

Statement from Friends of the Earth
regarding the Environmental Pillar's Communication on the EPA research

Friday, 26th October 2012

Friends of the Earth has had reservations about the idea of the Environmental Pillar acting as a compiler of views on the terms of reference (TOR) for the EPA research since it was first suggested by Departmental officials as an alternative to a full public consultation.

Like the Pillar itself, our preference since the beginning was for a proper Departmental-run public consultation. But we agreed that it was worth exploring whether people in the affected communities were interested in the "non-public consultation" suggested by the Departmental officials.

This week we heard many concerns raised about the risks and pitfalls of the "non public consultation" by people inside the Pillar and, more importantly, by people outside the Pillar in the wider anti-fracking movement.

We became increasingly concerned that the idea of the "non public consultation", and the Pillar's role in it, was becoming a potentially divisive distraction from the bigger issues all of us who are opposed to fracking face.

So, in response to the questions and concerns being raised, we worked with others to get the Pillar to issue the communication that went out this morning (copied below). And we're glad the Pillar will now restate to the Minister its original position and demand the Department run a public consultation on the TOR for the EPA research.

I very much endorse the menu of questions for discussion that Jerriann Sullivan posted today about what the fracking-free movement does next (specifically what might be discussed at tomorrow's meeting). They were:

- people might wish to prepare submissions to the department about the TOR as individuals or groups and could brainstorm for ideas on this?
- people might want to do some media work calling for a public consultation on the TOR, and argue that in the spirit of the Aarhus convention the people of Ireland are entitled to this. We know the EPA are planning to do a piece of research that will mainly focus on environmental impact, we could be putting public pressure on them to make sure the research is appropriately independent and broad?
- people might want to discuss bigger issues than the TOR?... such how to mobilise the whole country around fracking while the EPA research is taking place? And how to improve the capacity and communication networks of the fracking-free movement to meet that need to achieve that mass mobilisation and shift in public opinion?

Wishing you all the best for your meeting tomorrow as we all try to construct a broad, inclusive and collaborative movement to ban fracking in Ireland forever.

Oisín Coghlan
Director
Friends of the Earth.