

## **Unconventional Gas Exploration and Extraction (UGEE) – Joint Research Project**

### **UGEE Project Aim**

This scientific Joint Research Programme (JRP) is based on the consideration of existing baseline data with respect to groundwater, air and seismicity and the potential implications and mitigations that are required to be considered in order to understand the possible environmental impacts of using this technology and whether or not it can be undertaken in an environmentally protective manner in accordance with the requirements of environmental law. The programme of research will assist regulators, both North and South, in making informed decisions about hydraulic fracturing (fracking).

The UGEE JRP is co-funded by the EPA, the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (DCENR) and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). DCENR is represented on the Steering Group which was responsible for the award of the contract and which is overseeing the project and DCENR officials are engaged in the review of the work being produced by the consortium of consultants engaged to carry out the research programme.

### **Current Position**

When answering PQs on 15 December, Minister of State Joe Mc Hugh indicated that he saw merit in the EPA publishing an interim report on the research that had been carried out to date. DCENR wrote to the EPA on 8 January advocating this approach and suggesting that no action should be taken to progress a supplementary tender for phase two of the research programme until after the EPA had published a report on the work carried out to date.

The overall approach to reporting the research findings was considered by the Research Steering Committee (on which DCENR is represented) at its January meeting and the following decisions were made:

- The Steering Committee agreed that Phase 2 of the UGEE Joint Research Programme (i.e. acquisition of additional baseline data) would be put on hold.
- The Steering Committee agreed that the Consortium would be requested to produce a report pulling together the results of the research carried out to-date. It is anticipated that this report, could be completed and published by Q3 of this year.