

CONCERNS REGARDING EXPLORATORY OIL AND GAS DRILLING IN BALLINLEA BY RATHLIN ENERGY LIMITED

BALLINLEA RESIDENTS GROUP

PLANNING APPLICATION (REF E/2013/0093/F) RELATES TO THE DRILLING OF A SECOND EXPLORATORY WELL IN BALLINLEA, BUT RATHLIN ENERGY LIMITED HAVE STATED THAT THEY WISH TO OPEN AT LEAST SIX SIMILAR BOREHOLES IN QUICK SUCCESSION ACROSS THE NORTH COAST AREA.

IF SUCCESSFUL IN FINDING VIABLE OIL OR GAS RESERVES, THEY INTEND DRILLING UP TO FOUR COMMERCIAL WELLS PER SQUARE MILE IN THEIR CHOSEN AREAS ACROSS THE RATHLIN BASIN, WHICH STRETCHES FROM BALLYCASTLE TO MAGILLIGAN AND INLAND AS FAR AS GARVAGH. THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION HIGHLIGHTS A FEW CONCERNS ABOUT THIS COURSE OF ACTION.

1. Public Health and Safety

A series of studies were conducted between 2005 and 2008 in Garfield County, Colorado on the possible health effects of oil and gas production. These studies found a significantly higher theoretical risk of cancer and non-cancer risks from benzene exposure near oil and gas development sites. The results produced a list of 15 “Chemicals of Potential Concern” that are directly related to oil and gas development. These chemicals are (in alphabetical order):

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| 1. Acetone | 9. Trichlorofluoromethane |
| 2. Benzene | 10. Trichloroethylene |
| 3. 2-Butanone | 11. Tetrachlorethylene |
| 4. Chlormethane | 12. Toluene |
| 5. Ehtylbenzene | 13. Vinyl acetate |
| 6. 2-Hexanone | 14. O-Xylene |
| 7. Methlene chloride | 15. m, p-Xylene |
| 8. Styrene | |

As an example, two chemicals from this list that Rathlin Energy Limited publicly acknowledge they will be using, are Benzene and Toluene.

Benzene is a known carcinogen which causes Leukaemia. Its non-cancer acute effects are neurological - drowsiness, headaches, unconsciousness, convulsions, skin irritation, eyes and upper respiratory tract irritation, nausea, vomiting. The non-cancer chronic effects are blood dyscrasias, aplastic anaemia, excessive bleeding, leucopenia delayed bone formation in babies, immunosuppressant and developmental- low birth weight. According to The World Health Organisation, because it is carcinogenic, **“no safe level of exposure to benzene can be recommended.”**

Toluene’s acute effects are neurotoxic, i.e. fatigue, drowsiness, headaches, nausea, unconsciousness. The chronic effects are depression, ataxia, tremors, cerebral atrophy, impaired speech, hearing and vision, inflammation and degeneration of nasal epithelium and pulmonary lesions. In relation to human reproduction it can cause increased spontaneous abortions, and deform foetus neurological development causing attention deficit disorder, cranio-facial and limb anomalies.

The oil industry itself routinely monitors its workers for dermatitis, folliculitis, oil acne, urticaria, skin corrosion/ irritation/inflammation, skin sensitization, respiratory tract irritation, respiratory tract sensitization, occupational asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, chemical pneumonia, and nose bleeds.

The immediate neighbours, adults and children alike, all living between 80 and 300 metres away from this drilling site will receive no such monitoring from Rathlin Energy Limited. Indeed the only concession to this public health concern by Rathlin Energy is an offer to Moyle District Council to monitor the air if the council should request it.



2. Damage to landscape and local environment

There is now a great deal of evidence of serious pollution incidents linked directly to oil and gas well failures in the USA, Canada, Australia and Scotland. The percentage of drilling wells that fail within the first year is reported as more than 6% by the oil and gas industry itself. This has been reported as up to (and in some cases over) 50% failure within fifteen to fifty years. These well failures result in the leaching of thousands of gallons of dangerous/hazardous chemicals such as Potassium Chloride, Sodium Hydroxide, Biocides and other naturally occurring pollutants such as Radioactive Isotopes, Heavy Metals, Chlorine and gases such as Methane into the surrounding aquifers, water table and rural landscape. Moreover, gas leakage has been reported to occur in 50% of wells within a period of only **fifteen** years. Scant regard has been given to this concern in the supporting documentation supplied by Rathlin Energy Limited. When asked at the public consultation meeting about the percentage of well failure, they replied that they did not know the figures and would “look into it”.

If just one well fails within the Licence Area, either one of the

major Rivers - Bush or Bann, are ultimately at risk of a serious pollution incident. Given that it is now recorded that up to 50% of all wells will fail within fifty years, then it is a 75% statistical probability that one of the two wells at Ballinlea will create a pollution incident in the future. This is an unacceptable environmental risk.

Rathlin Energy Limited have stated within their documents accompanying this Planning Application that they intend testing the Well site for a period of up to 90 days. The Well will be pumped during this period and is anticipated to produce a mixture of oil, gas and water. However their document does not state how this ‘produced water’ or ‘flow back material’ will be safely disposed of or recycled. So what happens to this polluted material? How do Rathlin Energy Limited guarantee that this ‘produced water’ or ‘flow back material’ will not effect or pollute the air, water, and surrounding environment? Rathlin Energy Ltd have not provided any clear, specific information as to how this “produced water” or “flow back material” will be prevented from polluting the air, water and surrounding environment.

3. Consequent Destruction of Local Economy - Tourism and Agriculture

Rathlin Energy Limited have publicly admitted that any jobs, which may be created as a result of this project, will be very limited in number and short-term in nature. However, both the proposed temporary works and the envisioned long term installations will cause long-term damage to two of the most important sectors of the local economy - tourism and agriculture.

The Causeway Coast and Glens region is made up of six local authority areas – Ballymena, Ballymoney, Coleraine, Larne, Limavady and Moyle and accommodates circa 24% of NI’s domestic and inbound visitation and spend. (NITB latest available statistics). The region hosts two of the top 10 visitor attractions in Northern Ireland, (The Giants Causeway and The Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge), and there are an estimated 5,682 direct and 18,392 indirect jobs dependent on tourism in the area. The perception of this area as environmentally uncontaminated and non-industrial is key to its current success as a tourist destination. These green environmental credentials are too easily squandered or lost. Many tourists directly enjoy the unspoilt local environment through house lets, cycle tours, walking tours, angling, water sports, wildlife observation etc. These tourist activities underpin many small businesses. The latest available figures from NITB show that in the Moyle district alone, tourism brought in an annual figure of £27 million pounds into the

local economy which is 5% of the total for Northern Ireland. High environmental standards are now core aspects of visitor expectations and not optional extras. Growth in tourism against competing destinations can only be sustained if the quality of the natural and built environment, which underpins the region’s appeal, is maintained.

Effects on Farming, Agriculture and Rural Income:

In addition, concern over the pollution of air and water courses as a result of drilling poses a substantial threat to the domestic and export markets for local agricultural produce. This has already affected farmers in Australia and New Zealand, as the perceived health risks of consuming contaminated produce drives consumers elsewhere.

The 2012 farm census statistics for the Moyle district alone states that there are 38,043.6 hectares of land farmed giving direct employment to 2,748 people. The implications of any serious pollution event occurring in the future places farming in jeopardy and as such puts at risk the livelihood of many living and working in the rural economy in this region.

Ballinlea Residents Group are a body of concerned residents who object to the planning application E/2013/0093/F. Although the immediate impact of this planning application will be localised, the wider concern relates to the establishment of multiple projects throughout Moyle, Coleraine, Limavady and Ballymoney Council areas.



If you would like to support the Ballinlea Residents group, please visit
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