

Protests against award of Oil Drilling Licence off West Coast of Ireland

written by Molly Hoque, 31 May 2019

THE Department of Environment has defended the awarding of an oil exploratory licence off the coast of Kerry as fossil fuels will still be required ‘when the wind isn’t blowing and the sun isn’t shining’.

The comments come as a protest occurred outside the Dáil on Thursday – Richard Boyd Barrett, People Before Profit, accused the Taoiseach of ‘greenwash’

“I’m absolutely disgusted that the Taoiseach could at the weekend say he takes seriously the message from the people about a need for radical climate action,” he said.

“And then two days later sabotage a bill that is trying to keep fossil fuels in the ground and issue new licences for multinational oil corporations to drill for oil and gas in Irish territorial waters. It is shocking, outrageous hypocrisy.”

Minister for the Environment Richard Bruton said yesterday that halting exploration in the Irish offshore “would have no impact on our emissions and would not help us meet our EU targets.”

A representative for the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment told the Irish Independent “Minister Bruton has already said, we will be taking actions to reach 70% renewable electricity by 2030. Fossil fuels will still be required to provide a back-up supply when the wind isn’t blowing and the sun isn’t shining, as well as to heat our homes as we transition towards renewable heating systems.”

PROTESTERS marched on the Dáil on Thursday (31 May 2019) demanding a halt to oil exploration off the coast of Kerry.

Representatives from the Friends of the Earth, Schools Strike for Climate, Green Party and Solidarity People Before Profit (SPBP) attended the event at lunchtime.

They called on the government to progress a SPBP bill entitled ‘Climate Emergency Measures’ and enact on promises in relation to climate change.

Earlier this week, Bríd Smith, TD, said that she received a letter from Junior Minister Sean Canney who outlined that a “money message” would be required in order to progress the bill.

A money message is a state recommendation, signed by the Taoiseach approving of legislation that will cost the State money.

They also highlighted that Environment Minister Richard Bruton approved a licence in recent days for CNOOC Petroleum Europe and ExxonMobil for oil drilling exploration off the coast of Ireland.

Oisín Coghlan director of Friends of the Earth said that the government was “cynical and hypocritical”

“There is no point in looking for more oil and gas, my analogy is, if you’re giving up chocolate for lent, you don’t go buying lots of chocolate in the weeks before lent- I’m not going to eat this, I’m just going to keep it in my kitchen to remind me why I’m not going to eat it,” he said.

“That’s what the government is doing now, saying ‘oh lets let all the companies come and find more oil and gas and we’ll tax you, the end user, not to use it’”

Green Party leader Eamon Ryan said in order to stop the runaway climate change, we have to keep four fifths of the fossil fuels in the ground.

“So going out and exploring for more and particularly in deep Atlantic waters makes no sense, and it distracts from what we should be doing which is going out into the Atlantic to tap into our offshore wind energy and bringing that ashore as our energy supply,” he said.

“So we should stop offshore oil and gas exploration in Irish waters.

The government is blocking the majority of the Dáil who want to do that, that's a disgrace.”

Regarding to the environmental impact of the licence, a spokesperson for China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) said “we are committed to delivering this project safely, responsibly and minimising any environment impact.”

“We have a proven track record of safe and environmentally responsible exploration and bring this experience, knowledge and technical capability, along with stringent processes and procedures, to our exploration activity in the Irish offshore.” They said.

Regarding the Economic Benefit of the Licence, The Irish Offshore Operator’s Association (IOOA) estimated that “an oil find could create €16.25bn in expenditure, 1,200 jobs annually and provide tax revenue of €8.5bn, while a significant gas find could create €2.3bn in expenditure, 380 jobs per annum and provide tax revenue of €2.4bn.”

“It will benefit the people of Ireland significantly because while we all accept that a move towards renewable energy is the preferred direction to move toward; we simply cannot turn off the traditional sources of energy that-if we can source it closer to home it will be better for the environment, for our economy and for our energy security,” They said.

Interview Transcripts

Oisín Coghlan – Friends of the Earth

There is no point in looking for more oil and gas, my analogy is like, if you’re giving up chocolate for lent, you don’t go buying lots and lots chocolate in the weeks before lent- I’m not going to eat this, I’m just going to keep it in my kitchen to remind me why I’m not going to eat it. That’s what the government is trying to do now. That’s what the government is doing now, saying ‘oh lets let all the companies come and find more oil and gas and we’ll tax you, the end user, not to use it’

They need to leave it in the ground. They look like they’re capitulating to the fossil fuel industry and until they at least let TD’s debate this bill. They supported the declaration of a climate emergency just a few weeks ago and now they’re saying TD’s can’t even debate what that means in practice. Until they let TD’s debate and support that bill they won’t get any support for any other measures they take on climate action.

This is so cynical and so hypocritical that they’ve basically – everything else stops now until they let TD’s do their job.

Molly Redmond-Mercier - Schools Strike For Climate

I think it’s really upsetting, it’s so unfair on us, they had our hopes up y’know, and then they just rip it away. Like I’ve said, it’s like they’re dangling a carrot in front of our face and we’re trying to get hopeful, and then they just rip it away from us again, like it’s not fair.

I’m in a group and they were literally distraught they were like thinking about giving up hope at this point and I think that’s so unfair to do that to the youth, like actually some of them giving up hope, like this is all they’ve been doing.

It’s just hypocrisy at its highest level out there, it really is disgusting.

They’re going in the wrong direction, people are saying there is change but there isn’t.

Richard Bruton – Minister for the Environment

“halting exploration in the Irish Offshore would have no impact on our emissions and would not help us meet our EU targets. It would however guarantee that we source the fossil fuels needed in the transition in the future from outside the EU, for example from Russia or from the Persian Gulf. During this transition phase, there are several benefits of using indigenous energy versus imported energy, such as energy

security, reduced environmental impact of transporting energy over long distances and tax revenues to the State.

Fossil fuels will still be required to provide our remaining electricity needs and to provide a back-up supply when the wind isn't blowing and the sun isn't shining, as well as to heat our homes as we transition towards renewable heating systems."

CNOOC - China National Offshore Oil Corporation

1. Do you have any comment in relation to environmental concerns raised by protesters about the impact of this oil drilling exploration?

We have a proven track record of safe and environmentally responsible exploration and bring this experience, knowledge and technical capability, along with stringent processes and procedures, to our exploration activity in the Irish offshore.

2. What measures will CNOOC ensure to limit environmental damage?

Our Environmental Risk Assessment (EIA Screening) Report and Appropriate Assessment Screening report passed on the basis of a rigorous environmental assessment of the drilling programme. As the operator, we are committed to delivering this project safely, responsibly and minimising any environment impact.

3. When will CNOOC begin exploratory drilling?

Drilling is underway and will take between 100-150 days.

IOOA - Irish Offshore Operator's Association

1. How do you think this licence for oil exploration will benefit the people of Ireland?

It will benefit the people of Ireland significantly because while we all accept that a move towards renewable energy is the preferred direction to move toward; we simply cannot turn off the traditional sources of energy that people rely on in their daily lives. And while we are using energy sources like gas and oil if we can source it closer to home it will be better for the environment, for our economy and for our energy security.

The other consideration is that as it stands, Ireland is currently 100% reliant on imports to meet its demand for oil, while imports of natural gas account for approximately 30% of gas demand. However, with the end of gas production at Kinsale Head in the next couple of years and production from Corrib already declining and expected to become fully depleted by 2031, we are facing even greater challenges.

This means that unless there is a new, significant offshore find, 100% of Ireland's gas will be imported by the end of 2031.

And while we are using energy sources like gas and oil if we can source it closer to home it will be better for the environment, for our economy and for our energy security. Emissions associated with indigenous and European oil and gas are 30% less than those from imports outside of Europe, largely due to a combination of improved production efficiency and lower transport energy consumption.

From an economic perspective, the benefits are significant. Earlier this year, IOOA commissioned PwC to carry out a report to establish the value of the oil and gas industry to Ireland. The IOOA-PwC report, Value of the Indigenous Oil and Gas Industry to Ireland, found that an oil find could create €16.25bn in expenditure, 1,200 jobs annually and provide tax revenue of €8.5bn, while a significant gas find could create €2.3bn in expenditure, 380 jobs per annum and provide tax revenue of €2.4bn.

2. Do you have any comments on the protests occurring outside the Dáil in relation to this licence?

At IOOA, we recognise the need for Ireland to transition to a low-carbon economy. As we make this transition, we are committed to working with all stakeholders as how to best address this challenge.