

From: "McCARTHY, Kerry" <kerry.mccarthy.mp@parliament.uk>
Date: 28 September 2018 at 08:25:58 BST
Subject: Fracking and local democracy

Dear all,

Thank you for contacting me about the recent changes announced by the Government to fast-track fracking through the planning process – particularly its proposals to treat fracking as ‘permitted development’, which would run roughshod over local concerns. I received nearly a hundred emails from constituents ahead of the debate on 12th September, so I hope you will excuse this group reply.

I very much share your concerns about these frankly ludicrous proposals and made sure I attended the debate, which you can read [here](#). I was, however, unable to speak as it was just a 30 minute debate, which leaves hardly any time for interventions from anyone other than the MP who called the debate and the response from the Minister, but I did tweet during it, as a way of making public my concerns.

I was very surprised that the Minister responding to the debate was from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, which meant she was unable to respond to issues relating to the changes in planning policy – the precise reason for calling the debate! She also described opposition to fracking extraction as coming from “a travelling circus of protesters” rather than from the local community, directly after Tory and Labour MPs had just spoken about their constituents’ concerns.

In 2013, I gave a speech on fracking ([here](#)) and quoted a former Tory MP who said that planning applications for shale gas makes “onshore wind farms look like a walk in the park”, which has clearly now come to pass, and can’t be addressed by steamrolling the concerns of local communities.

I very much support national Labour policy which is to ban fracking altogether, as it locks us into an energy infrastructure that is based on fossil fuels long after our country needs to have moved to clean energy.

I am also deeply concerned that our protected areas – Sites of Special Scientific Interest and even national parks - will be exposed to fracking. For example, in the South West, the last round of PEDL licences in 2015 (the first stage in the process for gaining permission for exploratory drilling), were offered in one third of our protected areas – areas of natural beauty, special or scientific interest, and national parks.

When I was serving as Labour’s Shadow Environment Secretary, I worked with Labour’s then Shadow Energy & Climate Change Secretary, Lisa Nandy MP, to press the Government to fulfil promises it made to Labour during the passage of the Infrastructure Bill, to prohibit fracking in protected areas, such as national parks. We wrote a joint article about this for The Guardian, [here](#). Regrettably, the Government chose to u-turn and radically water down those conditions during the final stages of the Bill – allowing fracking [beneath](#) protected areas, including National Parks – and then compounded this further in secondary legislation which withdrew most surface protection from the areas Labour had proposed to protect too.

I have also been dismayed by the Government’s decision to override local communities, and have also questioned the Church Commissioner as why the Church of England has given the go-ahead for fracking on Church land ([here](#)). I will continue to press the Government not to impose fracking on communities against their will.

I hope this debate will lead to an application to the Backbench Business Committee for a longer debate, possibly in the main Chamber, so many more MPs can get to speak. I am sure that this issue will not go away, and that the Government will be forced to listen to local concerns.

Best wishes

Kerry

Kerry McCarthy
Labour MP for Bristol East



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