

**Question for written answer E-010177/2011
to the Commission**
Rule 117
Bairbre de Brún (GUE/NGL)

Subject: Hydraulic fracturing

Earlier this year, in the North of Ireland, four licences were granted for shale gas exploration in different parts of the region. Similar controversial licences have also been granted in the South.

Whilst no commercial production is taking place at present, there is a great need to examine thoroughly and assess carefully any pre-production exploration of shale gas deposits in Europe, given the potential environmental impacts of such exploration, as well as the effects it could have on tourism, the risk to agricultural production, the depletion of water supplies and the possible effects on health in the areas concerned.

The Commission has previously stated that all exploration and exploitation of shale gas projects should be covered by the EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) Directive and that an EIA is mandatory for natural gas extraction projects where the amount extracted exceeds 500 000 m³ a day. However, a European Parliament Expert Study entitled 'Impacts of shale gas and shale oil extraction on the environment and on human health' reported earlier this year that 'this limit is far too high', ignoring the reality of shale gas wells, 'which typically produce in the order of several ten thousand m³ per day in the beginning', and argued that an EIA with public participation should be mandatory for each well.

Does the Commission believe that, given the potentially disastrous environmental effects of hydraulic fracturing (fracking), the threshold of 500 000 m³ should be reviewed and lowered?

How does the Commission plan to address the high levels of public dissatisfaction in many Member States around the issue of fracking?