

24st February 2025

An Taoiseach, Mr. Micheál Martin TD
Department of the Taoiseach
Government Buildings
Merrion Street
Dublin 2

A Thaoisigh,

On behalf of the undersigned academics specialising in energy and climate research, we write in response to recent media reports indicating the Government's intention to change its policy on LNG to support commercial operation and imports from the United Statesⁱ.

The new Programme for Government reaffirms the State's objective to rapidly reduce fossil fuel dependenceⁱⁱ. Achieving this objective is essential to meeting our climate obligations, protecting our economic competitiveness, and ensuring societal wellbeing.

We urge the Government to base any energy security policy on independent and transparent evidence of the economic, environmental, and security implications of LNG, particularly infrastructure that is commercially-operated and could result in the importation of fracked gas. This research should assess the latest data on gas demand trends, energy system resilience, climate risks, and clean energy alternatives

Moreover, it is our view that any energy security measure involving new gas infrastructure must come with strict safeguards that ensure it does not conflict with the Government's commitment to radically reduce fossil fuel reliance and meet legally binding carbon budgets.

These safeguards have already been articulated in policy: The Government's 2023 Energy Security Package concluded that the best way to address the lack of resilience in our natural gas infrastructure in the event of a major supply disruption is to lower natural gas demand and establish a Strategic Gas Emergency Reserve, in a way that is compatible with the Climate Lawⁱⁱⁱ.

Traditionally, energy security focused on securing the physical supply of fossil fuels. A comprehensive strategy for energy security ought to consider factors in addition to the physical security of infrastructure, and also consider exposure to volatile fossil fuel prices – and the hardship this causes – due to Ireland's reliance on energy imports.

We wish to draw your attention to the following recent research and data that further strengthen the case for this approach:

- 1. New data and modelling supports an acceleration away from natural gas.** The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland's latest energy projections, based on committed policies, indicate a significant decline in natural gas demand this decade^v. According to the most recent figures, natural gas demand is anticipated to decline by 43% by 2030 (relative to 2024) and by 67% by 2040 under current policies. Moreover, energy systems modelling underpinning the Climate Change Advisory Council's 2024 carbon budget recommendations shows that under cost-optimal, carbon budget-aligned pathways, natural gas demand declines by 95% in 2040^v. These projections show that natural gas can, and must, decline rapidly within the lifetime of any new LNG terminal.
- 2. LNG is a severely polluting energy source.** Research continues to demonstrate the significant climate impact of LNG, especially when derived from fracked shale gas, due to leaked methane – a potent greenhouse gas – and the energy-intensive nature of its extraction and transportation^{vi}. Despite being framed by some as a “transition fuel”, this research finds that LNG causes more climate damage than coal.
- 3. Clean energy offers an alternative.** Clean energy – wind and solar power, electricity grids, battery storage, heat pumps, district heating networks, and energy efficiency measures – offer an unprecedented opportunity to achieve fossil fuel independence. European countries have demonstrated this potential following Russia's invasion of Ukraine: By building more renewables and taking efficiency measures, gas consumption on the continent declined by 20% in the past two years, to a 10-year low^{vii}. The utilisation rate of Europe's LNG terminals has fallen below 50%^{viii}.

Similarly, natural gas demand in Great Britain is expected to continue declining, due to efficiency measures and the expansion of renewable energy capacity. The UK saw annual LNG imports fall by 47% in 2024^{ix}. The UK is committed to ensuring that no more than 5% of its electricity comes from unabated gas by 2030, and its gas supply, on which Ireland depends, is diverse and secure^x.

Vienna, a city once heavily reliant on imported gas to heat homes and fuel industry, has committed to a “moonshot” mission of ending its reliance on Russian gas, by investing €20 billion in district heating networks, fuelled by waste and heat pumps^{xi}.

This research and evidence underscore the case for securing Ireland's energy future by “*taking decisive action to radically reduce our reliance on fossil fuels*” – a stated objective of this Government. We are concerned that permitting LNG infrastructure without strict conditions to ensure it respects the carbon budgets and does not drive additional gas demand will further entrench fossil fuel dependence, and risk forfeiting a tremendous opportunity to transition towards a cleaner, more secure energy system.

The vision of ending our dependence on costly and polluting imported energy, to secure our energy supply and meet our international climate change commitments is attainable, with your leadership.

Is sinne, le meas,

Professor Hannah Daly, Professor in Sustainable Energy, University College Cork

Professor Michael E. Mann, Director of the Penn Center for Science, Sustainability and the Media, University of Pennsylvania

Dr. Cara Augustenborg, Assistant Professor in Environmental Policy, University College Dublin

Professor Karen Wiltshire, Professor of Climate Sciences, Trinity College Dublin

Professor John Sweeney, Emeritus Professor of Geography, Maynooth University

Dr. Diarmuid Torney, Director, Institute for Climate and Society, Dublin City University

Professor Barry McMullin, Emeritus Professor, Dublin City University

Professor Jennie Stephens, Professor of Climate Justice, Maynooth University

Professor John Barry, Professor of Green Political Economy, Queen's University Belfast

Dr. James Carton, Assistant Professor in Energy Sustainability & Hydrogen, Dublin City University

Dr Patrick Bresnihan, Associate Professor, Maynooth University

Professor Lisa Ryan, Professor of Energy Economics, University College Dublin

Dr. Vikram Pakrashi, Associate Professor in Mechanical Engineering, University College Dublin

ⁱ <https://www.businesspost.ie/article/government-moves-towards-commercial-lng-facility-in-departure-from-green-policy/>

ⁱⁱ Programme for Government 2025: Securing Ireland's Future

ⁱⁱⁱ Energy Security in Ireland to 2030: Energy Security Package, November 2023

"The Department will engage with GNI as the independent Gas Transmission System Operator (TSO) to prepare a detailed proposal to introduce a reserve on this basis in line with criteria and requirements determined by the Department which will include:

- *A proposal which can be implemented quickly*
- *A proposal which does not inadvertently increase gas demand by increasing the supply available on the market*
- *A cost-effective proposal at the appropriate scale which provides sufficient resilience*

if a disruption to gas supply occurs

• *A proposal which is compatible with the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015-2021.”*

^{iv} <https://www.seai.ie/data-and-insights/energy-data-portal>

^v Daly et. al (2024). Pathways for Ireland’s Energy System To 2050: Modelling analysis to support the Climate Change Advisory Council on the Second Carbon Budget Programme.

<https://www.climatecouncil.ie/media/CBWG%20Report%20TIMES-Ireland%20Model.pdf>

^{vi} Howarth (2024) The greenhouse gas footprint of liquefied natural gas (LNG) exported from the United States. Energy Science and Engineering <https://doi.org/10.1002/ese3.1934>

^{vii} <https://ieefa.org/articles/europes-gas-consumption-falls-10-year-low-peak-lng-demand-nears>

^{viii} <https://ieefa.org/european-lng-tracker>

^{ix} <https://www.energyvoice.com/oilandgas/africa/lng-africa/567042/uk-lng-imports-2024/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/feb/18/europe-uk-imports-liquefied-natural-gas-lng-report>

^x <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statutory-security-of-supply-report-2024/statutory-security-of-supply-report-2024>

^{xi} <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2025-01-24/vienna-bets-on-heat-pumps-to-decouple-it-from-russian-gas>