

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-015351/15
to the Commission**

Matt Carthy (GUE/NGL)

(2 December 2015)

Subject: Conflict of interest in EPA fracking report

Community groups and activists in County Leitrim have been campaigning to stop the ongoing EPA-commissioned environmental impact assessment of fracking in Leitrim as a result of the involvement of CDM Smith — a company with strong links to the fracking industry which is leading the government-sponsored research.

CDM Smith has not declared any conflict of interest and plans have been scrapped to present the initial findings of the research at a public meeting. Queen's University has also now confirmed that it is not involved in the study, despite being named as a partner and centrally involved in reviewing the research.

There are fears that the report is likely to result in fracking being allowed in Ireland. Fracking poses a very real risk to the success of our farming industry and to the health and safety of rural communities, and could also undermine our tourism industry.

Can the Commission comment on this EPA report and outline whether it considers that CDM's involvement as lead consultant in the assessment constitutes a conflict of interest?

Answer given by Mr Vella on behalf of the Commission

(19 February 2016)

The Commission asked for further information from the Irish authorities on the Unconventional Gas Exploration and Extraction (UGEE) Joint Research Programme, managed by the Environment Protection Agency (EPA).

Based on information provided to the Commission, the contract was awarded after an open procedure and an evaluation of the various tenders received. The selected contractor CDM Smith Ireland Ltd leads a consortium of commercial consultancies, academics, a geological research institution and a legal firm and had to return a declaration of conflict of interest. As to the involvement of Queen's University Belfast, according to information received, Queen's University decided that the identified researchers were not able to fulfil their agreed responsibilities, which resulted in a change in the allocation of tasks within the consortium.

EPA does not foresee a public consultation on interim reports but indicated that 'the research findings will be reviewed by external experts, presented at public seminars and the final reports made publicly available' ⁽¹⁾ on the EPA website.

The Commission is unable to comment on the EPA report itself, since it has not yet been published. In the absence of any indications of an infringement of EC law, this question primarily is a matter for the national authorities concerned.

⁽¹⁾ http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/research/ugeejointresearchprogramme/FINAL_Response_Document_to_PublicConsultation.pdf