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Consultation on mineral exploration and mining

draft mining policy 2021

15/10/21

A personal response

A Tipping Point?

When I look at the maps of prospecting concessions across Ireland I am reminded of the maps produced for the 1884/5 Berlin Conference where the seven empires of Europe divided up the map of Africa so that each got access to the mineral wealth of the continent. Historically and economically, mining, the search for gold, minerals, fuels, and the dream of el dorado has been the engine which has driven the rise of political dominance and the amassing of individual wealth and power throughout the world.

Globalisation, the connectivity of these powerful economic interests has thwarted national self interest, environmental and human sectors opposed to mining, by the weight of its clout.

Ireland has been caught.

At a time when the world looks forward to brave, courageous and complex solutions to global warming, this mining draft policy is on the side of an historic culture, ancient and modern practices, of an industry which continues to drive a juggernaut through real time life. The life of those of us who live here, life of the earth and the air we all need to thrive and to stay alive in these dangerous times.

The concession mining maps of Ireland shows where gold prospecting in Ireland has been granted. So there is gold in Ireland. Not a lot, but enough to tickle the humours of the gambler and the market investors looking for a bump in share price. The expansion of prospecting and mining in Ireland has stimulated the development of educational and scientific sectors where, for the most part, field work experience is risk free. By that I mean no threat to life or limb. Ireland is a peaceful, conservative, and democratic country. The mining industry wants to have reserves in 'calm waters' in recognition of difficult times ahead. The policy acknowledges this.

My concern is that the historic and deep seated culture and behaviour of the industry cannot and will not be contained by the regulatory framework and policies of the document. The evidence contradicts the vision.

It is not a time to offer a 'come all ye' to the extractive industry of the world to dig deep, wide and poop. The industry leaves a mess to be resolved no matter what colour it is painted. The profit is exported and hoarded elsewhere. The offers of jobs are a small carrot well passed its sell by date.

The ingrained behaviour of individual companies towards communities, individuals, property, the landscape, the callous use of the power of money to divide rural communities masquerading as community benefit is well documented. Community benefit is a chimera. The industry is exceptionally poor at consultation. It starts from a position of a 'win' for them. The rest is the new word 'mitigation'. I, nor the community I live in, are mitigation. Prospecting Licences were granted during the National Public Health crisis. The Pandemic. This cannot happen again. I thought the Aarhus Convention precautionary principle would have shone a light on the decision at that time. But no. Policy needs to include moratoriums on activity locally and nationally when life and the economy is under threat. Events will happen again. The world climate is seeing to that. Making decisions is the responsibility of government. It should be included in policy. It cannot be left up to the discretion or decision of individual companies. Self interest will prevail over national interest to protect its people.

Working mines and prospecting up to the boundary, the line, of the concession is the known practice. The Law. This will not save the small number of protected conservation and habitats spaces, in Ireland from damage. Nor will it protect homes and community life. There needs to be a cordon sanitaire around each and every designated and future designated piece of land and human habitation on your maps for the industry. No go areas for mining and prospecting. This is irrespective of where the rock formation says the mineral is. What we have we hold dear. The application for prospecting and mining needs to make that clear in the company notices to the public and media from the start of both processes. No need for a battle to protect. This will focus the minds of the industry and the community in a less chaotic way. Consultation could be more humble, respectful....a listening and negotiation process. The company wishing to explore or mine will need to up their skills, knowledge and behaviour towards people. The law is there to protect people. The property and spaces inhabited by the industry do not take precedence. The present and proposed arrangement are scatter gun in which the Department absolves itself of the responsibilities of the human and the earth costs of the policy. No more 'Berlin ' conference maps please.

This country may be on the western shores of the EU but that does not mean we have to take on the burden with other countries at the boundaries of Europe for these decisions and creation of reserves. As for our international interests and obligations these are constructs of a paradigm in decline. Sometimes we have to accept that the old ways no longer work. And say so. Not an easy task. But Ireland can become part of that delegation. The addiction to gold, and extraction is deep and comfortable and remains a major threat to us all.

Greed , individual and group wealth are core to the thrust, growth, and divisions in our present and past civilisations. Conversation about policy in Ireland cannot be separated from our global and national future. We are intrinsically linked by our past and the way forward.

It is a moral dilemma. It needs wider discussion, thought and learning. For example I agree that the underbelly of the extractive industries have a dark, illegal, and ecologically destructive side as well as having little respect or value for human life. The mining policy is not strong enough nor I suspect will it ever be to hold these negative outcomes at bay. They are already here.

We need to take a route in policy, regulation and integration which is new to the departmental structure presently in place. It is called joined up thinking and practice. No longer is the merchant, the banker, the gold digger, the lobbyists local or international at the center of policy.

Us . Our land. Our hopes of survival. That is the new centre.

Growth, profit, have new meaning now. They are no longer God. They are the threat.

Enough, recycle, reduce, sustain All the children of the earth know these words now.
No more Jack and the bean stalk stories. No more singing of 'O Mary....gangs of them
digging for gold in the streets.'

Gold is beautiful, has many wonderful and life saving, scientific and artistic uses. We are
so lucky to have so much above ground, recyclable and in storage. We have enough. That
is my hope. And I know there really is enough.

The Tipping Point is already behind us.

