

13th February 2015

Dear Constituents,

Thank you for contacting me about the Infrastructure Bill.

The Government has amended the Infrastructure Bill to put in place a regulatory regime which provides greater clarity and certainty of the strong environmental protections that are in place.

Ministers are committed to exploration for shale gas and oil, and believe the country cannot ignore the opportunity to extract this domestic energy and secure jobs and investment. They want to give the shale industry the best possible chance of success in the future, by providing clear reassurance around the safety and environmental sustainability of the regime.

This includes further protections for groundwater. Fracking will not take place within protected groundwater source areas and secondary legislation will be brought forward later this year to set out these definitions in law. The Government's approach is based on the advice of the Environment Agency. Ministers are also consulting on whether to make water companies statutory consultees in respect of any applications.

The new measures to further strengthen the regulatory regimes and place a duty on the Secretary of State, when issuing a well consent (as required by an onshore licence for England or Wales), to impose conditions which prohibit hydraulic fracturing at depths of less than 1000 metres.

Hydraulic fracturing at depths of 1000 metres or more will need a "hydraulic fracturing consent". The latter cannot be granted unless a number of conditions have been met, including, for example, environmental impact assessments and monitoring the level of methane in groundwater. The amendment makes provisions which will ban hydraulic fracturing in National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

In addition, the Government tabled an amendment to strengthen the requirement for the Secretary of State to seek advice from the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) on the likely impact of onshore petroleum production. This gives the Secretary of State a duty, following the CCC's advice on the impact of onshore petroleum production on UK climate change targets and carbon budgets, either to stop the right of use provisions for operations or to make a written statement to Parliament explaining the reasons for not doing so.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Alok Sharma MP