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Mr Stephen Hamilton,  
Principal Planning Officer  
Strategic Planning Division  
Millennium House  
17-25 Great Victoria Street  
Belfast BT2 7BN

**Application ref: E/2013/0093/F for temporary works of drilling exploratory borehole to approx 2700m depth to investigate underground strata for hydrocarbon exploration under DETI license PL3/10**

Dear Mr Hamilton,

I wish to object to planning permission being granted for this application on the following grounds:

**1. Public Health.** According to Rathlin Energy's own supporting literature<sup>i</sup>, the drilling of this exploratory borehole will involve the atmospheric release of known hazardous substances such as VOCs and BTEXs - benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylenes. The World Health Organisation has for example stated that there is **no safe level of exposure** to benzene<sup>ii</sup>. Additionally, drilling risks releasing radon gas, which is currently trapped in the rock strata below the North Antrim area. The company have admitted that they have never drilled so close to residential properties before, yet cannot guarantee the complete containment and control of all the hazardous materials they intend to use<sup>iii</sup>. This poses an unacceptable risk to public health.

**2. Damage to Landscape and Local Environment.** The percentage of drilling wells that fail within the first year alone is reported by the oil and gas industry itself as more than 6%. This failure rate increases to between 30%-50% within fifty years<sup>iv</sup>. This creates a **75% statistical probability that one of the two wells at Ballinlea will leak** in the future, risking the escape of thousands of gallons of hazardous and toxic chemicals and pollutants into the surrounding landscape, aquifers and watercourses such as the rivers Bush and Bann. In addition, gas leakage occurs in 50% of wells within a period of only fifteen years<sup>v</sup>.

The proposed development borders a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty<sup>vi</sup> as well as areas of Special Scientific Interest (1km from Prolusk ASSI)<sup>vii</sup>. Moreover, it must not be considered in isolation, but as one of a series of such developments; the licensed area ("Rathlin Basin") stretches from Ballycastle to Magilligan and inland as far as Garvagh (see DETI license PL3/10), and the company stated at a public meeting on 27 June 2013 that in the event of a successful exploration, they plan to install up to **four drilling wells per square mile** across the area.

**3. Consequent Destruction of Local Economy - Tourism and Agriculture.** The risk to tourism and agriculture, key areas of the local economy, is unacceptable. In the Moyle district alone, tourism generates £27 million pounds per annum, which is 5% of the total for Northern Ireland<sup>viii</sup>. Tourism in the area accounts for 5,682 direct jobs, as well as a further 18,392 indirect jobs<sup>ix</sup>. The north coast area is renowned for its scenic beauty, but tourists will not wish to visit an area which has been industrialised and contaminated.

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** (as has happened to farmers in Australia and New Zealand)<sup>x</sup>, as even the perceived health risks of consuming contaminated local produce drives consumers elsewhere. Over 2700 people are directly employed in agriculture in the Moyle area<sup>xi</sup> - all of these jobs are threatened by the proposed development.

Both tourism and agriculture will suffer if this exploration continues, and Rathlin Energy has publicly admitted that any potential jobs created by this project will be very limited in number and short-term in nature.

Given the environmental and economic dangers it will cause, I urge you to reject this planning application.

Signed:

Date:

July 2013

## References

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- <sup>i</sup> Air Quality Impact Assessment - Rathlin Energy Ballinlea Petroleum Exploration
- <sup>ii</sup> <http://www.who.int/ipcs/features/benzene.pdf>
- <sup>iii</sup> <http://www.timesunion.com/opinion/article/Fracking-is-hardly-leakproof-3646458.php>
- <sup>iv</sup> <http://thetyee.ca/News/2013/01/09/Leaky-Fracked-Wells/>
- <sup>v</sup> [http://www.slb.com/~media/Files/resources/oilfield\\_review/ors03/aut03/p62\\_76.ashx](http://www.slb.com/~media/Files/resources/oilfield_review/ors03/aut03/p62_76.ashx)
- <sup>vi</sup> [http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/protected\\_areas\\_home/aonb.htm](http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/protected_areas_home/aonb.htm)
- <sup>vii</sup> [http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/prolusk\\_-\\_a\\_special\\_place.pdf](http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/prolusk_-_a_special_place.pdf)
- <sup>viii</sup> Northern Ireland Tourist Board 2013
- <sup>ix</sup> [nisra.gov.uk](http://nisra.gov.uk)
- <sup>x</sup> <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-06-21/fonterra-oil-drilling/4770874>  
<http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/rural/138025/fonterra-to-stop-taking-milk-from-farms-with-oil-and-gas-waste>  
<http://www.beefcentral.com/p/news/article/1247>
- <sup>xi</sup> NI Farm Census 2012

Signed:

Date:

July 2013