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Crispin Blunt MP  
House of Commons  
London  
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Copy to GO.

Your ref: CB/CO  
Our ref: MC2018/14425/OC

17h July 2018

Dear Crispin,

Thank you for your letter of 19 June to the Secretary of State about oil extraction in your constituency. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

The Government supports strong regulatory controls to ensure that onshore oil and gas operations are carried out safely. I hope I can assure you that where development is proposed to take place the Environment Agency (EA) will ensure that it is conducted in a way that protects people and the environment.

Horse Hill Developments Limited (HHDL) operate the Horse Hill Well Site which was permitted for a well to be drilled to prospect for oil and gas in 2014 and then carry out a series of short-term well tests early in 2016. They applied to the EA to modify this existing environmental permit to test the economic viability of the resource with a view to developing an oil production facility. Depending on the results, the operator will then consider further drilling to access other potential oil and gas reservoir rocks of interest.

The EA reviewed the application to establish if any of the proposed activities would result in discharges of substances to groundwater, contrary to Schedule 22 of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations (EPR) 2016. The operator applied for permission to use acid washing to remove any fine rock debris that arose from drilling, in the area immediately adjacent to the well bore. This proposed acid wash process is considered to be an environmentally low risk activity that is exempt from requiring authorisation for groundwater protection. The variation was issued to the company on 31 August 2017 and there are now no further permissions required from the EA. Its staff will continue to carry out regular, on-site checks and audits to ensure that the company is adhering to permit conditions and meeting the high standards required.

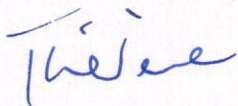
You raise the concern that other methods of acidisation do not fall under the regulatory framework of the 2015 Infrastructure Act which defines associated hydraulic fracturing. The EA assesses and regulates the risk from onshore oil and gas developments under the Environmental Permitting Regulations (England and Wales) 2016. The EA is not restricted by the definition under the Infrastructure Act 2015. Any form of fracturing would require a site specific Hydrogeological Risk Assessment before a decision is taken whether to grant an environmental permit. Any proposals to use acid for hydraulic fracturing in locations and hydrogeological environments where acid can cause pollution at the surface or of groundwater are not acceptable, and will not be permitted.

The EA considers each application in its own right on a site-by-site basis. Certain types of acidisation, such as matrix acidisation or acid fracturing, may be considered as a form of hydraulic fracturing if the dilute acid is used at sufficient volume and at pressures high enough to fracture the rock formation at a distance from the well bore. The EPR Mining waste permit for Horse Hill excludes well stimulation. This means that the operator is not allowed to carry out high volume hydraulic fracturing, matrix acidisation or any other stimulation techniques. If in the future, the company propose to use stimulation activities the EA would need to assess any plans through a new application for a permit variation.

Environmental permit conditions are legally binding and specify how companies must carry out operations to provide a high level of environmental protection. The EA has considerable expertise in the assessment of risk and the protection of the environment. It has local teams with a thorough knowledge of the local environment who monitor compliance with permits and take enforcement action if required. You can read more about its regulatory role at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulation-of-exploratory-shale-gas-operations-guidance-note>.

I hope that this information has proved helpful. If you have any further questions about the site and the proposed activities, please contact Julie Foley, Area Director for the EA. Julie will be happy to meet with you locally and can be contacted at [julie.foley@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:julie.foley@environment-agency.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely,



**DR THERESE COFFEY MP**