

Mr. Rory Boyd,
Petroleum Affairs Division,
Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources.

Re: 10 SEA 1 Slyne, Erris and Donegal Basins

The following are the observations of the Department's Strategic Environmental Assessment Working Group on the Draft Environmental Report circulated with your letter of 31 March, 2006 in this matter.

Overall, this is a comprehensive, well written Environmental Report, which deals with the main issues of concern in relation to the proposed plan to issue Frontier Exploration Licences in the Slyne, Erris and Donegal Basins.

Non-technical summary: Page i, For consistency it would be useful at the outset to state that PAD is a Division of the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources as has been done on Page 1-1.

Section 1.3.2: Energy Policy Context: It would be useful to update this section to include reference to the recently announced Renewable Energy Feed Tariff System (REFIT) programme, the Greener Homes grant programme and plan to have 2% market penetration by biofuels by 2008.

Section 2.2.5: Suggest changing sentence beginning "This will be published prior to granting of Frontier licences, ..." to "This will be published prior to consideration of granting of Frontier licences..."

Section 3: Regulatory Context: - Reference is made to a PAD document (PAD 2006b) entitled " Commercial Handbook, Licensing, Permitting and Gas Marketing in Ireland: an information summary for E&P Managers." There are number of inaccuracies in this document, which have pointed out to PAD by CZMD, and which need to be addressed before the document can be considered other than a draft.

Section 3.3.9. This section needs to be updated to take account of the transfer of the MSO, MRAU, Marine Environment Division etc from DCMNR to the Dept of Transport. Page 3-6 implies that the Maritime Safety Directorate is responsible for enforcing the Foreshore Act and the Dumping at Sea Act while this responsibility lies with the CZMD of the DCMNR.

Section 4.3: It would be useful to expand this section and set it in the context of Ireland's overall Energy needs and Energy Policy, including renewables, biofuels etc. See comment on Energy Policy context above.

Section 7.2.3 and 7.2.5. These sections deal with the effect of seismic noise. Physical damage may be caused to fish up to 2150m from a seismic array according to table 7.3. Section 7.2.5 notes that there may be 2000km of 2D seismic survey shot in 2006 and 2007. This would appear to indicate that fish in an area of 6800km² (2 x 2.15km x 2000km) may suffer physical damage at some point during this two year period. Superficially this would not seem insignificant and could perhaps be addressed further.

Section 10: Mitigation and Monitoring

The Environmental Report appears to be not sufficiently connected to the Plan (to issue Frontier Exploration Licences). The Department of Environment's "Implementation of S.E.A Directive Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment: Guidelines for Regional Authorities and Planning Authorities" recommends that an Environmental Report should have a section "Incorporation of mitigation measures and assessment results into the plan". We suggest this Environmental Report should have a similar section and that the necessary additions to be made to the Plan to allow the incorporation of the recommended mitigation measures.

Monitoring of both the activity and impacts of the activity is required under both National and International legislation. Little detail, is, however, provided on how this will be done, who will be responsible, what data will be collected, where the data will be stored, who will have access to the data etc. The section on monitoring could be considerably strengthened by providing some detail on the above questions e.g directing the reader to sources of information where such questions are answered.

Section 11: Conclusions and Recommendations:

Licensing Constraints:

On the basis of the information provided in the report the overall conclusion that there is no basis on which to suggest spatial and / or temporal licensing constraints is reasonable based on the currently available data.

The last paragraph of Section 11.3.1 page 11-5 is somewhat vague and either a firm, specific recommendation on impact assessment on seabirds and cetaceans should be made or the whole paragraph deleted.

Operational Controls:

It would be preferable in this section to have clear, specific and implementable recommendations in order to avoid any ambiguity. It is not clear from the section, as currently written, whether these are issues that might be considered by PAD or firm recommendations for actions. The 4th bullet point in this section, in connection with the filling of data gaps by operators, is particularly vague and unclear as to its intention. The section as a whole needs to be strengthened.

John Wynne,
Co-ordination Unit.

May 10th, 2006