister Durkan has read your e-mail and has asked me to reply to you on his behalf.

Currently in Northern Ireland, Australian mining company Tamboran, is exploring the possibility of extracting shale gas in part of County Fermanagh. At the outset, I must stress that the extraction of any hydrocarbons by either conventional or unconventional methods is development requiring planning permission along with other environmental consents. At this present time no planning applications for unconventional extraction (fracking) have been received. However, the Department understands there may potentially be applications submitted later next year or into 2015.

The Minister is well aware of the issues and concerns throughout the island of Ireland about this technique. In response to these concerns, the Department's Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is supplementing its knowledge of this process through reviewing and engaging with emerging research, studying case studies from other parts of the world and liaising with counterparts in other Environmental Agencies in Britain and Ireland, and other countries where fracking is currently proposed or taking place.

On a cross-border level, NIEA meets regularly with the Republic of Ireland's Environmental Protection Agency and is co-funding a major research programme into the potential environmental impacts of fracking.

Minister Durkan has made his position of fracking very clear. If planning applications are submitted, the final decision on whether or not to allow this process rests with the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, regardless of what happens in

the rest of the UK. He has stated categorically that he will not make any decisions until all the facts and scientific evidence have been established and to proceed to permit the technique at this time would be reckless.

In terms of your comments about an outright ban, the Department has a legislative duty to determine any planning application that is submitted. That does not necessarily mean that applications for fracking will be approved. They will however be rigorously assessed taking account of all potential environmental impacts and relevant research and will involve a range of expert consultees. As I have already stated, the Minister has insisted that decisions must be based on fact and a process that ensures the best possible knowledge is available.

Should any planning applications be submitted, the views of all concerned parties will be fully taken into account in the determination process.

I trust this information will be of assistance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. J. Kirk', with a stylized flourish at the end.

SIMON KIRK
Director of Strategic Planning Division