

The Impact Research Group, Leitrim in a press release to *The Leitrim Observer*, 30 January 2012. Expressed concern that the proposed Shale Gas Extraction/Hydraulic Fracturing in Ireland, will have serious implications for the region and the country. In our own region, one of the licenced companies, of which there are three to date, has been making varying assertions which need scrutiny.

Tamboran Resources has made much of the alleged financial benefits of hydraulic fracturing for Ireland. In fact, the company's CEO Richard Moorman continues to repeat the industry mantra that fracking will bring unprecedented prosperity to the affected area. Of course, once one scrapes beneath the surface of the excessive claims and false smiles that characterise this industry, it is found that the economic advantages of shale gas production for rural communities often fall between the minute and the non-existent.

In an article published in the Huffington Post last October, world-renowned environmental lawyer Robert F. Kennedy Jnr. condemned the industry, not only on the well-documented grounds of water and air pollution but also for concealment of the truth regarding chemicals used in fracking and for making exaggerated claims about the value of their projects. In his concluding paragraph he writes: "Gas fracking flacks routinely make extravagant promises about bringing jobs and income to depressed rural communities." Moreover, he points out that industry frequently inflates statistics on the quantities of gas extracted at wells to hoodwink investors, landowners and the public on the feasibility of shale gas production. To further this point Kennedy states that the US Geological Survey has more recently downgraded the estimated shale gas reserves by 80%, from the original figures which were supplied by the Industry and which are now discarded by Government.

Kennedy wrote in support of a series of New York Times articles on hydraulic fracturing that uncovered the frightening truth behind the propaganda of one of America's most powerful industries. Naturally, balanced investigative journalism and gas company CEO's are frequently at loggerheads and an impressive campaign of misinformation has been launched by the pioneers of fracking in an attempt to discredit the NY Times. Indeed, the accusations levelled at the New York Times for honest reporting are reminiscent of Richard Moorman's scathing attack on the

justifiably alarmed residents of this region. In a tirade by giants of the shale gas world, the NY Times have been labelled with big-business's favourite denunciations; anti-capitalist and anti-development. Oddly enough these are exactly the terms used by Mr Moorman in a statement to Shannonside Radio last week. He was referring to what he calls "a small group" of "protestors". By "small group" he meant the comfortable majority of councillors in counties Leitrim, Roscommon, Longford, Sligo and Donegal, a host of T.D.'s and senators from all parties and the thousands of people who have now signed an online petition to ban hydraulic fracturing in Ireland.

It is important to examine the motives of a company like Tamboran Resources Ltd. It would appear that its resources are very limited indeed. At the moment Tamboran is a speculative company floating on the stock exchange and hoping to attract investors. To date they have produced absolutely no shale gas anywhere yet the people of this area are expected to believe that they are capable of doing what industry giants like Chesapeake and Exxon have failed to do; extract natural gas without causing air and water pollution. It seems a tall tale to say the least, but why would they lie?

The answer is very simple. Tamboran is what Robert F. Kennedy Jnr. refers to as one of the "bottom feeders" of the industry; a group of speculators hoping to cash in on energy shortages by enticing investors with promises of vast quantities of gas and billions to be made. Should the project fail or should our water and air be polluted, our health affected and our landscape destroyed, Tamboran as a Limited company can walk away without being legally bound to clean up its mess. In fact, Kennedy in his article includes a claim by the gas industry there that they do not have the funds to repair damaged local roads and this cost is being left to local taxpayers. Like their big brothers in America, the Tamboran speculators have tried to sweet-talk local communities into welcoming their toxic machine of heavy industry. Seeing that this was not working, Richard Moorman has become increasingly bullish as his comments to Shannonside Radio demonstrated.

Mr Moorman's figures for predicted employment in the Republic of Ireland have fluctuated from an optimistic 350 to an unlikely 600 to the ambiguous, absurd and slightly desperate "thousands of jobs" he spoke of on Pat Kenny Live in early

January. The latter two predictions can safely be discarded as “extravagant promises” that will never come to fruition but the figure of 350 jobs should be analysed a little closer. First of all, Tamboran made these predictions for the Republic of Ireland long before they decided that the large tract of Cavan which it had intended to frack was not commercially viable. That’s roughly half of the initial project that they have lost interest in. Therefore one can assume that the number of jobs to be created would be halved correspondingly. That means the figure is something in the region of 175 jobs. Independent studies predicting the number of direct jobs to be created in New York State by hydraulic fracturing found the figure to be roughly 22% of what industry claimed. That’s not to suggest that the number of direct jobs to be created by hydraulic fracturing in Leitrim is 22% of 175 (that’s roughly 39 jobs). On this one we can probably give Richard Moorman the benefit of the doubt but one should probably refer to a study by Food and Water Watch on the potential fracking of New York State which stresses that “many of the high-paying industry jobs created would go to transient, out-of-state workers with shale gas industry experience”. And with Tamboran pulling the plug on the employee training deal with IT Sligo that never existed, according to the Institute, it seems inevitable that most of the skilled jobs will go to imported employees. Who knows how many direct jobs that leaves for locals but it would likely be very few.

The ‘promise’ of energy security has been cited by the Irish Government as validation for the possibility of allowing fracking to commence. The very fact that our EPA are to be advised by the University of Aberdeen, an institution funded by oil and gas giants including Shell and Halliburton, on the viability of fracking speaks volumes about the Fine Gael/Labour coalition’s position on shale gas extraction. But one must wonder what exactly constitutes energy security as the gas Tamboran plans to force from beneath our feet will not belong to the Irish people. In fact, the gas already belongs to Tamboran under the terms of its options license. If the gas is extracted, we will have a chance to buy it back but only, to use Richard Moorman’s own words, “at market price”. This can only be understood to mean Irish shale gas will be no cheaper than imported gas. In any event, this could only be a short-term contribution, putting off the inevitable need to develop alternative energy sources.

The boys of Tamboran are trying to sell the unsellable. They want us to risk a burgeoning food, agriculture and tourism industry, currently accountable for roughly 13 billion euro of Ireland's annual national income, and over 500,000 existing jobs, for a handful of short term new jobs, a polluted ecosystem and inevitable damage to human and animal health. Farcically, in a Tamboran video on the company's website, Tony Bazley suggested that tourists to North Leitrim would find hundreds of gas wells "interesting". Who knows where Tony likes to holiday but frankly an industrialised zone wouldn't be the preferred destination of most people.

In relation to Agriculture, this country must consider its strategic need for food security, a growing concern across the world.

Caution is advisable in relation to investment and job creation by shale gas companies. Leaving aside the hazards of this dirty business, it is prudent to consider the motives of these companies and what they stand to gain by exaggerating the alleged benefits for Leitrim. By all honest accounts, they will be considerably less than claimed.

Given all the alarming evidence available to date, the Impact Research Group, Leitrim, calls upon the State to ban this process, and to request Northern Ireland to do the same.

The Secretary Joseph Keaney concluded.