

Government energy security plans unrealistic and flawed, experts say

State has excluded the critically important option of a liquefied natural gas terminal, say engineers



Minister for the Environment Eamon Ryan. Photograph: Gareth Chaney/Collins Photos

Barry O'Halloran

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Government energy security plans to ensure the country will have enough gas and electricity to meet its needs in coming years are “entirely unrealistic” and “flawed”, experts said, as the country faces into one of the most difficult winters in years.

Minister for the Environment Eamon Ryan last month published a report, Security of Energy Supply of Ireland’s Electricity and Natural Gas Systems, on the issue. The consultation period for submissions on the report ends this week.

The Irish Academy of Engineering described many of its proposals as entirely unrealistic and flawed in a response detailed on Tuesday.

The Corrib gas field could run out by 2030 leaving Ireland depending solely on fuel imports needed to generate electricity to be delivered via the Moffat pipeline from Scotland, it said.

The academy, whose members include professionals who have worked in the Irish and global energy industries, said the Government has excluded the critically important option of a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal, posing a high risk to power supplies.

“Far from being excluded, this option should have been considered as a potential major contributor to the long-term security of Ireland’s energy supply.”

The Government’s opposition to LNG is based on the fear that it would allow imports of gas extracted by “fracking”, a method that environmentalists oppose.

The academy said by 2030 a fifth of Europe’s gas will be fracked so Ireland will consume significant amounts of fracked gas by then, irrespective of whether or not it has an LNG terminal.

The academy said the alternative proposal, a floating storage and regasification unit — essentially a floating LNG plant — was not designed to provide strategic gas storage, as the Government document suggested, because this would hold less than four days’ gas supply at times of peak demand.

The Government report said the abandoned Kinsale field could be used for natural gas storage.

However, engineers said this is “entirely unrealistic” as it would require developing the field from square one, including a big upfront investment in “cushion gas” to enable this proposal to work.

Optimism about green hydrogen’s potential is also unrealistic as this will not be commercially available for at least 15 years.

The Government’s report said it would cost €1 billion to build an electrolyser that would produce enough green hydrogen from water to generate 1,600MW of electricity.

That would be 80 times bigger than the largest such facility in use anywhere in the world today, the academy said. It also said the Republic had nowhere to store hydrogen.

An academy briefing said the organisation supported green hydrogen development but said energy policy must be based on realistic development timescales.

Don Moore, chairman of the academy's energy committee, said the report adequately assessed the risk to Irish supplies, but said its proposals were simplistic and ignore costs and timing, making it entirely unsuitable for future planning.

He said relying on a single import source for gas posed a serious strategic threat to supplies.

“It is essential for the security of Irish energy supplies that Ireland develops its own LNG import facility as soon as possible,” Mr Moore said.

Barry O'Halloran

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