

## **Hypocritical Ban on Fracking leaves Ireland with a real “Nimby” dilemma**

*By Gemma Bryce*

The recent ban on onshore hydraulic fracturing for shale gas was seen as a resounding victory by many individuals and groups in the broad based anti fracking campaign, which lasted for six years. But the fact that it is onshore only means the ‘ban’ is lacking.

There have been many groups involved in the fight against the “Dash for Gas” in Ireland, from ad-hoc, loosely affiliated grassroots factions, to rigidly organised, highly secretive organisations, some of whom became incorporated not for profits, and actively sought funding, both to “fight fracking”, and to expand and grow as NGOs, which included building websites, renting premises, hiring staff, and drawing down European funding. Some groups have close political affiliations.

The ban, noisily celebrated in those politically affiliated groups, received a much more muted welcome in the network of grassroots anti-fracking collectives. Rather than focusing on becoming NGOs, their contribution to the campaign had been one of street actions, international collaborations, solidarity with the British and Northern Irish anti-fracking movements, and a downright distrust of the EPA, whose “study” into the impacts of fracking was being run by a company with vested interests in the fracking industry (the analogy of the fox guarding the chicken house comes to mind).

### ***Have we really banned fracking?***

The actual “ban” came about after a Bill originally proposed by Fine Gael TD for Sligo Leitrim, Tony McLoughlin, received unanimous support from all parties at the Second Stage, Committee Stage, Report and Final Stage in the Dáil, and was passed by the Dáil on May 31st 2017.

One of the prominent groups in the long battle against onshore unconventional gas extraction, Love Leitrim, a group closely affiliated with Fine Gael stalwart, Eddie Mitchell, (a campaign manager for Tony McLoughlin TD), applauded the passing of the bill loudly from the visitors’ gallery in the Dáil.

Others, including Richard Boyd Barrett, People Before Profit TD, saw the bill as placating the oil and gas industry, as it did not include banning fracking offshore. Mr Boyd Barrett, quoted in *The Irish Times*, claimed that FG and FF had made a political decision that they did not want the ban to extend offshore, “because our friends in the oil and gas industry would not like that.”

People Before Profit, Independents4Change, and the Green Party had proposed amendments to the Petroleum and Other Minerals Development (Prohibition of Onshore Hydraulic Fracturing) Bill, to include a ban on fracking off-shore. Then, Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin called on People Before Profit, Independents4Change and the Green Party to withdraw their amendments on banning fracking off-shore, in order to ensure the bill was passed, they said. Under this pressure, all amendments to include a ban on offshore exploration and fracking were unfortunately defeated.

### ***Terminals for fracked gas planned for Ireland***

The battle grounds have now been re-drawn. A grassroots group, Not Here, Not Anywhere, has recently tackled Minister Denis Naughten about the proposal to build an LNG terminal in the Port of Cork, which would receive fracked gas from Texas, in partnership with a US company, Next Decade. Next Decade is an LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas) development company listed as being worth over 1 Billion Dollars on the stock exchange. The terminal is touted as a huge boost for the economy of the region, and for the country as a whole, by the commercial manager of the Port of Cork, Michael McCarthy. According to McCarthy, subject to planning permission being granted for the terminal, it could be fast tracked into becoming operational as early as 2020.

According to a [report](#) by Jessie Dolliver, for Trinity College News, Naughten is in favour of an LNG and has spoken out in defence of a major new industrial gas infrastructure, and states that as 88% of the energy consumed in Ireland is imported, continued fossil fuel development is necessary, **for energy security under Brexit**. According to the departmental statement, “the potential for LNG will be considered as part of a range of actions in relation to energy security, along with storage and interconnection.”

### ***Local impacts of LNG production***

The hypocrisy on the one hand of facilitating a ban on *onshore* fracking in the Republic of Ireland, only to import fracked gas from the US, and in turn, cause environmental and social damage to communities around the Texas/Mexico border is staggering, but not surprising.

The next step in the campaign is to work with the affected communities in the Rio Grande in Texas, who say that as the LNG would have to be exported from the Port of Brownsville in South Texas, irreversible environmental damage would be caused in the construction of the infrastructure and industrial facilities capable of coping with such a massive project.

The Rio Grande LNG Port will require the construction of a huge double 42 inch natural gas pipeline, one of the largest ever pipelines requesting a permit from the federal government. All natural gas pipelines have the potential for leakages and explosions. Landowners will have no choice as to whether they want or approve of a potentially dangerous gas pipeline crossing their properties, as their land will be seized if necessary under eminent domain.

### ***A price we are willing to pay?***

The cost of such “energy security” for Ireland is far too high a price for the communities in the Rio Grande, and those who will be affected by an environmentally degrading pipeline to have to suffer. Environmental devastation in the Rio Grande, and the Bahia Grande, an area of natural wildlife habitat that has been painstakingly restored over the past decades, would include massive industrial plants spewing out pollutants including greenhouse gases. Dredging the basins to create deep ports for massive ships to dock and turn would result in earth being dumped onto the wetlands, resulting in polluted runoff, not to mention the gas flaring from the LNG facilities, creating airborne pollution, methane, and an extreme hazard for seabirds.

The ban on fracking in Ireland has therefore turned out to be a poisoned chalice, a double edged sword, and an environmentally sensitive issue that will see seasoned and experienced campaigners take on a new challenge, and one that they have had six years to prepare for (almost two decades if we include the brave veterans of the Shell to Sea campaign).

We cannot accept LNG terminals capable of importing over 3 million cubic tonnes of liquefied natural gas (much of it fracked) from communities in the US that have been devastated by this process, if we cannot accept fracking in Ireland. We are prepared to work together with international campaigners to fight this ill-advised proposal. Keep Ireland LNG Free!