

## COMMUNITY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES

### Des Cox, RPS.

#### 1.0 Qualifications and Relevant Experience

- 1.1 My name is Des Cox, I am a Chartered Planner with some 14 years experience in the fields of regional, urban, rural and strategic planning. I am currently Operational Director with the Planning Division of RPS Group.
- 1.2 I hold a BA in Geography and Sociology from Trinity College Dublin, and a Master of Regional and Urban Planning (MRUP) from University College Dublin. I am a Member of both the Irish Planning Institute (IPI) and the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI).
- 1.3 I have been involved with the Corrib Onshore Pipeline project as part of the RPS Project Team, since January 2007.

#### 2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 This statement addresses a number of key issues of the Corrib Onshore Pipeline development, and cumulatively, the wider Corrib Field project, which directly or indirectly affect the local residential, working and visiting communities of the area, and the wider regional and National populations. For clarity, it does not address matters of public health and safety in respect of the proposed development, which are addressed in separate statements.
- 2.2 A separate statement to this Hearing has addressed the planning and development policy context for the project, and its considered benefits in terms of security of a strategic energy supply for the State, and opportunities for enhanced regional development, to the benefit of the residential and working populations of the region and State. On the other hand, any residual negative impacts of the project, as detailed in the EIS, however slight and whether temporary or permanent, can be expected to be most keenly experienced by the communities of the local environment in which it will be situated.
- 2.3 However, there are also likely to be direct and indirect local benefits of the proposed development, as the Erris area receives one of the largest construction projects in the State, and including the planned roll-out of a long-term community investment programme. The EIS has addressed both the impact of the proposed onshore pipeline development, and the cumulative impact of the overall Corrib Gas Field project, on the communities of the immediate and wider areas of the pipeline.
- 2.4 The application, and this statement, acknowledges the concerns of individuals and groups with regard to the nature of the overall project, and the proposed development, and notes that such concerns are not restricted to the local vicinity of the proposed development; however, it also acknowledges that there is considerable local and wider support for the project, including that documented in written submissions to An Bord Pleanála.

- 2.5 Since January 2007 RPS has undertaken a process of community engagement, consultation, and information gathering and dissemination in respect of the Onshore Pipeline development. Community and stakeholder engagement was identified at the outset as a fundamental element of the overall project strategy; it has contributed significantly to the identification of corridor and route selection criteria, and the corridor identification and route selection process.
- 2.6 In addition, since the announcement of the preferred route corridor in April 2008, RPS has undertaken a process of landowner liaison in respect of the proposed development. It is also continuing its process of community and stakeholder engagement; I have personally been involved in this ongoing consultation and engagement process, and have met with, and/or discussed the key issues of the proposed development with local residents in Rosspoint, local business operators and in Belmullet, (being the primary town of the Erris area), and bodies such as Erris Chamber of Commerce and Turasóireacht Iorrais (Gabhálas) Teo (Erris Tourism (Holdings) Ltd).

### 3.0 Existing Environment

- 3.1 The proposed route of the onshore pipeline is approximately 9.2 km long, of which approximately 7.5 km is over land, the remaining portion being the upper and lower crossings of Sruwaddacon Bay. Approximately 3 km of the land route is through privately owned farm land. Most of this farm land is of relatively good agricultural quality, and is currently used for grazing drystock. Approximately 2 km of the route runs through forestry, consisting mainly of lodge pole pine grown on blanket peat. Approximately 2.5 km of the route runs through commonage lands, of poor quality from an agricultural perspective, which are mainly used for grazing drystock and cutting turf.
- 3.2 Turf cutting is generally undertaken on areas close to vehicular access points for easy removal of harvested turf. Some of these access points are from public roads, while some are specifically constructed roads or tracks to access turf plots. The proposed onshore pipeline will cross a number of public roads and private roads or tracks used to access the commonage, and will cross a number of plots currently used for turf cutting.
- 3.3 **(Slide No. 1)** The local vicinity of the proposed pipeline, and the wider Erris area, has an established rural settlement structure, with generally clustered or linear settlements separated by an expansive rural landscape. Dwellings are also located along the approach roads to the settlements. As recorded in the EIS (Vol. 1, Chapter 6) the settlements of the Erris and wider area typically contain a range of basic commercial and community facilities, such as schools, churches, pubs and shops. Larger or more specialised facilities, such as supermarkets, banks and comparison retail facilities (such as clothes or shoe shops) are located in larger settlements such as Belmullet, Ballina and Castlebar, some distance from the local vicinity of the pipeline route.
- 3.4 The Erris area, and the local vicinity of the pipeline route, is one of outstanding physical beauty. Natural amenities include coastal uplands, beaches, rugged coastline, and blanket bog landscape. This wild beauty is emphasised by its remoteness, with the clustered settlements of the area connected by a modest network of county roads.

- 3.5 Turasóireacht Iorrais (Gabháltas) Teo has confirmed my consideration that the remote nature of the area, combined with some considered deficiency in physical infrastructure in the area, has resulted in the evolution of a tourism product that, for the most part comprises outdoor activities focusing on the natural and human cultural heritage of the local and wider area; such activities include touring, beach activities, river, lake and sea fishing, and walking.
- 3.6 As detailed at Volume 1, Section 6.3.11 of the EIS, within the wider receiving environment of the pipeline, we identified 2 B&B/guesthouse outlets, and a holiday hostel. A B&B is also located in Portacloy, while holiday cottages are advertised in Inver. It is acknowledged that there may be other unregistered and unadvertised accommodation in the area.
- 3.7 As noted in Volume 1, Chapter 6 of the EIS, and as confirmed by Turasóireacht Iorrais (Gabháltas) Teo and Erris Chamber of Commerce, for the most part, such tourism activities in the area of the pipeline development are daytime-based, with a return to accommodation and evening/night-time facilities and activities within the larger towns of the area, in particular Belmullet, Bangor Erris, Ballina and Castlebar.
- 3.8 A local company, based in Rossport, provides a bus service which links the Erris area with Belmullet. A daily return service operates three days a week, with a twice daily service operating on Fridays. This comprises a valuable public transport link between the area within which the proposed pipeline development route lies, the wider Erris Area, and the largest town of the area.

#### **4.0 Community Engagement and Liaison**

- 4.1 Consultation and engagement - with local communities, the wider public, stakeholders, and Statutory and non-Statutory agencies (including An Bord Pleanála and Mayo County Council) - has comprised a fundamental element of the Corrib Onshore Pipeline project. As is described in Volume 1, Chapter 2 of the EIS, RPS prepared and initiated a consultation strategy at the outset of the onshore pipeline project in early 2007, prior to the identification of any potential route corridor. The early involvement of the public and other stakeholders assisted in the process for identifying selection criteria for the modified route; such engagement continued through the route selection process itself, and will continue through the construction and operational phases of the onshore pipeline project, and the overall Corrib Field project.
- 4.2 It is not proposed to reiterate in this statement the full detail of community consultation and engagement, as set out at Volume 1, Chapter 2 of the EIS; it is useful, however, to note key elements of the overall consultation strategy, which have ensured that the local communities of the area of the onshore pipeline have contributed to, or have had the opportunity to contribute to, and engage in, the identification of a modified onshore pipeline route.
- A dedicated RPS community and stakeholder consultation team was assigned to develop the consultation strategy;
  - From the outset of the Corrib Onshore Pipeline project in early 2007, a local RPS Project Office was established in Belmullet, where a full time RPS Consultation Team Manager and other project staff were based, to facilitate local community and stakeholder consultation. This office, open during

normal office hours, includes a project display area and meeting room, where members of the community can meet with project staff;

- The RPS consultation process commenced in early 2007 in tandem with the technical and environmental information gathering processes. The public consultation process was advertised widely, and the public were encouraged to visit the RPS Project Office, or otherwise engage with the RPS Consultation Team to discuss the project, whether in support or opposition to the project.
- A number of consultation events were held to consult and inform the public with regard to the route selection process for the onshore pipeline. These included 'Open Days', a Community Workshop, 'Open House Week' and Public Displays. These events, which were also widely advertised, combined with other means of community and public engagement, and confirmed to RPS a range of criteria of importance and/or concern to local communities, the general public, and other stakeholders. Key issues raised by the public and by other stakeholders are set out at Tables 2.1 and 2.3 of the EIS (Vol. 1). As referred to in the separate statement to this Hearing in respect of the route selection process, these criteria formed the basis for identifying potential route corridors, and ultimately, the preferred route.
- In particular, the purpose of the Community Workshop was to gain a greater understanding of, and to develop, the criteria that the residential and working communities of the local and wider vicinities of the area considered important in the route selection process. The information received at the workshop, and indeed from the wider consultation process, was reviewed by the technical and environmental specialists of the Project Team. In combination with the parallel process of information gathering by the technical and environmental experts of the Project Team, this fed into the shortlisting and route selection process, as has been described in a separate statement to this Hearing.
- Community Update Brochures were published on a regular basis and at each project milestone, and were hand delivered to approximately 3,500 homes throughout the local and wider area. These Brochures were intended to keep the local communities of the area, the general public, and other stakeholders updated on progress with regard to the route selection process, and the subsequent applications process. Each brochure invited further consultation and engagement with the RPS Consultation Team, giving contact details of RPS Consultation personnel.
- A stand alone website ([www.corribgaspipeline.ie](http://www.corribgaspipeline.ie)) dedicated to the Corrib Onshore Pipeline project was set up as a virtual means of consultation and information-sharing with the public and to further assist the consultation and information-gathering process.
- The key deliverable of this consultation and engagement process was a modified onshore pipeline route in the vicinity of Rosspport which meets the criteria derived from the public consultation process, as well as safety, engineering and other technical and environmental constraints. The proposed modified route meets documented community concerns regarding matters of public health and safety, whilst also having regard to other

matters considered by the communities to be of importance, including environmental and visual amenity.

- 4.3 As noted above, following identification of C1 as the preferred route for the onshore pipeline, RPS commenced a process of landowner liaison, co-ordinated and managed by an experienced RPS Liaison Officer. Liaison was directed towards landowners and occupiers along this identified route, and directly affected by the proposed development.
- 4.4 This process included identifying, and talking with (or inviting talks with) all landowners, and occupiers of lands upon which the proposed pipeline was planned to occur; contact would initially be made by means of telephone calls and/or letters to all identified landowners and occupiers of lands along the pipeline route; it is noted that, at the initial time of contact, some members of the local community expressed their wish not to engage in this liaison process.
- 4.5 RPS remains engaged in ongoing and regular contact with owners and occupiers of lands along the pipeline route who are prepared to engage in the liaison process. Such contact principally includes face-to-face meetings, but also includes telephone calls and other correspondence, as not all landowners are resident in the area, or even the State. Meetings occur primarily at the properties of these affected persons, or in other venues of their choosing. They also occur at the RPS Project Office at Seafield House, Belmullet.
- 4.6 This liaison process is complemented by the wider ongoing RPS community engagement and information-sharing process outlined above; this ensures that other members of the local communities along the pipeline route, but who are not actually landowners or occupiers along the route, also have a facility to contact RPS and thereby engage in the overall liaison process. This process has proved successful, and RPS has met, spoke, or otherwise engaged with, and continues to engage with, many members of the local residential and working communities within the local and wider vicinity of the proposed onshore pipeline development.

## 5.0 Socio-Economic Profile

- 5.1 In order to evaluate information being gathered during the ongoing community liaison and consultation process, and to substantiate observations obtained during meetings and area driving surveys, as detailed in Volume 1, Chapter 6 of the EIS, RPS carried out a desktop socio-economic profile assessment of the Erris Area (also detailed in Volume 1, Chapter 6 of the EIS). (**Slide No. 2**) This was substantially based upon the most recent (2006) Census of Population. The assessment was evaluated against the area assessment detailed in the Cill Chomáin Development Plan 2006-2010 – a locally prepared development strategy for the area of the Corrib project.
- 5.2 This local plan, the area assessment of which is consistent with the Official Statistics, suggests a socio-economic profile characterised by a dispersed settlement pattern, a deficiency in local employment opportunities, a traditional dependence on small-scale primary sector activities such as farming and fishing, but a recent growth in construction employment. I believe this may be attributable in part to the construction of the Corrib Gas Terminal.

- 5.3 This socio-economic assessment also accords with qualitative statements made in various written submissions to An Bord Pleanála, and with the profile contained in the 2004 Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region. These Guidelines identify an urgent need to promote and encourage farm diversification, and also to examine alternative means of earning incomes, in order to stem the current experience of rural population decline in the Region.

## **6.0 Potential impacts and Mitigation Measures**

- 6.1 The EIS has acknowledged that construction of the proposed development could result in temporary nuisance and disturbance to residential communities in the vicinity of the planned works (Volume 1, Section 6.6. and Volume 3, Section 5.5); such temporary consequence would not be unexpected in any linear construction project. This will be mitigated primarily by means of appropriate management of construction, and adherence with an Environmental Management Plan, as set out at Section 5.13 (Vol. 1) of the EIS.
- 6.2 In particular, it is proposed to extract peat from the route of the proposed pipeline development, and to deposit this peat at the Srahmore peat deposition site. This will occur via an identified haul route, and will be managed by means of a convoy system where required, in order to minimise any potential impact. It is acknowledged that, having regard to the nature of the existing road network of the area of the pipeline, a convoy system could cause local inconvenience for the residential, working and visiting communities of the area, including private vehicles, school buses and other road users. This will be a temporary inconvenience, and will be of a planned and managed duration, to reduce potential impacts on all road users. Matters of traffic movements, road safety, and access to properties, schools etc. are addressed in a Traffic Management Plan, included as Appendix E of Volume 1 of the EIS, and as also outlined in Chapter 7 of Volume 1 of the EIS, and Chapter 16 of Volume 3 of the EIS.
- 6.3 Section 11.7 of Volume 1 of the EIS, addresses the impact of the proposed development on Utilities – electricity supply, telecommunications, water supply, sanitary services, and lighting. It is acknowledged at this section of the EIS that there will be locations along the route of the proposed development where the existing overhead and/or underground utilities will be crossed. As confirmed at Volume 1 Section 11.7.5 of the EIS, all utilities will be identified prior to construction, and particular care will be taken during construction at points where the proposed development crosses these utilities.
- 6.4 Any potential impact of the proposed pipeline development on utilities is considered only to occur during construction of the proposed development. In this regard, it is anticipated that all utilities will remain operational for the duration of construction. Should utilities have to be temporarily disrupted to facilitate construction of the development, advance public notice will be given. Any utility affected during construction will be quickly reinstated and made operational. Section 11.7.4 of Volume 1 of the EIS concludes that no significant impact is anticipated in this regard during the construction, and operation, of the proposed development.
- 6.5 A key element for the overall mitigation of adverse impact on the local communities during construction is the continuation of a structured system for public information, communication, and feedback. This includes both ongoing liaison with the local community, and specific liaison with landowners on agricultural and other issues that may arise during the construction process.

- 6.6 Whilst local nuisance may occur with the construction of the proposed pipeline, such potential temporary impact must be considered in the context of the wider strategic benefit that will occur with the provision of the pipeline as part of the overall Corrib Field project, and the delivery of natural gas from the Corrib Field.
- 6.7 As detailed at Chapter 6 of Volume 1 of the EIS, it is anticipated that some 120-140 persons will be employed in construction of the proposed onshore pipeline. Separately, as detailed at Chapter 5 of Volume 3 of the EIS, it is estimated that the manning requirement for the peat deposition activity will be up to 50 people for a period of 3 to 4 months. In addition, based on the experience arising during construction of the terminal, it is envisaged that during construction of the pipeline, there will be an economic benefit to the local and wider vicinity of the development in support services such as retailing, building supplies, transport and accommodation.
- 6.8 In cumulative terms, it is noteworthy that peak construction at the gas terminal employs some 1,000 persons. In operation, the Applicant envisages that some 60 permanent jobs will be created in the technical operation and maintenance of the terminal. The recruitment process for this employment has commenced, with over half the jobs being filled to date by suitably qualified persons residing in County Mayo. In addition, it is anticipated that some 100-120 persons will be employed in support occupations, such as administration, catering, general maintenance, etc. The Applicant envisages that support services can be provided as local contracts. Visiting staff to the terminal requiring overnight stay will avail of local accommodation and associated facilities.
- 6.9 As detailed at Section 11.5.2 of Volume 1 of the EIS, it is considered that the proposed pipeline development will have no impact upon development potential. This derives from our consideration that the development potential along the route of the pipeline is currently extremely limited, having regard to the landscape and environmental designations of the area, and the stringent rural housing policies of the Statutory Development Plan. It is our consideration that any significant development potential is effectively restricted to the settlement of Rossport. Development will require to be prohibited within the identified permanent wayleave of the pipeline (and within the wider temporary working area during construction and subsequent reinstatement of these lands).
- 6.10 It is acknowledged in this section of the EIS that a site on the northern side of the coast road in Rossport at pipeline crossing RDX1 does have development potential which will be lost as the pipeline wayleave crosses this site. While the existing houses on this site have been vacant and/or inhabitable for some time, this does not lessen its potential for re-development. However, the Applicant is the legal owner of the site, and no third party development potential is affected.
- 6.11 Elsewhere having regard to current codes and standards governing the design and operation of the proposed pipeline, the pipeline will not comprise a constraint or obstacle to the potential for future development outside the identified permanent wayleave.
- 6.12 Agricultural land will require to be temporarily removed from production during the construction of this proposed development. There are also likely to be temporary access restrictions across agricultural lands. However, from experience of other pipeline development, such impact on agricultural practice -

to facilitate the phased construction of what is a linear development - is localised, short-term and moderate.

- 6.13 The proposed development will have a long term but minor impact on one small farmholding at the location where the LVI is proposed, due to the loss of agricultural land. Again, the Applicant is the legal owner of this farmholding and no third party landowner is affected. The residual impact on third party agricultural lands through which the proposed pipeline goes will be minor. The proposed pipeline will have no significant residual impact on agriculture from a local, regional or national perspective.
- 6.14 Tree felling and temporary severance during construction will impact on forestry. Once construction is complete, no forestry can be re-planted within the 20m permanent wayleave area proposed through the forested area. The proposed development will prohibit forestry production within the permanent wayleave, but will have no significant impact on forestry from a local, regional, or national perspective.
- 6.15 The commonage lands are primarily used for two purposes. The first is grazing of drystock and the second for turf cutting for fuel. There are no fences on the commonage, so any temporary loss of a small area of commonage for grazing will constitute a potential minor impact. As turf cutting is undertaken on small plots that are generally adjacent to vehicular access points, restricting access to these plots will also have a potential local significant impact. The permanent wayleave of the proposed pipeline will result in a permanent impact to a small number of plots where it will no longer be possible to cut turf, or otherwise where the exploitation of turf plots is restricted. The impact of the proposed pipeline on turf cutting on the whole commonage is considered to be minor.
- 6.16 The primary mitigation for all such temporary and permanent impact of removal of use and/or landtake will be by compensation, which is not a matter of proper planning and sustainable development to be addressed at this Hearing. Existing means of access to agricultural and residential landholdings, including turf plots, will be maintained where practicable; alternative temporary access points will be provided to such affected landholdings where retention of an existing access is not possible.



## 7.0 Community Investment

- 7.1 The Social Investment Programme currently being implemented by SEPIL is a key element of the overall Corrib Project. Deriving from a recommendation of the Cassells Mediation Report, this front-loaded Programme of community investment, comprises both a Local Grants Programme, and a Scholarship programme, and must be considered to constitute a significant commitment by the Applicant to ensuring a community gain for the Erris area, in addition to the direct and indirect socio-economic benefits detailed above, and in the EIS.
- 7.2 The objectives of the Programme are contribute to the long term economic, social, environmental and cultural development of Kilcommon and the wider Erris area, by providing both financial and non-financial assistance which will benefit the local community. Non-financial assistance includes providing advice and support for business planning for community-led projects, and development of mentoring networks to provide professional advice and assistance
- 7.3 This Programme has committed to a grants fund of €5 million over its first three years; it is intended that the fund will run over the life of the project. Whilst funded by the Applicant, the application of the Programme, in terms of where such grant assistance is best provided, has direct and pro-active input by an advisory panel, comprising representatives of Údarás na Gaeltachta, LEADER, Council for the West, Mayo County Enterprise Board, and Mayo County Council. This will ensure that this community investment strategy will contribute to the long-term economic, social and environmental development of the Erris area. This Programme complements other financial grants which have already been made by the Applicant to projects, community groups and facilities in the Erris area and its environs. The success of this Programme, and its potential to ensure widespread local benefit is confirmed by the fact that 83 no. different community groups received a grant in 2008.
- 7.4 The extent of community investment by the Applicant must also have cumulative regard to the various levies and contributions paid in respect of Conditions of Permission relating to the Bellanaboy Bridge gas terminal per Appeal Ref. PL 16.207212. In total, financial contributions towards upgrading of local and regional roads and water supply infrastructure amounted to over €5.7 million; a special contribution of €30,000 was directed towards specialist infrastructure required by Mayo County Fire Service; the Applicant has provided €64,000 for artwork; finally, the Board Conditioned a Peat Levy amounting to €1 per m<sup>3</sup> of waste peat transported to the deposition site towards the cost of the provision of environmental improvements, recreational or community amenities in the locality. The Peat Levy fund was administered by Mayo County Council.
- 7.5 Whilst the totality of community investment by the Applicant in the area comprises both a voluntary programme of investment (albeit following a recommendation from the Cassells Report), and by way of Condition pursuant to a Permission for development which facilitates the Applicant and the Corrib Gas Field development, it must be considered to comprise a significant community gain for the local and wider vicinity of the proposed development, in the context of good planning practice, and to the benefit of the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

## 8.0 Conclusions

- 8.1 There remain issues of concern among some members of the general public in respect of the proposed onshore pipeline development, principally concerning matters regarding the safety of the pipeline infrastructure, and ensuring the protection of the environment. Such matters have comprised fundamental criteria in shaping the specific nature and extent of the proposal, as has been addressed in the separate statement in respect of the Route Selection Process and Alternatives Considered. Of note, the proposed onshore pipeline route is a greater distance from existing occupied houses than the previously approved pipeline and has a guaranteed limitation of onshore pipeline pressure.
- 8.2 Other local, public and stakeholder concerns raised during the consultation and liaison processes have also been addressed throughout the overall EIS, with the identification of potential impacts and consequent mitigation measures.
- 8.3 Concerns of the local communities regarding matters relating to both the construction and operation of the planned onshore pipeline development, and indeed the wider Corrib Field Project, will continue to be addressed through ongoing community and landowner liaison and communication.
- 8.4 On this basis, I remain satisfied that the proposed development will not have any significant adverse impact upon *“the existence, activities and well-being of people”*, but rather offers an opportunity for a long-term benefit of a new indigenous energy source, and associated long-term and sustainable direct and indirect social and economic benefits to the local and wider vicinities of the development. The proposed development is therefore considered to be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.