

Answers to a number of Dail questions on the subject of hydraulic fracturing from 21st March 2012

Dail Eireann

To ask the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he proposes to assess the environmental implication of test drilling for gas using hydraulic fracturing at Gubb, Glangelvin, County Cavan known as Dowra Two and also Dowra One between 1963 and 2003; and if he would examine the condition of the Owenmore River which flows into Lough Allen.

* For WRITTEN answer on Wednesday, 21st March, 2012.

Ref No: 15231/12

Proof: 568

To ask the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he would list the number of gas wells fracked in the north west of Ireland between 1963 and 2003; and the names of the companies and sub contractors approved to carry out the operation and the chemicals and liquids used if any..

- Tony McLoughlin.

* For WRITTEN answer on Wednesday, 21st March, 2012.

Ref No: 15234/12

REPLY

Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (M. F. O'Dowd)

I propose to take Question Nos. 318, 321& 322 together. Before addressing the detail of the questions asked by the Deputy I believe it would be helpful to first clarify for the Deputy the difference between the fracturing of wells in the case of conventional gas exploration and production and the practice known as “hydraulic fracturing” or “fracking” that is used in the case of exploration and production of unconventional gas. In the case of conventional gas exploration, such as that carried out in the north west of Ireland over a number of decades, the practice of fracking a very short section or sections of a vertical well has been commonly used internationally by the oil industry for very many decades. In the case of unconventional gas exploration, use of the technology is more recent and generally involves fracking of very long sections of horizontal wells. With unconventional exploration significantly larger volumes of liquids are also used. The exploration carried out in the north west of Ireland since the 1960s was “conventional exploration”.

Conventional fracking has been applied in the case of three onshore wells - Dowra-1 Re-entry (1981), Dowra 2 (2002) and Thur Mountain 1 (2002) – as follows: Dowra-1 Re-entry was operated by Aran Energy / Marinex. The contractor that performed the fracking was Dowell Schlumberger. Dowra 2 was operated by Evergreen Resources who also performed the fracking. Thur Mountain 1 was operated by Evergreen Resources who also performed the fracking. The chemicals used in the Dowra 1 Re-entry well are listed as: 15% HCl, A200 Inhibitor, F75N Surfactant, Ball Sealers, U42 Chelant, WF-15-10, Nitrogen, YF 1.5 PSD fracturing fluid and sand; while those used for the Dowra 2 and Thur Mountain 1 wells are listed as: Fresh Water, 15% HCl, Nitrogen Foam (Fracturing Fluid), Guar Gellant, Foam Surfactant, Breaker E Enzyme Breaker and X-cide 207 Bactericide. Details of these chemicals are included in the detailed reports relating to wells drilled both offshore and onshore Ireland and these reports are available for purchase from my Department's data management agent. The induced fractures which were extremely short, less than 100ft, and were limited to short intervals within the wellbores coinciding with sandstone reservoir rock and occurring at depths between approx 2500ft and 4000ft.

I have made clear to the House on a number of occasions that any application for an exploration licence that proposed the use of hydraulic fracturing as part of an unconventional gas exploration programme, would be subject to planning permission requirements and a full environmental impact assessment. An Environmental Impact Assessment entails consideration of the potential impacts of a project on population, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, including the architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the inter-relationship between the above factors. Under the EIA Directive it should be noted that it is not possible to permit a project unless it can be determined following assessment that it would not have an unacceptable environmental or social impact. In relation to the condition of the Owenmore River, the Deputy will no doubt be aware of the statutory function of local authorities under the Water Pollution Acts 1977 to 1990.

DÁIL QUESTION addressed to the Minister for Health (Dr. James Reilly) by Deputy Tony McLoughlin

for **WRITTEN ANSWER** on **21/03/2012**

To ask the Minister for Health if he proposes to assess the public health implication on local residents due to test drilling for gas using hydraulic fracturing at Gubb, Glangelvin, County Cavan known as Dowra Two and also Dowra One between 1963 and 2003; his views on the high incidents of cancer in Gubb townland; and if he will make a statement on the matter.
Tony McLoughlin T.D.

REPLY.

As the Deputy will appreciate, matters relating to drilling are primarily a matter for the

Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. On the specific health matters the Deputy has raised, the National Cancer Registry Ireland (NCRI) has, at my request, considered your question and has also provided some general information in relation to cancer incidence. In particular, the NCRI would point out that most variation for cancer between areas is known to be due to personal characteristics and not the external environment.

Gubb, Glangelvin is located in the Derrynananta/Dunmakeever area. The figures of cancer in respect of this area and a number of surrounding areas were compared with the rates for Cavan/Leitrim and Ireland. The NCRI concluded that the results in both the local and wider areas were not statistically significant. The NCRI, in considering the range of cancers diagnosed and the age at which they are diagnosed, compared Derrynananta/Dunmakeever and the surrounding areas with Cavan/Leitrim and Ireland and there was little difference in either the cancer type or age profile of patients. There are a number of parliamentary questions in relation to this matter also due for answer today by the Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources which will set out the difference between "fracturing of wells" in relation to conventional gas exploration and production and "hydraulic fracturing" in relation to exploration and production of unconventional gas. The Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources has also confirmed to my Department that any exploration licence that proposes the use of hydraulic fracturing as part of an unconventional gas exploration programme would be subject to a full environmental impact assessment, including consideration of the impact of the project on the population, fauna, soil, water, air, and climatic landscape.