

NEWS

PONC public meeting votes for a ban on fracking and demands meeting with Stormont Committee

No MILAs attend 'No Fracking' meeting

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Campaigners lobbying to protect the North Coast from fracking held a public meeting in Portballintrae last Thursday night.

People from across the North Coast from Ballycastle to Limavady voted overwhelmingly to stop exploratory drilling and fracking in the area or anywhere in Northern Ireland.

Melanie Brown, a former policy adviser and researcher for the New Zealand government and resident of Ballycastle, presented a detailed analysis of the dangers of fracking on the North Coast.

She said: "Rathlin Energy—the licensee on the north coast—have admitted in a meeting in Ballycastle in 2013 that fracking will bring very few local jobs as most of the workers are specialist technicians brought in from around the world.

"This is in stark contrast to 5000 direct jobs coming from tourism across the Causeway Coast and Glens council areas that will be at risk should fracking proceed

Moving on to the issue of energy security, Melanie said: "The gas will not belong to Northern Ireland or local people, but to the companies who extract it, and will be sold on the open global market for the highest prices.

"Research is only now emerging from America which shows serious damage to health and the environment from fracking."

At the meeting a Balinlea resident, Brian Connolly stated: "As a concerned resident I have great worries over the health and environmental impacts that the proposed oil and gas exploration well will have for my family and other local residents.

"Of particular immediate concern is the venting and flaring of gasses during the exploration and testing phases of the proposed development.

"Millions of cubic metres of gasses including methane, benzene and other volatile compounds, some of which have no safe limit of exposure for human health, will be flared or vented 24 hours per day, for weeks.

"Not something that any of us want to experience or expose our children to.

A spokesperson for Protect Our North Coast (PONC) said: "In spite of the enormous concerns evident in the meeting and among the wider community, it was very disappointing to see that no MILAs were in attendance from North Antrim, the area most affected.

"PONC will be making direct contact with the Assembly Committee for DETI to arrange a suitable time and place for such a meeting."

A spokesman for Rathlin Energy Ltd, said: "We applied for a renewal licence from the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI) and were successful, enabling us to continue our exploration programme. Accordingly, we have submitted a planning application and we are currently preparing an Environmental Impact Assessment for submission to the Department of the Environment by January 2015."

"We are very conscious of genuine concerns expressed by residents in the area and we will continue, in the coming weeks and months, to consult with nearby neighbours. We are committed to working with the local community regarding our ongoing work."

