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Dear Kevin,

Thank you for your letter dated 22 December to Greg Clark, about hydraulic fracturing and drinking water. I am replying as this matter falls within my portfolio.

The Government is committed to a low carbon and affordable future for energy. Gas – the cleanest fossil fuel – still meets a third of our energy demand and we will need it for many years to come. So it's 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 Government is committed to developing this new source of energy as part of our work to ensure our energy security. Developing shale gas could create a whole new British industry, provide more jobs and make us less reliant on imports from abroad.

Reports by the Royal Society and Royal Academy of Engineering, as well as Public Health England considered a wide range of evidence on hydraulic fracturing in the UK context. They concluded that risks can be well managed if the industry follows best practice, enforced through regulation. The UK has over 50 years' experience regulating the onshore oil and gas industry, and measures are in place to ensure on-site safety, prevent environmental contamination, mitigate seismic activity and minimise emissions.

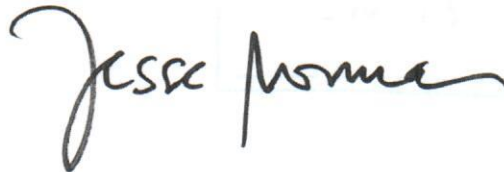
There is, as you indicated, evidence from the US that developments have, on occasion, led to water contamination. However it is important to note that the latest evidence confirms that this was due to surface operations or faulty well construction, rather than the hydraulic fracturing itself. If a well is designed, built and constructed properly, there is negligible risk of water contamination of actual or potential water supplies. The UK has decades of experience in safely conducting surface activities and constructing onshore gas wells, regulated by the Health & Safety Executive.

To reinforce these regulations, the Infrastructure Act 2015 brought forward a range of further requirements if an operator is to carry out hydraulic fracturing, to provide the public with confidence that this industry is being taken forward in a balanced way. These include environmental impact assessments, groundwater monitoring, community benefits and the exclusion of protected areas from hydraulic fracturing.

In December 2015, Parliament approved the Onshore Hydraulic Fracturing (Protected Areas) Regulations 2015, which define the "protected groundwater source areas" in which hydraulic fracturing will be prohibited. They define these areas as being equivalent to the existing definition of Source Protection Zones 1 (SPZ1s), which are areas close to drinking water sources where there is the greatest risk associated with groundwater contamination. Separately, the Government has also committed to ensure that hydraulic fracturing cannot be conducted from wells that are drilled at the surface of National Parks and other protected areas, such as SPZ1s.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Yours sincerely



**JESSE NORMAN MP**  
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