

# **CONSULTATION SUMMARY REPORT**

*for*

**Mineral Prospecting Licence Application**

*from*

**Flintridge Resources Limited**

**OMA1/22**

*Application OMA1/22 is for an area, known as OM1/16, that the Department previously licensed to Flintridge Resources Limited – the most recent licence, OM1/16, expired on 18 July 2022.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Under Section 11 of the Mineral Development Act (Northern Ireland) 1969 (the 1969 Act), the Department for the Economy (the Department), grants Mineral Prospecting Licences (MPLs), for the exploration of base metals as vested in the Department. The 1969 Act can be accessed at the following link:

[Mineral Development Act \(Northern Ireland\) 1969 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1969/11)

In December 2021, Flintridge Resources Limited submitted an application to the Department for an MPL covering an area that Flintridge Resources Limited had previously held under an MPL. The previous MPL, known as OM1/16 expired on 18 July 2022.

## **2. CONSULTATION PROCESS**

As required under Section 11 (3) and (4) of the 1969 Act, the Department undertook a notification/public consultation process on the application. The documentation issued to inform that process can be viewed at: [Flintridge Resources Limited OMA1/22 documents](#). The consultation period ran from 6 June 2022 to 28 August 2022.

The objective of this document is to provide a summary of the issues and concerns raised during the consultation period and to set out the Departments' response to each.

## **3. NUMBER OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES**

When the consultation closed on 28 August 2022, the Department had received a total of 90 responses in respect of the application.

As the notification/consultation documentation outlined, as well as allowing the general public to provide a response, the Department specifically requested a number of stakeholder organisations to provide views on the intention to award the MPLs.

Out of the total of 118, 8 responses were from those stakeholder organisations and the remaining 110 were from other organisations and the public.

As in previous licensing consultation processes, several template letters have been produced to enable the public to make representations. Two such template letters were identified. In total, these accounted for 97% of all responses from the public and outlined in Table 1 below

**Table 1: Template Letters**

<b>Template</b>	<b>No of Responses</b>	<b>% of Overall Total</b>
<b>1</b>	80	73
<b>2</b>	26	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>97</b>

#### **4. ISSUES RAISED AND DEPARTMENTAL RESPONSE**

The reader is asked to note that this consultation was carried out at the same time as three other MPL applications. Most of the issues and concerns raised were of a generic nature to mineral exploration and as such most respondents indicated that their response covered all four applications. For that reason, this report considers all the issues raised, regardless of whether it was deemed specific to this application.

The Department has drawn out all the relevant issues and concerns raised and has grouped them under the following six themes:

1. The Consultation Process
2. Legal
3. Applicant Company
4. Societal
5. Environmental
6. Economic

The remainder of this Consultation Summary Report details each of the individual issues, grouped under the six themes above.

#### **4.1 Consultation Process**

- 4.1.1 Lack of Information within the consultation documentation
- 4.1.2 Restrictions in advertising and impact of summer holiday period
- 4.1.3 Implications of European Convention on Human Rights and the Aarhus Convention
- 4.1.4 Lack of Community Outreach and Engagement from Applicants

#### **4.2 Legal**

- 4.2.1 The effectiveness of legislation governing minerals licensing
- 4.2.2 On-going judicial processes
- 4.2.3 Permitted Development Rights
- 4.2.4 Interaction between Crown Estate Options and MPLs

#### **4.3 Applicant Company**

- 4.3.1 Lack of Due Diligence into Applicants

#### **4.4 Societal**

- 4.4.1 Community division caused by Exploration and Mining
- 4.4.2 Lack of information to communities on exploration activities

#### **4.5 Environmental**

- 4.5.1 Lack of Environmental Screening or Impact Assessment
- 4.5.2 Lack of Strategic Environmental Assessment
- 4.5.3 Lack of Transboundary Consultation
- 4.5.4 Cumulative impact of exploration
- 4.5.5 The Precautionary Principle

#### **4.6 Economic**

- 4.6.1 Impact on Tourism
- 4.6.2 Impact on Employment

### **4.1 CONSULTATION PROCESS**

#### **4.1.1 Lack of Information within the Consultation documentation**

Some respondents stated that there was insufficient information made available in respect of the applications for MPLs and noted that the lack of information prevented them from participating fully in the process. Respondents pointed specifically to the fact that the Work Programme had been redacted from the published Application Form.

Some respondents cited that they were unable to identify, in any meaningful way, the types of activity that may be associated with each MPL. Others noted that there was insufficient geological information provided regarding the Licence area.

#### ***Departmental Response***

While the Department aims to be as open and transparent as possible, it is also required to safeguard the interests, economic and otherwise, of the applicant. An application for an MPL contains commercially sensitive information particularly within the Work Programme. Any commercially sensitive information is withheld as it could be used by the applicant's competitors to their commercial advantage and therefore to the detriment of the applicant's own commercial interests. The Department will work with all applicants to ensure any redaction of information is in line with our desire to be as open and transparent as possible while working within the parameters of the exceptions outlined in the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

Minerals exploration is an iterative process, and it is not possible for an Applicant to provide the specifics of exploration activities at the outset. However, the Department has made it a condition of an MPL that a Licensee must have permission from the Department before undertaking any, and all, specific exploration activity throughout the lifetime of an MPL. The Department will ensure, as appropriate, that all other relevant statutory organisations are consulted, and all other required permissions and consents are in place before consent to proceed with any given activity is given.

The Department contends that in relation to MPLs, it carries out an informed and extensive consultation process, which is over and above what is set out in the 1969 Act.

In respect of insufficient geological information being made available, the Department, through Geological Survey Northern Ireland (GSNI), provides very extensive geological information about Northern Ireland on its website: this can be accessed at the following link:

[Welcome to the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland \(bgs.ac.uk\)](http://bgs.ac.uk)

#### **4.1.2 Restrictions in advertising and impact of summer holiday period**

Some respondents reported that they felt that public notification/consultation undertaken in relation to this application was too narrow. More questioned the Department's motive for undertaking this consultation over a holiday period.

#### ***Departmental Response***

The requirement for the Department to undertake public notification/consultation is outlined in the 1969 Act. The Department goes beyond the minimum requirements as set out in the 1969 Act for all MPL applications. The specific notification arrangements for MPLs are specified in Sections 11 (3) and (4) of the 1969 Act. In summary this requires the Department to:

1. notify its intention to grant licences by publicising for two successive weeks in the Belfast Gazette and in one or more newspapers circulating in the locality where the land is situated;
2. consult other Departments, public bodies and local authorities (Local Councils) concerning the intention to issue a licence;
3. name a place or places (including at least one place in the locality) where maps identifying the land are available for inspection at all reasonable hours; and
4. consider representations made to it within one month of publicising its intention in respect of the licence application when taking a decision.

The Department has met all statutory requirements as outlined above and below details several key enhancements to that process:

1. all relevant documentation pertaining to the application was/is placed on the Department's website;
2. respondents were invited to contact the Department if they wished to view any of the documents and an appointment would be arranged to facilitate this;
3. the notification of the intention to award the Licences was placed in numerous newspapers in each locality for a two-week period; and
4. the period of notification/consultation was extended to 12 weeks.

The consultation period ran for a period of 12 weeks from 6 June 2022 to 28 August 2022. The Department published the following documents on its website: Consultation Overview, Application Form, Minerals Prospecting Overview, Company Overview, Map of the Application Area, the Wards and Townlands in the Application Area and the Public Notice used to advertise the consultation.

Given that the Department undertakes a full 12-week consultation period, it is not possible to avoid all holiday periods. It should also be noted that, in line with guidance provided to NI Executive Departments on activity around election periods, the start of this consultation period was delayed to avoid the local elections which took place in May 2022.

#### **4.1.3 Implications of European Convention on Human Rights and the Aarhus Convention**

Some respondents were of the view that the Department failed to address issues pertaining to both the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the Aarhus Convention as part of the Consultation Process.

#### ***Departmental Response***

The ECHR is an international human rights treaty, which gives all people, adults, children and young people a set of rights, such as the right to life and the right to freedom of religion. The Department ensures that the principles of the ECHR are met by making information on the intention to grant MPLs available to the public and other statutory and non-statutory bodies and taking into consideration any representations made to it as a result.

Amongst the objectives of the Aarhus Convention are ensuring the public have access to environmental information, that the public can participate in the environmental decision-making process and have access to environmental justice. The Department ensures that the principles of the Aarhus Convention are met by making information on the intention to grant MPLs publicly available, by consulting with the public and other statutory and non-statutory bodies and taking into consideration any representations made to it as a result.

The Department believes that the processes it has in place for the consideration and issue of MPLs do not contravene either the European Convention on Human Rights or the Aarhus Convention and is content with the regulatory safeguards which are in place for MPLs. Where specific concerns have been raised by respondents about breaches of other rights in either Convention these are considered in the relevant sections below.

#### **4.1.4 Lack of Community Outreach and Engagement from Applicants**

Some respondents stated that they believed that communities are disengaged from the consultation process and the Department has made no effort to ensure consultations are “community focused.”

#### ***Departmental Response***

The specific notification arrangements for MPLs are as specified in Sections 11 (3) and (4) of the 1969 Act.

As outlined in the consultation documentation, part of it requires the Department to consult other Departments, public bodies and local authorities (Local Councils) concerning the intention to issue a Licence. The organisations outlined in the consultation documentation are consulted as part of the consultation process and their views are taken into consideration along with all other responses received through that process. Furthermore, a Public Notice was placed in the Belfast Gazette and in many other local newspapers within the Licence Area over a two-week period at the outset of the consultation period.



On the wider issue of mineral prospecting and development, the Department proactively engages with Local Councils in the drafting of Local Development Plans, as prescribed in the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS).

Post award of an MPL, the Department will encourage Licensees to engage positively, as and when required, with people in the communities in which they propose to undertake exploration work. If applicable, the Department will encourage Licensees to put in place a Community Engagement Programme. A Licensee is encouraged to engage with all stakeholders to explain their activities and the legislation under which they operate. Licensees are encouraged to use this engagement to better understand and address local concerns.

## **4.2 LEGAL**

### **4.2.1 The effectiveness of legislation governing minerals licensing**

Some respondents expressed concern that the legislation dealing with Mineral Prospecting Licensing in Northern Ireland, mainly the 1969 Act, is ineffective, outdated and no longer fit for purpose. Some respondents stated that the perceived pre-determination towards awarding MPLs in the 1969 Act is contrary to public opinion of exploration and mining. Some respondents went further and stated their belief that mineral licensing in Northern Ireland should be subject to Public Inquiry before any further MPLs are awarded.

#### ***Departmental Response***

The Department has begun a wide-ranging review of minerals licensing policy and regulatory framework. The ongoing review is intended to ensure that the licensing regime continues to be effective in addressing the twin objectives to grow the economy and protect the environment. As a first step in the review the Department commissioned research into the economic, societal and environmental impacts of mineral exploration and mining in Northern Ireland. This research also considers the strategic policy context for minerals, NI's potential prospectivity as well as environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues. The Department's consideration of the research will inform the scope of the issues to be considered as part of the review of mineral exploration and mining policy.

The Department considers its current licensing regime is sufficiently effective. In over 50 years of operation there has been no evidence of environmental, economic or other issues that would suggest that the current process is 'unfit'. The Department is therefore not considering the suspension of licensing at this time, as there is no indication that it would benefit the review process and would most likely be subject to legal challenge. It is also important to note that suspension of MPLs by the Department would not impact gold or silver exploration or extraction, as these are licensed by the Crown Estate Commissioners.

As an example of the outdated nature of the legislation, one respondent noted that the Department is no longer able to provide evidence as to why the maximum size of an area is set at 250km<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately, it is a matter of fact that the files containing information on the development of the legislation no longer exist and so the rationale for setting the maximum size of a licence area at 250km<sup>2</sup> is no longer available. It should be noted that the destruction of the information was in line with the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) information retention policies. However, as above, there is no evidence to suggest that setting the maximum size of an MPL area at 250km<sup>2</sup> creates any issues in terms of adverse impacts.

It is also important to note that some respondents confused the activities that can be undertaken under an MPL with those that would be permitted under a mining licence. Any future mining activity will be subject to planning and mining permissions from the relevant organisations or statutory bodies.

Respondents are also asked to note that there is now widespread acceptance that the transition to green energy will not be possible without the development of the raw materials, such as minerals, required to manufacture the infrastructure needed to produce and distribute green energy.

#### **4.2.2 On-going judicial processes**

There are two important judicial processes currently on-going in relation to mineral licensing in Northern Ireland and some respondents believe that the Department

should cease the consideration of any MPLs until both those processes have concluded.

### ***Departmental Response***

The two significant judicial processes are the Public Inquiry into the Planning Application (submitted by Dalradian Gold Limited for a Goldmine) and the Judicial Review (taken by Derry City and Strabane District Council) into three MPLs awarded by the Department in May 2019.

The Public Inquiry will consider the goldmine planning application and the two associated powerline applications. While the Department grants MPLs, it only does so for minerals vested in the Department and the 1969 Act specifically exempts gold and silver which fall under the responsibility of the Crown Estate. However, the Department can assure respondents that it will consider any, and all, issues arising from the Public Inquiry that could potentially impact on the Department's mineral licensing regime.

Regarding the ongoing Judicial Review brought by Derry City and Strabane District Council, the Department has provided a full response outlining its position. While it would be inappropriate to provide detailed comment until the judicial review process has completed, at this stage the Department would contend that the policies and process in place are wholly adequate for the purposes of considering MPLs.

### **4.2.3 Permitted Development Rights**

Some respondents raised concerns regarding Licensees undertaking exploration activities under Permitted Development Rights.

### ***Departmental Response***

Permitted Development Rights for mineral exploration are not unfettered and require consideration by local councils before activities are permitted. An MPL confers limited rights on the Licensee to search for minerals and is not a carte blanche permission to carry out all exploration related activities. Licensees in undertaking any mineral prospecting activities must comply with all relevant regulations and controls put in place by Government Departments and local councils. Licensees are required to

obtain a range of further separate permissions for more advanced operations from both the Department and other regulatory authorities. The local council may consider that permissions sought for certain exploration activities should go through the full planning process to ensure that all risks have been identified and mitigated.

#### **4.2.4 Interaction between Crown Estate Options and Mineral Prospecting Licences**

Some respondents questioned the interdependency between Options from the Crown Estate and MPLs in the stated belief that a Crown Estate Option can only be in place if a valid MPL is in place from the Department.

##### ***Departmental Response***

The Department can confirm that, while it is usual for Licensees with an interest in both gold exploration and other base metal exploration in Northern Ireland, to apply simultaneously for an Option from the Crown Estate to permit gold (and silver) exploration and an MPL from the Department to permit exploration for all other minerals vested in the Department, there is no policy or legislative link between the two and one can exist independently of the other. In the example used in the consultation responses, the Crown Estate Option remained valid even after the MPL had expired.

The 1969 Act, which vests all minerals in Northern Ireland in the Department, explicitly exempts gold and silver. An MPL is for prospecting base metals only and not for gold or silver. Permission to explore for and develop gold and silver in Northern Ireland remains under the remit of the Crown Estate. The Department has no role in the work of the Crown Estate in respect of gold and silver exploration licensing. However, it should be noted that all other permissions and consents, other than the licence required to carry out exploration works, are still required from the applicable local statutory bodies and agencies in Northern Ireland e.g. planning.

It should also be noted that exploration companies holding Crown Estate Options are required to provide GSNI with data acquired during exploration works with a view to helping to build a greater understanding of our geological landscape.

Information on the Crown Estate can be found at this link: [Crown Estate](#)

### **4.3 APPLICANT COMPANY**

#### **4.3.1 Lack of Due Diligence into Applicants**

Some respondents expressed concern that the Department did not carry out sufficient due diligence checks on the applicant companies when considering MPLs.

#### ***Departmental Response***

When considering an application for an MPL, the Department carries out due diligence checks in line with current regulations to be satisfied that the applicant has the technical capacity and financial resources to carry out the proposed exploration Work Programme.

On behalf of the Department, GSNI carries out a full technical assessment of the proposed Work Programme including ensuring that the geological data used by the Licensee is accurate. It should therefore be assumed that given that the Department has deemed these applications valid, GSNI has assessed the Work Programme as viable for exploring for base minerals that, based on the geology, could be potentially found in the area.

The financial viability check of companies applying for MPLs include, where appropriate, seeking a Parent Company Guarantee for the finances required to deliver the agreed Work Programme over the term of the Licence.

Only when all the required documentation is in place and all checks are completed to the satisfaction of the Department will the Department deem the application valid and move on to the public notification/consultation stage of the process.

Further information on the assessment process is contained in the following link – [Assessment Process](#)

### **4.4 SOCIETAL**

#### **4.4.1 Issuing Mineral Prospecting Licences causes division and fear in the Local Community**

Some respondents expressed concern about the societal issues caused by exploration and mining activities in impacted areas and asked that the Department recognise the heightened levels of fear and concern felt within local communities. They stated that community involvement in every aspect of the statutory process concerning exploration of valuable minerals is something that should not be overlooked.

##### ***Departmental Response***

The Department is aware of the concerns around mineral exploration and mining in Northern Ireland, particularly in areas in and around the proposed gold mine at Greencastle Co Tyrone.

The MPLs under consideration by the Department are for exploration only and not mining. Furthermore, as outlined previously, the 1969 Act vests all minerals in Northern Ireland to the Department but explicitly exempts gold and silver. Permission to explore for and develop gold and silver in Northern Ireland remains under the remit of the Crown Estate.

The Department takes these community concerns seriously and encourages all exploration companies to engage proactively with the local community to explain the activities being undertaken and where appropriate to have a Community Engagement Programme in place.

#### **4.4.2 Lack of information to communities on exploration activities**

Some respondents reported concerns around the engagement with local communities and landowners when specific exploration activities are to take place. Some respondents stated that the applicant should engage in more extensive community involvement such as mandatory notification being served on landowners prior to entering their land as well as prior notification being provided of overhead surveillance which can be intrusive and intimidating for local communities involved.

##### ***Departmental Response***

It is a condition outlined in all MPLs that the Licensee must have landowner/s permission to access land before any prospecting activity takes place. The rights of landowners is set out in legislation, particularly [Section 47 of the 1969 Act And the Mineral Development Applications: Fees: Model Clauses 1970, Schedule 2, Clause 14](#).

The Department also requires Licensees to inform residents who could potentially be impacted that exploration activities are to be undertaken: those potential impacts include noise levels, groundworks, traffic etc.

## **4.5 ENVIRONMENTAL**

### **4.5.1 Lack of environmental screening or impact assessment**

Some respondents were concerned that the Department had failed to carry out appropriate environmental screening and assessment prior to the consideration of the application.

#### ***Departmental Response***

All NI Executive Departments have a statutory duty to carry out their functions in a way that promotes sustainable development. Mineral exploration takes place within a framework of environmental legislation that is intended to protect the natural heritage and minimise environmental impacts. All relevant environmental legislation is enacted and administered by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), the Department for Infrastructure (DfI), and Local Councils.

The following outlines the actions undertaken by the Department, or by GSNI on behalf of the Department, in conjunction with other statutory bodies, to ensure any potential impact of exploration is minimised.

Under the Conservation (Natural Environment, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended) (commonly referred to as the Habitats Regulations) certain sites have been designated as either Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) or Special

Protection Areas (SPAs). Ramsar sites have been designated under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

Under this legislation the Department, as the Competent Authority, in considering issuing an MPL where the land area is designated as being part of the National Site Network, undertakes assessment to meet the requirements of all environmental legislation including the Habitats Regulations.

When an application is received, designated environmental areas that might be affected by the work carried out under the terms of the licence are identified and noted for future reference. These areas may be within the licence boundary, or outside it if there is potential impact from exploration work within the licence area. Formal Habitats Regulation Screening is not carried out at this stage. However, once a Licensee notifies the Department of proposed specific exploration activity under the licence that may have an impact on a designated area, a screen of the activity is carried out. If the results of the screen indicate that one is necessary, a formal Habitats Regulation Assessment is completed within the required guidelines.

Habitats Regulations Assessments are carried out against specific work activities and in consultation with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). The Department ensures that an assessment in accordance with the Habitats Regulations is carried out where an MPL includes any activities that are likely to cause a significant disruption or disturbance to the designated features of a protected area. The Licensee must comply with the outcome of any Habitats Regulations assessment made by the Department.

Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is consulted on any relevant activities under the licence and as the Regulatory Body responsible for the environment they will advise the Department on impacts resulting from works including learning from previous activities.

A full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) may not be required for most exploration activities due to the nature of the activity being small scale and low impact



as outlined in the Common Exploration Methods Paper. This link provides information on [Common Exploration Methods](#).

In its response, DAERA asked for the following wording to be included in all licences:

*In the absence of submitted firm plans for field-based activities we would recommend that a precautionary approach be taken by attaching a condition to any licence issued that 'the Licensee shall not carry out any work within or likely to damage an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) without the prior written consent of the Department'.*

However, it should be noted that the Department takes a stronger line by ensuring that a MPL contains the requirement for a Licensee to obtain permission from the Department before any, and all, exploration activity is undertaken.

#### **4.5.2 Lack of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)**

Some respondents expressed concern that no SEA into mineral licensing has been carried out.

##### ***Departmental Response***

The Department's position on SEA has been well documented. The Department contends that the requirement for an SEA only applies when introducing a new overarching policy which defines the licensing regime and therefore the granting of an individual MPL does not fall within the remit of legislation requiring an SEA. It should be noted that the Department is currently reviewing the mineral licensing regime and the Department fully recognises that any change to the future mineral policy may require an SEA to be carried out.

#### **4.5.3 Lack of Transboundary Consultation**

Some respondents expressed a concern about the lack of transboundary consultation as required in the ESPOO (EIA) Convention.

##### ***Departmental Response***

The Department takes its environmental responsibilities seriously and follows all national and international laws and regulations as applicable, including the ESPOO (EIA) Convention.

The ESPOO (EIA) Convention sets out the obligations of parties to assess the environmental impact of certain activities at an early stage of planning. It also lays down the general obligation of States to notify and consult each other on all major projects under consideration that are likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact across boundaries.

Activities undertaken during mineral exploration are not usually considered likely to have significant environmental impact, whether local or cross boundary. However, for any exploration activity proposed by a Licensee, the Department considers the requirements of the ESPOO (EIA) Convention and although it hasn't been required to date, will take action as appropriate.

#### **4.5.4 Cumulative impact of exploration**

Some respondents are concerned about the number of MPLs currently and historically in place and the potential cumulative environmental impacts.

#### ***Departmental Response***

As outlined, the Department takes its environmental responsibilities seriously and there is no evidence of the work undertaken within the remit of MPLs over the past 50 years, or so, having any cumulative effect on the environment or landscape. One of the conditions of an MPL, is a requirement for a Licensee to make good, as far as possible, any disturbance caused by exploration activities: the same is a usual requirement from landowners before access to land is provided. As part of the monitoring of licences, the impacts of exploration are monitored by GSNI.

#### **4.5.5 The Precautionary Principle**

A number of respondents were concerned that the Department did not adhere to the Precautionary Principle.

#### ***Departmental Response***

The Department will apply the Precautionary Principle at the point at which it is considering the actual exploration activities that are to take place. The classic definition of the principle states that, "*Where there are threats of serious or irreversible*

*damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation" (UNEP 1992).*

While many actions by modern society carry environmental risk, the previous 50 years of exploration activity and the continuous monitoring carried out by the relevant statutory bodies, demonstrates the likelihood of serious or irreversible damage is negligible.

## **4.6 ECONOMIC**

### **4.6.1 Impact on tourism**

A number of respondents stated that not enough consideration was given to the impact of exploration activities on tourism.

#### ***Departmental Response***

As stated, all NI Executive Departments are committed to the principles of sustainable development and environmental protection. Part of the remit of the Department is tourism and any impact on tourism is considered within the Department.

The Department will ensure that no exploration activity takes place within an area that could potentially impact on any specific tourism location or asset.

One of the conditions of granting an MPL is that the exploration company is required to make good any land or property impacted by its exploration activities. The Department will monitor the Work Programme of the Licensee closely to ensure that this requirement is fulfilled.

As outlined previously, there is no evidence from the past 50 years of MPLs being in place, of any detrimental impact on tourism. As well as attracting everyday tourists, the diverse geology and mineral potential of Northern Ireland has also attracted earth scientists and academic groups to Northern Ireland.

### **4.6.2 Impact on Employment**

One respondent reported that exploration can have a positive impact on employment for local people and increase their skills and help the economy.

### ***Departmental Response***

While any expenditure in a local area is a positive impact, the Department would caution against any attempt to overstate positive economic benefits resulting from exploration in local areas. As we have stated previously exploration is low level activity by small exploration companies. However, it should be noted that one requirement of an MPL is the reporting of annual expenditure on the Work Programme of each MPL by the Licensee. That expenditure can range from anywhere from around £5-10k up to around £100k. The major share of expenditure is usually on salaries but also on servicing activities, some of which will undoubtedly be of benefit to the local economy.

## **1. DECISION POST CONSULTATION**

Having considered all the responses received from our stakeholders, campaign groups and members of the general public, the Department sees no impediment to awarding the applicant the MPL.

The MPL will be governed by the underpinning legislation supporting mineral prospecting licensing in Northern Ireland and the MPL contains a set of Terms and Conditions that must be observed: failure to adhere to the stipulated Terms and Conditions may result in the MPL being revoked by the Department.

The MPL will be awarded from 01 October 2022 and, provided the Licensee continues to meet the conditions as outlined in the licence and both parties agree to the licence continuing, run until 30 September 2028. A map showing all existing and prospective MPLs in Northern Ireland, including the area subject of this consultation, can be viewed at: [Mineral Prospecting Licences Map](#)