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of Energy &
Climate Change

The Rt Hon Fiona Mactaggart MP
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The Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP
Secretary of State

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Dear Fiona,

Thank you for your email dated 27 October, enclosing an example of correspondence you have received from a number of your constituents, raising opposition to fracking in national parks.

The Government is clear that the transition to a low carbon economy is key to our long-term economic and environmental prosperity. We also need to have more secure, home-grown energy supplies in our energy mix. Gas, the cleanest fossil fuel, still meets a third of our energy demand and we will need it for many years to come. Developing shale gas could create a whole new British industry, provide more jobs and make us less reliant on imports from abroad. It is therefore vital that we seize the opportunity to explore the UK's shale gas potential whilst maintaining the very highest safety and environmental standards, which we have established as world leaders in extracting oil and gas over decades.

The draft regulations as laid on 16 July 2015 ensure that the process of hydraulic fracturing can only take place below 1200 metres in National Parks, the Broads, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), World Heritage Sites and areas that are most vulnerable to groundwater pollution. The Government has also committed to ensure that hydraulic fracturing cannot be conducted from wells that are drilled at the surface of these areas. This is not intended to impact on conventional drilling operations, which have been successfully carried out for decades.

Separately, the Government has also committed to ensure that hydraulic fracturing cannot be conducted from wells that are drilled at the surface of the UK's most valuable areas. We are currently consulting with industry and other interested parties on how best to implement this commitment. Recognising that surface activities are of greatest public concern, the Government is minded to apply the surface restrictions in Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Ramsar and Natura 2000 sites, as well as the areas covered by the draft regulations (National Parks, the Broads, AONBs, World Heritage Sites and areas that are most vulnerable to groundwater pollution).

These measures are in addition to the strong protections for these areas already provided by the planning system. For example, specifically in relation to National Parks, the Broads and AONBs, these areas have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty and the National Planning Policy Framework states that planning permission should be refused for major development, except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated that it is in the public interest.

The UK has one of the best track records in the world when it comes to protecting our environment while also developing our industries, and we have brought that experience to bear on the shale gas protections. The shale industry will be developed safely with world class environmental protections, creating jobs and delivering better energy security while safeguarding of some of our most precious areas.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amber Rudd', with a stylized, cursive script.

AMBER RUDD