Name

Address

Minister Pat Rabbitte,
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2

Date:

Re: Ireland's future energy needs

Dear Mr Rabbitte,

Ireland, the Emerald Island, the Non 'Fracking' Island

Energy demand – energy independence
The world is facing an spiralling demand for energy and it is up to the nations including Ireland to respond in a sensible way to this unprecedented challenge. It is not only the demand for energy that has to be tackled but also but also the limitations of Green House Gas Emissions are to be met.
The answer was to gradually move away from the traditional – non-renewable – fossil fuels to renewable energy sources, where according the EU directive 2009/28 EC 20% of energy supply should come from renewable sources.[i]

Shale gas – 'clean bridge fuel'?
However, a new – non-renewable – energy source is entering the world market, heralded by the oil and gas companies as a 'clean, bridge fuel'.
Clean, as they say it has a low carbon footprint and a bridge towards renewable energy and energy independence.
Undoubtedly you have heard of this controversial fossil fuel called 'unconventional gas' which is extracted from shale rock layers by method of hydraulic fracturing for which Ireland has granted option licenses.
Initially, it seemed like a reasonable idea: natural gas, being the best of the worst would give a leeway to get Ireland up and running with renewable energy sources.
This 'clean, bridge fuel' - what the oil and gas companies wants to believe us that shale gas is - is in stark contrast with numerous academic studies.
According to these unconventional gas extraction

- poses high environmental risks[ii]
- has a higher carbon footprint then the dirtiest of fossil fuels: coal[iii]

Make up your mind
The worries that local people have regarding unconventional gas extraction out of shale by method of hydraulic fracturing (fracking) are, in my opinion, justified. However, I am the least to force my opinion on you or anyone. It is the freedom of thought that inspires to balanced decisions and it is therefore that articles, publications, reports are collected and compiled into a website www.frackingfreeireland.org for anyone including you, to get informed, to make up his mind and come to the conclusion whether unconventional gas extraction is a sensible contribution to our energy solution or not.

Energy independence - by shale gas extraction in Ireland: at what cost?

The advocates of unconventional gas say it gives us less reliance, more independence from foreign gas imports and Ireland may benefit from the sale of it's gas reserves. That is to say: unless it will become a major stakeholder, following the Norwegian example, it may benefit from the unconventional gas extraction.

But possible benefits come at a price:

a. Environmental implications
Given the oil companies track record with environmental disasters can we trust them to do well with a novel method of unconventional gas extraction by fracking? Current legislation in general seems not to be adequate if not to say outdated to deal with this new process. Legislation tend to be put in place after damages have happened e.g. it is reactive instead of pro-active.
Any spill will impact on Ireland's environment and will tarnish it's green reputation abroad. The food- and tourism sector, two major industries in Ireland, will suffer as a consequence. The possible benefits will be cancelled out or worse by any one incidence. [iv]

b. High Carbon footprint
Unconventional gas extraction has a high carbon footprint. The possible benefits are cancelled out against by buying in carbon credits and paying fines for not meeting the Green House Gas emission targets as set in the Kyoto treaty. Even without unconventional gas extraction Ireland is below target.

c. Decreasing gas prices
Unconventional gas extraction is set to be on a world wide scale. Supply may outweigh demand lowering the gas price and reduce profit margins as a result. If it unconventional gas extraction becomes unprofitable, the gas companies may pull out and leave us, the Irish people, to foot the clean-up bill.

Unfortunately we seem to let go easily of our resources: the Corrib Gas Field, the shale gas fields in the Northwest and Clare and even stretches of the west coast for windfarms from foreign (UK) investors.
By safeguarding our resources and be a major stakeholder we will also safeguard our independence.

d. Developments of renewable energy decelerate
Shale gas extraction will not last for ever. The extraction of it will slacken off the need to invest in renewable energy.

Energy independence - by using sustainable energy

Ireland, surrounded by the sea, has an inexhaustible abundance of wind, waves and tides to be exploited as sustainable energy.
It takes a little more effort to tap into these resources but if we do we will have the following benefits:

a. It is safe, guaranteed.
No unconventional gas extraction by-products will enter the food chain.

b. Lower carbon footprints.
Ireland will lower it's GHG emissions, and is – as a major stakeholder - able to sell green energy

c. Carbon credits
Ireland can sell it's carbon credits to other countries. (or at least lower its GHG fines)
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Three times Green: Food, Tourism, Energy
Ireland has a green reputation in tourism and food produce, a reputation that can be extended with green energy: winds, waves and tidal
Green is our trademark, we should be at the forefront of green energy and unconventional gas extraction does not enter into the '3 x green = durable' equation.

> *Green energy – green tourism – green agriculture are Ireland strengths and distinguishes it from other EU countries: Ireland is a non fracking island.*

Finally
There is one responsibility we have as human beings: custodianship to the earth. We ought to leave this earth a better place for future generations. We knowingly ignore the early warning signs of climate change by releasing even more greenhouse gases We also ignore our children's children by leaving them an inheritance of ignorance, short term vision and fossil energy greed *and* an earth that has become a less hospitable place as a consequence.

To secure a sustainable future we must use sustainable resources and policies. Short term resources and policies will have their consequences.

I call on the Irish Government to place an immediate and permanent ban on the process known as Hydraulic Fracturing ('Fracking') and all related preparatory and exploratory work in the Republic of Ireland, and to focus on the investment and development of renewable energy for Ireland's future energy needs.

Yours,

[i]The National Energy Efficiency Action Plan 2009 – 2020
http://www.dcenr.gov.ie/NR/rdonlyres/FC3D76AF-7FF1-483F-81CD-52DCB0C73097/0/NEEAP_full_launch_report.pdf

ii The Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research states that

- *There is a clear risk of contamination of groundwater from shale gas extraction.*
- *It is important to recognise that most problems arise due to errors in construction or operation and these cannot be eliminated.*
- *The US EPA research should provide important new evidence in understanding this issue.*
- *Very high standards of hazard management will need to be maintained at all times if surface pollution is to be avoided.*
- *Very significant amounts of water are required to extract shale gas and this could put severe pressure on water supplies in areas of drilling.*
- *The impacts of climate change may further exacerbate this problem.*
- *For the UK, high population density and the likely proximity of wells to population centres could result in certain impacts such as noise pollution, traffic, and landscape impacts being exacerbated.*

Shale gas: a provisional assessment of climate change and environmental impacts, Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research p 74 – 76
http://www.tyndall.ac.uk/sites/default/files/coop_shale_gas_report_final_200111.pdf

iii The most recent analysis conducted by Howarth's team at Cornell, recently published in the peer- reviewed scientific journal Climatic Change Letters, states that on a 20-year time horizon *'the GHG footprint for shale gas is at least 20% greater than and perhaps more than twice as great as that for coal when expressed per quantity of energy available during combustion.'*
http://www.eeb.cornell.edu/howarth/ Howarth%20et%20al%20%202011.pdf

Fracking the Future, How Unconventional Gas Threatens our Water, Health and Climate – p8
www.desmogblog.com

For more information, reports, articles visit: www.frackingfreeireland.org

[iv]UK: Blackpool: earthquake
Germany/the Netherlands: Xanten/Nijmegen: earthquake
Northern Germany: Pollution:
Poland: contamination (benzene) and water pollution after 2 years of starting extraction by HF