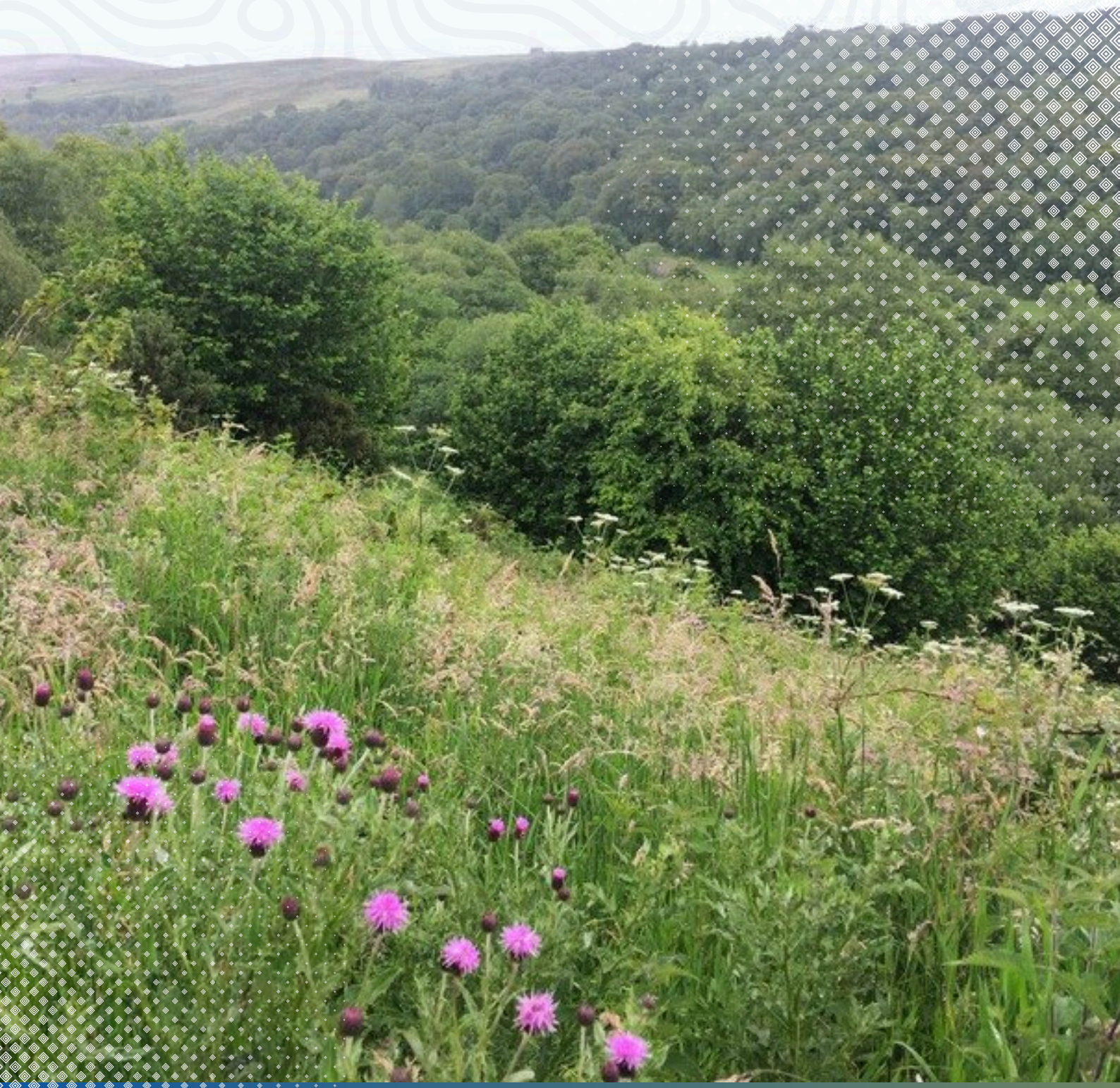
State of Mining in Ireland: Report Series

Sperrins Case Study — **Dalradian Gold**



The Sperrin Mountains are the subject of a goldmine planning application but are an ecologically significant upland area with a range of protective statuses, including Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); Ramsar site of international importance for active raised bog (Black Bog); Dark Skies Observatory (one of only 200 internationally); with six Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs); Owenkillew River Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and a site of EU significance for the rare Freshwater Pearl Mussel and the Atlantic Salmon.

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It is dedicated to preserving and protecting the nation's precious natural and built heritage. An Taisce is an authoritative, independent advocate for environmental and heritage issues and it is not a part of government or a semi-state agency.

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This is a case study on the Sperrins Mountains.
It forms one of a series of reports on the State of Mining in Ireland.

It has been produced from research into the environmental impacts of this industry and the specific risks associated with the activities involved.

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Acknowledgements
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Images: Save Our Sperrins/Canva/Wikimedia
Project funded by Irish Environmental Network (IEN)

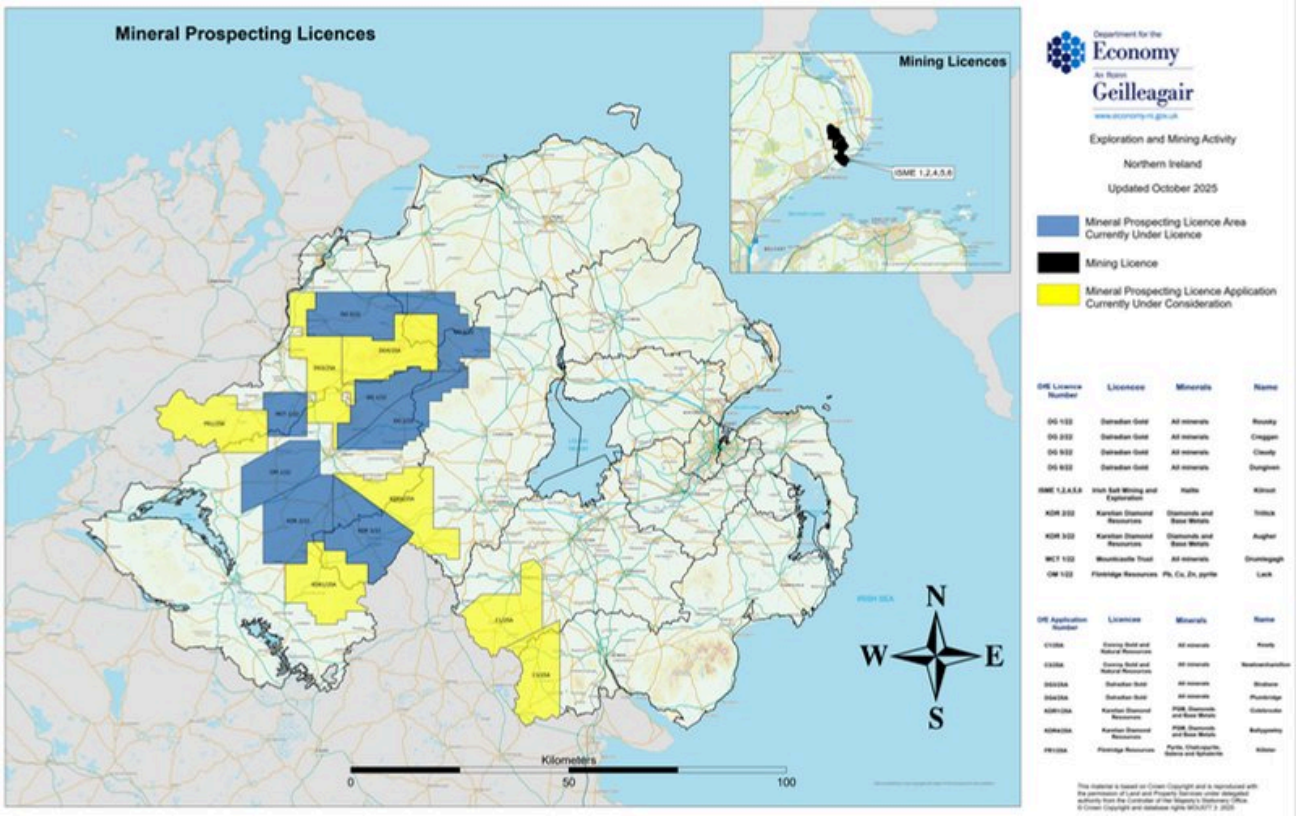
Summary

In 2017, Dalradian Gold submitted one of the largest planning applications on the island of Ireland, for a large underground mine and processing infrastructure beside Greencastle, County Tyrone, in the Sperrin Mountains. Legally one of most protected landscapes in Europe, the Sperrins is highly environmentally sensitive and an important cultural landscape.

Despite this, this mining application is still being considered by the Northern Ireland executive and there is currently a public inquiry with the Planning Appeals Commission NI (PACNI) into the controversial plans. Ongoing breaches in environmental law and democratic rights have surrounded the application and public inquiry process. Resistance emerged as early as 2014 and since then the campaign against the proposed mine has grown with national and international support.

More than 50,000 submissions were lodged raising concerns about the mine throughout the planning process. Concerns have been raised relating to air, water, land, human rights, transboundary impacts, cultural heritage, livelihoods and the economic model that mining fuels. This application represents an important case in the direction of mining policy both North and South of the border.

'This map shows the five prospecting licences connected to Dalradian Gold - 3 confirmed and 2 disputed (discussed later), adding to approx 10% of Northern Ireland



History

In 1976, the Geological Survey Northern Ireland (GSNI) published a geochemical survey of the mineral potential in the Sperrin Mountains. Irish Base Metals was founded in 1971 with the purpose of exploiting the Curraghinalt gold deposit in the Sperrins, the company changed names to Ulster Base Minerals Limited in 1973, Ulster Minerals Limited in 1986, Dalradian Gold Enterprises Limited in 2007 and from 2009, Dalradian Gold Limited.

In the 1980s as the price of gold increased, exploration began, leading to the discovery of gold deposits in County Tyrone, at Curraghinalt, by Ulster Minerals Limited and at Cavanacaw, by Riofinex. However, security issues surrounding the use of explosives during the conflict known as “The Troubles” disrupted plans.

Since the advent of the 1998 peace process and the ending of the conflict, as well as rising commodity prices in recent years, considerable interest in the mineral potential of the North of Ireland has resurfaced.

In 2009, Dalradian bought the licences for mineral and surface rights from Tournigan Gold Corporation and has been conducting exploratory activities in the area. The pursued development model since the peace agreement has been described by economist Dr Conor McCabe as a ‘double transition’ - to both peace and neoliberalism, a model which favours foreign direct investment (FDI) and an extractive economy.

Since the advent of the 1998 peace process and the ending of the conflict, as well as rising commodity prices in recent years, considerable interest in the mineral potential of the North of Ireland has resurfaced.

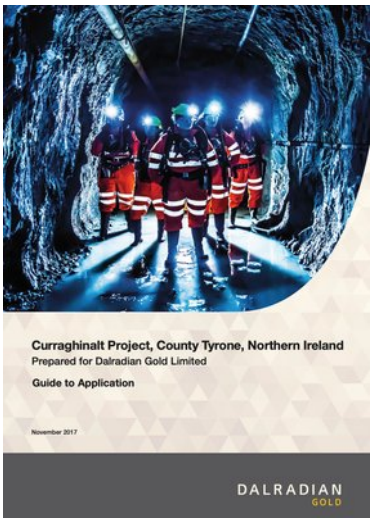
Goldprice from 1998 to 2026 clearly shows financial incentives for mining companies to aggressively continue with planning application
Source: Goldprice.org



Current Proposal

Curraghinalt, Co. Tyrone

In November 2017, Dalradian Gold submitted a 10,000 page planning application to the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) for a gold mine at the Curraghinalt site between Greencastle and Rouskey and supporting infrastructure including a processing plant on Crocknaboy Hill close to the village of Greencastle, situated in the Sperrin Mountains. In 2019 they submitted Addendum 1 (15,000 pages) and in 2020 Addendum 2 (20,000 pages). Still no decision has been taken by the DfI, but an ongoing public inquiry continues. The plans include eight separate applications (comprising 1,165 documents). This would represent one of the biggest extractive projects on the island of Ireland and one of the largest gold mines in Europe.



In November 2017, Dalradian Gold submitted a 10,000 page planning application to the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) for a gold mine at the Curraghinalt site in NI.

The plans include: the underground mine - 500 metres below the water table; 59-metre tall (18 story) mine waste facility storing up to 8 million tonnes of materials and heavy-metal laden tailings (located within 1200 metres of playing fields, school, church, houses, playschool and community centre,); two water abstraction and impoundment licenses; two water discharge licenses; 33kV overhead and underground power lines and a road abandonment proposal. The planning application details plans for water storage ponds, wastewater treatment plant and explosive store that would carry out two blasts per day 365 days a year. As well as plans to use 3.5 million litres of diesel each year onsite, removing 74 acres (thirty hectares) of peatland and abstracting 1650m³ (half a million gallons) of water per day. In addition, the application lists 24 heavy metals they will discharge into local rivers, Due to community resistance, original plans to use cyanide in processing operations onsite were dropped in August 2019. No feasibility study has been conducted on how the project could operate without cyanide. There are fears that this may be re-introduced later or moved to another community elsewhere.

In contradiction of many regulations, including the Aarhus Convention, no public consultation was held concerning these plans at the time they were announced. Developer-led “information sessions” were held in 2016 by the company which failed to provide objective, accurate information. Since the announcement of Dalradian’s plans there has been strong opposition, with over 50,000 objection letters and only 4,000 letters in support. These objections come from the local community but also concerned citizens across Ireland and globally, as well as specialist agencies, Environmental NGOs and local government.

At the Curranghinalt site, Dalradian have a 2,700m adit (horizontal tunnel) into the hillside from where they removed a 14,000 tonne bulk sample of rock in 2017 as part of their exploration works. They have taken around 21,000 surface samples and drilled 97,000 drill core samples across the Sperrins, in order to try and ascertain where the gold veins are. The exploratory site and explosives site have been operating since 2020 (when restoration was required), it would appear, without planning permission. Fermanagh and Omagh District Council decided to serve enforcement notices on the site in August 2025. Dalradian have appealed the Enforcement Notices to the PACNI and there was an Informal Hearing on 11th March 2026.

In 2016, the CEO of Dalradian Gold, Patrirck FN Anderson stated in an interview with Bloomberg that, "I'm not talking about a single mine here, we are working on a mine camp here", leading local residents to fear the industrialisation of the Sperrins. Dalradian Gold had acquired over 300,000 acres (122,000 hectares) in prospecting licences* across the Sperrins, almost 10% of the total land area of Northern Ireland. However, in August 2025, after the local community group Save Our Sperrins lodged an application for Judicial Review for the decision to grant the latest sweep of prospecting licences across NI, DfE asked the companies to relinquish these 7 licences; some but not all of the companies complied. The status of these latest licences, therefore, remains unclear.

**The holder of a prospecting licences allows the company to engage in prospecting activities - which could range from soil sampling to trenching and drilling. Permitted development, where planning permission is not required, was removed from petroleum prospecting in NI, but not for mineral prospecting.*

A review of the Mineral Licencing regime in NI is currently being carried out by Tetrus RPS, and a Call for Evidence is open until 21 May 2026.

Current Proposal

The finance behind Dalradian

Dalradian Gold Limited is the subsidiary of a Canadian exploratory company, Dalradian Resources Incorporated who are ultimately owned by global investment firm Orion Resource Partners. In 2018, Dalradian Resources Inc. was bought by Orion Resource Partners, a New York Based investment fund, removing it from the Toronto Stock Exchange. The boss of Orion, Oskar Lewnowski, has the ultimate control over the company. In 2019, Orion increased its ownership of Dalradian to 97%, for a total investment of $360 million to date.

In November 2023, Dalradian entered into a purchase agreement with Wheaton Precious Metals (WPM) that guarantees WPM will buy a certain proportion of the gold produced, thereby de-risking Orion's investment. Corporate Watch have uncovered that the people managing Dalradian's operations in the Sperrins have a background in many controversial mining projects, involving human rights and environmental violations.

Dalradian Gold is owned by Orion Resource Partners, a New York based investment fund.

Ongoing Public Inquiry

On the 29th June 2020, Minister for the DfI Nicolla Mallon announced there will be an independent public inquiry into the controversial planning application. In 2021, the application was referred to the Planning Appeals Commission NI (PACNI), an independent statutory tribunal, to hold a public local inquiry. When the inquiry is concluded, the PACNI will prepare a report with its recommendations to the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) Minister. The PACNI's recommendations are non-binding, ultimately it is the DfI Minister who has the final decision-making power on the application. The Discharge Consents and Water Abstraction Licences are granted by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA)/Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) so it is unclear if it will be a joint decision between both Ministers (DAERA & DfI) or whether it will be opened up wider as a cross-cutting issue.


BBC

Dalradian: Tyrone gold mine plans subject of public inquiry

29 June 2020

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Dalradian Resources

Dalradian Gold claims there are £3bn-worth of deposits in the Sperrin Mountains

On the 29th June 2020, Minister for the DfI Nicolla Mallon announced there will be an independent public inquiry into the controversial planning application.

The public inquiry process was suspended in March 2024 at a pre-inquiry meeting because documents relating to expired water abstraction licences were not produced by the NIEA. After this issue was resolved, the inquiry commenced on 13th January 2025 in Strule Arts Centre, Omagh. However, it was again suspended only three days after it began when it was found that the DfI failed to comply with their own planning regulations, and the European Aarhus and Espoo Conventions (ratified by the UK government), that guarantee the right to public participation in environmental issues, by not having notified or consulted the Government and citizens in the Republic of Ireland. This failure was identified by Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) from the Sperrins and Donegal, who raised the issue during the inquiry. A transboundary public consultation was then held until April 2025 and the inquiry is set to resume on the 13th of April 2026.

It is important to note Dalradian have added substantial amounts of new information through their documentation for the public inquiry, which was not part of their original application. Their shift to include other minerals, including so-called "critical minerals" like tellurium, is significant. This would appear to be an attempt on their behalf to classify their mine as a contribution to the UK critical minerals agenda despite the PAC stating at the first pre-inquiry meeting on 24th March 2024 that only gold, silver and copper will be considered for the public inquiry, as those are the metals on Dalradian Gold's planning application.

Current Proposal

Timeline of events



Dalradian Receives £326,000 Investment from Northern Ireland Government to Support Curraghinalt Project

August 19, 2014 09:10 ET | Source: Dalradian Resources Inc.

TORONTO, ONTARIO--(Marketwired - Aug. 19, 2014) -



Dalradian lobbied for removal of two conditions protecting Freshwater Pearl Mussels. Image: Wikimedia



THE IRISH NEWS

Is Point Break remake the wipe-out fans feared?

Tyrone and Derry bosses at loggerheads

Fears over gold mine cyanide



Residents walk out of gold mine consultation



SAY NO TO GOLD MINING
NO TO CYANIDE IN OUR WATER

2009 Dalradian start prospecting work.

2011 First reports from the public of pollution from a drill rig running into the Owenkillow River were sent to NIEA (July & August 2011).

2014 Invest NI offer Dalradian £326,000

2014 Dalradian get permission to dig a 2km “exploratory tunnel” for 3 years, with 44 conditions attached.

2014 Dalradian lobby successfully for two conditions protecting Freshwater Pearl Mussels (FWPMS) to be removed (25 & 26). NIEA grants a Discharge Consent with less protection for FWPMs, allowing Dalradian to discharge higher levels of pollution into the local rivers.

2014 Dalradian applied for a “change of location” for the explosives store.

2014 Dalradian successfully put pressure on Omagh Council to issue ‘Stop & Enforcement” Notices on the weather proofing work of a local family to their 200-year-old stone house (known as Mickey Atty’s), citing that it was too close to their proposed explosives store.

2015 Dalradian get planning permission for an explosives store at a new location.

2016 Cyanide mentioned for first time in a newspaper article, sparking community opposition and large public meetings.

2016 Dalradian held “sham" consultation at their Curraghinalt site, without key pieces of information such as a business plan, feasibility study etc. A large crowd gathered outside and objected, despite freezing conditions.

2016 Dalradian produced a Feasibility Study which stated that the ore was of low grade and in order for the project to be financially viable, a high concentration of cyanide would need to be used onsite.

2017 (Nov) Dalradian Gold submitted a 10,000 page planning application to the Department for Infrastructure (DfI).

2018 Dalradian Resources Inc. was bought over by Orion Resource Partners, a New York Based investment fund.

Current Proposal


BBC

Dalradian: Tyrone gold mine company drop cyanide plan

14 August 2019

Conor Macauley

BBC NI Agriculture & Environment Correspondent

BBC reporting on Dalradian dropping cyanide plan

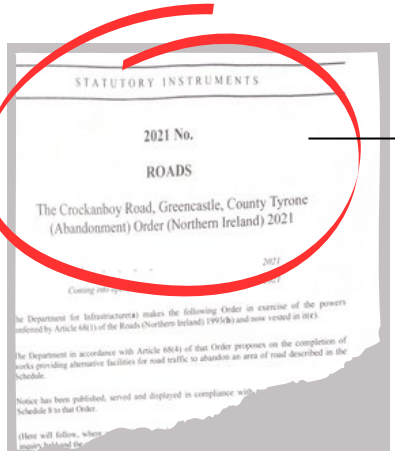
2019 (August) Dalradian submitted a huge Addendum of Further Environmental Information (FEI) to DfI in which they announced they are dropping plans to use cyanide locally in their operations, as well as an Updated Waste Management Plan.

2019 (November) Fidelma O'Kane won a judicial review against NIEA for a Discharge Consent granted to Dalradian in September 2017 allowing higher levels of heavy metals to be discharged into the Curraghinalt Burn & Owenkillew River, a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

2020 (June) Minister for the DfI Nicolla Mallon announced there will be an independent public inquiry into Dalradian's planning application.

2020 (October) Dalradian submits 3 new Applications for Consent to Discharge Goldmine Effluent & Sewage Effluent into Pollanroe Burn, a tributary of the Owenreagh River and Owenkillew River.

2020 (November) Dalradian submitted a huge Second Addendum & Updated Waste Management Plan.


STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS

2021 No.

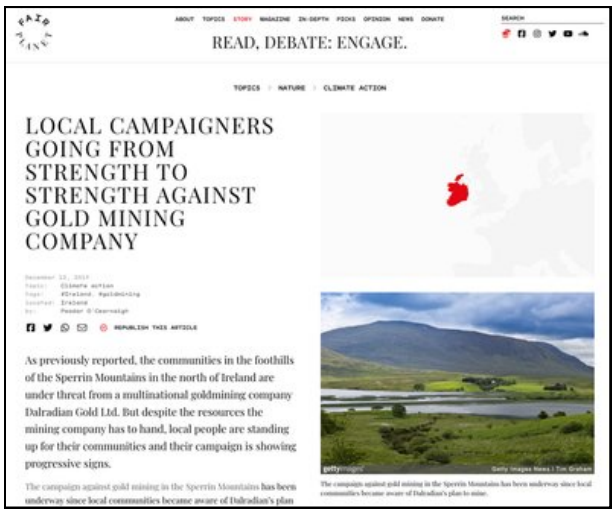
ROADS

The Crockanboy Road, Greencastle, County Tyrone (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2021

Removal of public road access in 2021

2021 (March) abandonment notice for Crockanboy Road erected in local area by Roads Division of DfI. Dalradian had applied for a section of this road to be abandoned as it ran through their proposed site. This would mean it would no longer be public.

2021 Dalradian submit two Water Abstraction Licences to DAERA (which were deemed refused in April 2024).


READ, DEBATE: ENGAGE.

TOPICS | NATURE | CLIMATE ACTION

LOCAL CAMPAIGNERS GOING FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH AGAINST GOLD MINING COMPANY

As previously reported, the communities in the foothills of the Sperrin Mountains in the north of Ireland are under threat from a multinational goldmining company Dalradian Gold Ltd. But despite the resources the mining company has to hand, local people are standing up for their communities and their campaign is showing progressive signs.

The campaign against gold mining in the Sperrin Mountains has been underway since local communities became aware of Dalradian's plan

2019: Fidelma O'Kane won a judicial review against NIEA for a Discharge Consent allowing higher levels of heavy metals to be discharged into the Curraghinalt Burn & Owenkillew River, a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Current Proposal

2024 (March) Pre-inquiry Meeting held by PAC.

2024 (July) due to procedural irregularities by DEARA/NIEA, Dalradian's new Water Abstraction applications were advertised then withdrawn, and applied for again**

2025 (January 13th) Public Inquiry began.

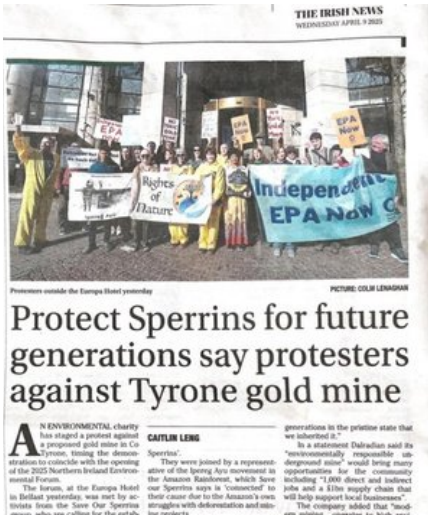
2025 (January 15th) Public Inquiry suspended due to lack of transboundary consultation.

2025 (February-April) Transboundary public consultation.

2025 (October) Dalradian relinquished 2 prospecting licences as requested by DfE (the day before Save Our Sperrins were due in court to apply for Leave for a Judicial Review).

2026 (February) DfE announce consultation to inform a new Mineral Licensing policy.***

2026 (April) Public Inquiry set to resume.



THE IRISH NEWS
WEDNESDAY APRIL 9 2025

Protect Sperrins for future generations say protesters against Tyrone gold mine

CAITLIN LEIG

AN ENVIRONMENTAL charity has staged a protest against a proposed gold mine in Co Tyrone, timing the demonstration to coincide with the opening of the 2025 Northern Ireland Environmental Forum.

The forum, at the Europa Hotel in Belfast yesterday, was met by activists from the Save Our Sperrins

generations in the pristine state that we inherited it."

In a statement Dalradian said its "environmentally responsible underground mine" would bring many opportunities for the community including "1,000 direct and indirect jobs and a £1bn supply chain that will help support local businesses".

The company added that "modern mining methods

Irish News April 2025



Northern Ireland

The war over Omagh's gold: the £21bn mine plan tearing a community apart

On Monday, a public inquiry will reopen, nine years after the plan was proposed and a toxic local battle began

Esther Addley

Sat 11 Apr 2026 07.00 CEST

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Prefer the Guardian on Google

NO GOLDMINING
DALRADIAN OUT

Campaigners (l-r) Marella Fyffe, Cormac McAleer, Fidelma O'Kane and Sinéad Ní Mhearnóg at the 'Greencastle People's Office', County Tyrone. Photograph: Paul McErlane/The Guardian

The Guardian newspaper reporting on public inquiry April 2026

*** DfI is responsible for giving planning permission for large infrastructure projects i.e. the goldmine, the heavy-duty powerlines and the road abandonment. DAERA/NIEA is responsible for granting Discharge Consents and Water Abstraction licences. The PACNI will consider all the applications via the public inquiry and will make recommendations to the various responsible authorities. All applications are linked to the same project, it is unclear if the company could go ahead if some of the consents are not obtained*

****Currently there are major deficiencies in the Mineral Licensing regime. As mentioned previously, the current regime allows permitted development for prospecting activities including drilling. Also, as we will mention below under 'Procedural injustice and democratic rights', the regime does not take into account NI or EU legislation post-1969. For instance, there has been no Strategic Environmental Assessment carried out, as is necessary for any plan or programme under the SEA Directive, which was transposed into the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2004. Therefore, a new minerals regime that adheres to current legislation would mean major changes to how mining companies operate in NI.*

Ecological Impacts

Sperrin Mountains

The Sperrins is an ecologically important upland area with a range of protective statuses. In fact, legally, the Sperrins is one of the most protected landscapes in Europe. In addition to being a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the Sperrins include: A Ramsar site of international importance for active raised bog (Black Bog); A Dark Skies Observatory (one of only 200 internationally); Six Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) comprising rivers, woodlands of sessile oak trees and ancient bog; Owenkillew River Special Area of Conservation (SAC), a site of European significance for several species, including the rare freshwater pearl mussel, the Native Atlantic salmon and otter.

In addition, the Owenkillew River SAC and the Owenreagh River ASSI are hydrologically linked to Lough Foyle Ramsar site, the River Foyle and Tributaries SAC (including the River Finn SAC in Donegal) which together with smaller tributaries, form an ecological continuum linking the north and south of Ireland. Despite these important ecological designations the planning application has progressed to this stage, raising concerns about the impact across a range of environmental factors.



Owenkillew River by Kenneth Allen, CC BY-SA 2.0,



A Sperrin bog by Richard Webb, CC BY-SA 2.0,



Sperrin Skyway by Richard Webb, CC BY-SA 2.0

Ecological Impacts



The Sperrins Mountains are hydrologically and ecologically connected to rivers and the greater ecosystems that span the Northwest of Ireland, and these cross the border from Northern Ireland into the Republic of Ireland. (Google Maps)

Water

The impact of the proposed application on water systems locally and across the island is a key concern for many. The Sperrin Mountains are hydrologically and ecologically connected to rivers and ecosystems spanning the Northwest of the island of Ireland - including County Donegal directly, and other counties in the Republic of Ireland (ROI), indirectly.

The rivers most at risk are the Owenkillew and Owenreagh rivers, both are designated Special Areas of Conservation and Areas of Special Scientific Interest because of the presence of Freshwater Pearl Mussels (Ireland's only globally endangered species), as well as salmon spawning, otters and brown trout.

There are a number of ways in which the protected waters mentioned above are at risk: via water abstraction, mine water discharge, acid mine drainage and the risk of failure of the tailings holding facility. Pertinent documents related to water abstraction and water discharge consent applications can be found on the DEARA's website.

Abstraction and Discharge

In the proposal, waste water is stored in lined ponds before being fed into a treatment plant and then discharged into local waterways. Two water abstraction applications are being considered. One is to abstract the wastewater from the mine, 375,000 gallons daily, which then would contain 24 heavy metals due to the mine's processes and acid mine drainage, in order to discharge it into the Owenreagh River ASSI and the Owenkillew River SAC & ASSI.

This discharge would continue in perpetuity: in Dalradian's Statement of Case for the Public Inquiry they submitted new information, not yet consulted on, stating that in the immediate seven years post mine closure, there would be a discharge of 4,400 gallons per day from the mine site into the Owenkillew River SAC & ASSI, which would then increase to 176,000 gallons per day permanently.

This is due to the fact that the mine would be at least 900 metres deep - 500 metres below the water table, which sits at approximately 400 metres deep. Water abstraction and discharge proposals risk violating EU Water Framework Directive standards, risking the health of local ecosystems and communities.

Ecological Impacts

Tailings

Thousands of tons of rock will be removed, crushed and chemicals used to produce ore. The mineral rich ore will be taken off site, while the majority of the crushed rock will be stored as a mine waste stack or as the company calls it, a 'Dry Stack Facility' (DSF).

However, Dr S. H. Emerman, expert consultant hydrologist for Save Our Sperrins, clarified that it will not be dry, as they need to prevent dust blow off, and will contain at least 15% water as it comes from the filter plant.

On top of this it will receive rainfall - therefore the water level cannot be held stable in an area such as the Sperrins – which receives an average of 200 days of rain per year, and in Ireland – where the effects of climate change will lead to higher probabilities of heavy rain and heavy snowfall, leading to sudden flooding events. Therefore, he states, "there is a major risk of catastrophic failure of the filtered tailings stack, with loss of life."

Dalradian proposes a mere 15-year closure plan in their Statement of Case to the Public Inquiry (up from the five years in their planning application), however this plan concentrates solely on monitoring the water flooding the mine, and not the Dry Stack Facility. After the closure plan concludes, the mine site and the tailings will then be the responsibility of the state. Therefore, these tailings will become the responsibility, and financial liability, of the state (NI currently, and ROI in the possibility of constitutional change).

These tailings never become benign, and the tailings facilities that hold them require perpetual upkeep. The Society for Mining, Metallurgy, and Exploration Tailings Management Handbook states: "Unfortunately, humans have no experience in designing facilities to last forever, so responsible tailings management is required for as long as the TSF exists".



Dr Emerman, expert consultant hydrologist for Save Our Sperrins speaking on BBC NI Spotlight Programme about the mine.



The report from Dr Emerman referred to examples from the 2019 Bumadinho Brazil mine disaster due to relevance of possible filtered tailings storage dam failures.

In a report prepared for Save Our Sperrins and Communities Against the Injustice of Mining (CAIM) Dr Emerman has calculated the spread of impact of this failure:

"Failure of the DSF [Dry Stack Facility] is possible because there have been at least five failures of these types of facilities over the past three years. Based on a statistical model developed from past tailings storage facility failures, the initial runout following failure of the DSF will cover 20 kilometers in the most-likely scenario (release of 34% of the stored tailings) and 65 kilometers in the worst-case scenario (release of 100% of the stored tailings).

"In the worst-case scenario, the tailings will travel along 17 kilometers of the River Foyle as it flows along the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland during the initial event.

"In any case, subsequent to the initial event, normal fluvial processes will transport the tailings to Lough Foyle, including passage along River Foyle. Moreover, tidal currents could transport tailings from River Foyle upstream into River Finn for 11 kilometers along the border and into the interior of the Republic of Ireland. The mean tailings velocity over the initial runout will be about 35 kilometers per hour."

Ecological Impacts

Air

The potential for air pollution from this project arises from the fine particulate matter released from crushing of rock, dust from the Mine Waste Facility, diesel fumes from fossil fuel burning (3.5 million litres per annum), and radon gas released from a mine 900 metres deep.

Poisonous contaminants will be easily transported by air from Dalradian's proposed site, impacting the whole Island. Dalradian states that the 'Dry Stack Tailings Facility' would need to be sprayed with water to prevent the dust, containing heavy metals, from blowing in the wind. Fears exist around this toxic dust contaminating the land, water, air and people's health.

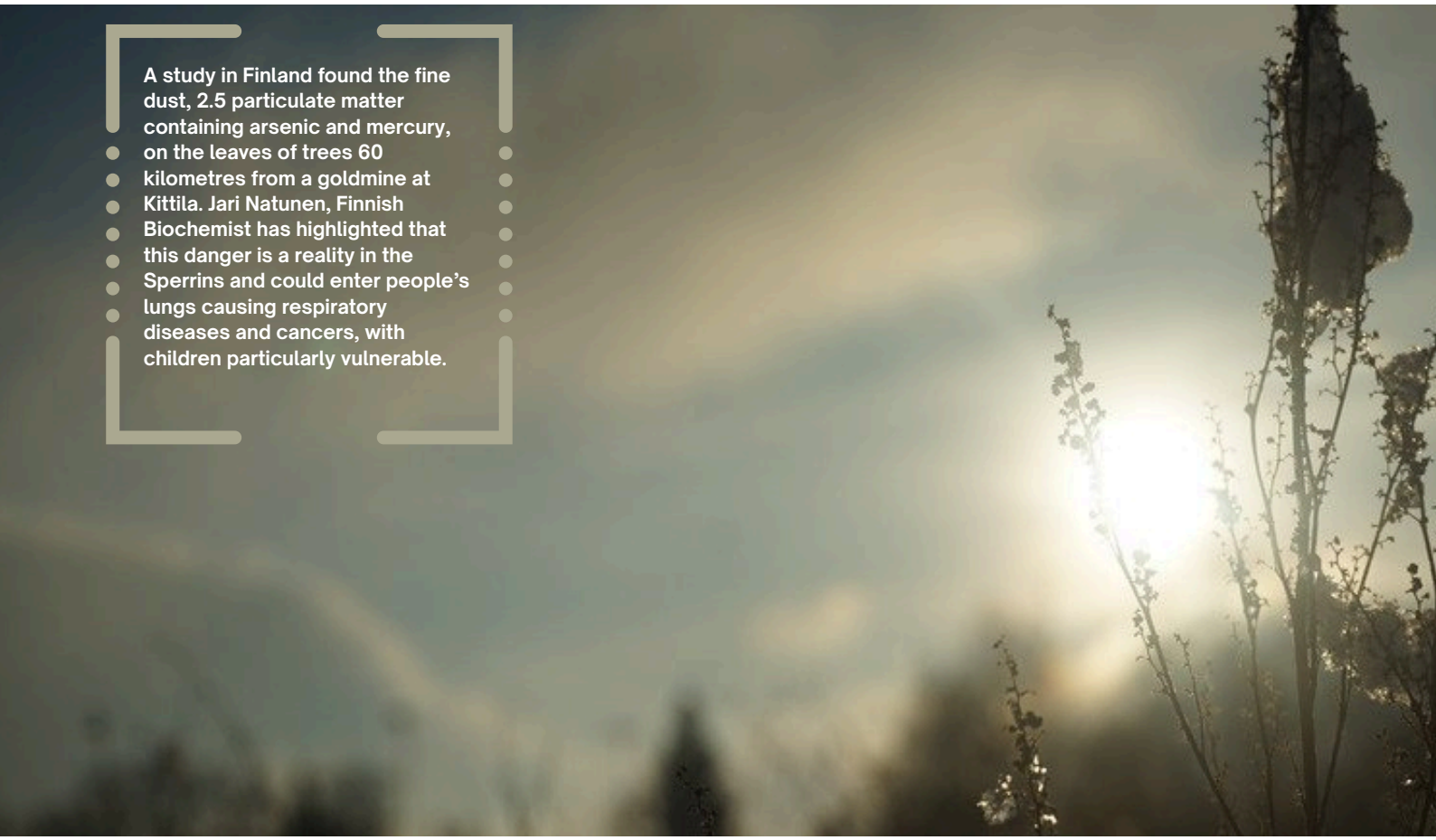
A study in Finland found the fine dust, 2.5 particulate matter containing arsenic and mercury, on the leaves of trees 60 kilometres from a goldmine at Kittila. Jari Natunen, Finnish Biochemist has highlighted that this danger is a reality in the Sperrins and could enter people's lungs causing respiratory diseases and cancers, with children particularly vulnerable.

Further, the North West of Ireland is high in radon gas, a mine 900+ metres deep would release significantly more radioactive contaminants into the air.

The link between radon gas and lung cancer is well established, according to the World Health Organisation.

Dalradian has applied to use 3.5 million litres of diesel onsite every year for 25 years - the implications of this on human, animal and plant life has not been measured in their Environmental Impact Statements. It is well documented that a high level of fumes from diesel emissions are poisonous - leading to increased rates of lung cancer, other heart and lung diseases and premature death.

A study in Finland found the fine dust, 2.5 particulate matter containing arsenic and mercury, on the leaves of trees 60 kilometres from a goldmine at Kittila. Jari Natunen, Finnish Biochemist has highlighted that this danger is a reality in the Sperrins and could enter people's lungs causing respiratory diseases and cancers, with children particularly vulnerable.



Ecological Impacts



Dalradian's plans propose a loss of 30.25 hectares (74 acres) across five peatland habitats.

The loss of these highly sensitive habitats, that take hundreds, if not thousands, of years to form, can not be mitigated.

Bog in the Sperrins by Richard Webb, CC BY-SA 2.0

Habitats

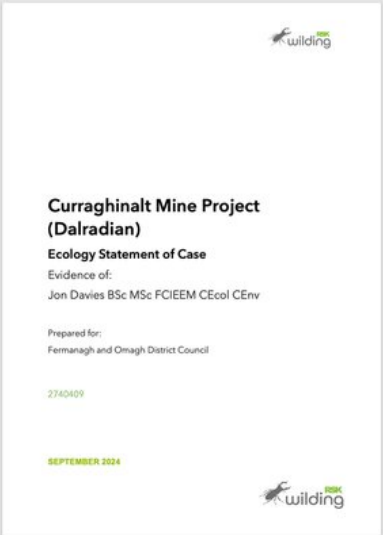
Peatland

Dalradian plan to excavate and abstract half a million gallons of water per day from the peatland surrounding their mine. Peatland is an important carbon store so this carbon would be lost, adding to climate change and impacting our ability to meet our climate targets regionally. Of note, the plans could impact the Black Bog ASSIs, a Ramsar site of international importance for its active raised bog, protected under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance.

Save Our Sperrins' Rebuttal to Dalradian's Statement of Case includes expert inputs who detail the potential for dewatering of the bog - by water abstraction, peatland excavation and a regime of daily underground blasting. Thus, a rich and special ecosystem, which is also an important carbon store, could be devastated. The drying of the peatland also leads to increased risk of wildfires and flash flooding.

Dalradian's plans propose a loss of 30.25 hectares (74 acres) across five peatland habitats. The loss of these highly sensitive habitats, that take hundreds, if not thousands, of years to form, can not be mitigated.

The Ecology Statement by Fermanagh and Omagh District Council has argued that Dalradian's restoration plans are largely unfeasible and inadequate. Further, peatland experts Dr. Accogli and Dr. Aitova highlight the peat management plan provides no information on the carbon emissions resulting from the excavation operations. Also, the peat management survey conducted on behalf of Dalradian fails to recognise and account for the legal status attached to peatlands as carbon sinks.


Curraghinalt Mine Project
(Dalradian)
Ecology Statement of Case
Evidence of:
Jon Davies BSc MSc FCIEEM CEcol CEnv
Prepared for:
Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
2740409
SEPTEMBER 2024

Ecology Statement by Fermanagh and Omagh District Council argues Dalradian's restoration plans largely unfeasible and inadequate.

Ecological Impacts

Endangered Species

In light of an ongoing biodiversity crisis, this proposed gold mine would have far reaching impacts for all species locally and across the Island.

The construction of heavy duty powerlines, removal and disturbance of bog ecosystems, blasting and rock removal noted in Dalradian's planning application would disturb wildlife habitats and ecosystems as well as contributing to climate and biodiversity crises.

At particular risk is the endangered Freshwater Pearl Mussels. Other protected species at risk include bats, otters and the Atlantic Salmon, who breed in the Owenkillew.

Native Atlantic Salmon, a protected species under Annexes II and V of the Habitats Directive, rely on the health of the rivers that would be directly impacted by the water discharge and tailings failure for habitat and nursery purposes.

Otters are at risk from heavy metal toxicity as a result of contaminated fish and macroinvertebrates they eat, in addition to direct toxic impacts on the otters themselves.

Other species at risk include Whooper Swans, Peregrine Falcons and Chough, as well as migrating birds - such as the Greylag geese and Snipe.



Native Atlantic Salmon rely on health of rivers to breed and develop into young Salmon Parr to continue their lifecycle.



Otters are at risk from heavy metal toxicity as a result of contaminated fish and macroinvertebrates they eat.

Climate Crisis

Despite greenwashing claims that the mining industry will solve the climate crisis, globally the industry is responsible for 20% of global carbon emissions.

In the context of ongoing catastrophic climate breakdown this proposed mine represents serious local and global impacts. The level of fossil fuel emissions well into the next decade, and past the legally binding date for net zero targets, has implications for climate breakdown that are far reaching well beyond the island of Ireland. Dalradian's plans are incompatible with the Climate Change Act NI 2022 and the Paris Agreement due to fossil fuel emissions at source, and emissions down stream which have not been considered by Dalradian.

The claims of carbon neutrality by Dalradian have been questioned by Friends of the Earth NI, among others. Dalradian's plans also rely heavily on carbon offsetting, which has been refuted for decades as a false solution. Concerns also arise regarding the removal of active bog during construction, which serves as a natural carbon store—an aspect overlooked in their carbon assessments. As Dr Amy Strecker points out: "The proposed water abstraction alone would seriously deplete the capacity of the designated bogs of the Sperrins to act as carbon sinks, and would negate any other 'green' policies by Dalradian including the offsetting of carbon by tree planting or purchasing carbon credits".

"The proposed water abstraction alone would seriously deplete the capacity of the designated bogs of the Sperrins to act as carbon sinks, and would negate any other 'green' policies by Dalradian including the offsetting of carbon by tree planting or purchasing carbon credits"

Social Impacts

The environmental issues raised so far do not affect biodiversity alone, they are intertwined with the human communities who live in the Sperrins. Understanding the Sperrins as a living landscape and the interaction of human and other-than-human communities is important when considering the impacts of such a large proposal.

Cultural Heritage and Language - Living Landscape

The Sperrins is also an important cultural landscape, the area is rich in history, archaeology1, local folklore2 and story. One site of note in the designated ASAI (Area of Significant Archaeological Interest) is the six thousand year old Beaghmore Stone Circles - one of the largest and most complex sites of its kind.

According to HED (Historic Monuments): "Generally, it is unlikely that ASAIs will be able to accommodate large scale development such as quarrying or mining operations... as it is likely that the overall impact of such proposals could be particularly damaging to the distinct appearance, character and historic environment of the area."

Recent research has documented the social, ecological and intangible cultural heritage significance of the area, through Ethnography, Countermapping and Photovoice. Revealing that the Sperrins has abundant social, sacred, ecological, historical and personal meaning. It was one of the last Gaeltacht (Irish speaking areas) in Ulster, and while speaking Irish as a first language declined in the 1950s, many still continue to speak Irish in the area.

The proposed application by Dalradian would cause immense harm to the sense of place and belonging people have in the Sperrins. Further evidence of the cultural significance of the landscape to the local community is provided by Dr Peader MacGabhann, expert in Irish language, history and folklore, (see Save our Sperrins Statement Appendix 8) who notes the Muintir Luinigh area is considered a sacred landscape comprising the adjacent Dún Ruadh site, a burial site that contains pre-Christian and early Christian human remains. Further, the ancient Green Road, traversed during the Flight of the Earls runs directly through the proposed site of Dalradian.

The landscape is very much part of people's religion, culture, heritage and history, as outlined in this report, which constitutes valuable intangible cultural heritage. The cultural landscape and intangible heritage is recognised in international treaties such as the UNESCO 1972 World Heritage Convention ("Cultural Landscapes"), the 2003 UNESCO Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (Article 2), and the 2000 Council of Europe Landscape Convention (Article 1). Expert statements for the public inquiry highlight that the Cultural Heritage Impact Assessments undertaken by Dalradian rely on outdated methodologies and do not consider intangible cultural heritage, social impact or the impact of the application on the wider cultural landscape and its importance for well-being and local peoples' sense of place.

Dinnseanchas and Solastalgia

Two concepts that capture sense of place are 'dinnseanchas' - meaning the spirit of a place, which results from interactions of natural and human processes over time, and 'solastalgia'- ecological grief, or grief from the loss of ecology.

Both of these concepts have been accepted as material considerations in recent years: Dinnseanchas by the PAC in the Doravill Wind Farm inquiry, and Solastalgia by Monaghan County Council in the planning process for the gypsum mine by Gyproc.

Likewise, both are material considerations for Dalradian's proposed goldmine - given the scale of construction, level of impacts and their perpetual nature.



Recent research has documented the social, ecological and intangible cultural heritage significance of the area, through Ethnography, Countermapping and Photovoice. Revealing that the Sperrins has abundant social, sacred, ecological, historical and personal meaning.

Social Impacts

Human Rights and Manufacturing Consent

Buying a Social Licence to Operate

Central to the ways extractive industries operate is the social engineering of communities to manufacture consent- this involves the divide and conquer of communities, buying a social licence to operate by sponsoring community groups or through greenwashing narratives.

An example of such being Dalradian's claims that the minerals extracted from their mine would be used for renewable energy, claims proven false by the Advertising Standards Agency in 2021. Greenwashing claims of carbon neutrality, as mentioned above, also form part of this narrative.

Dalradian have attempted to sponsor local community groups, sports teams and schools through the Dalradian Community Fund, formerly known as the Tyrone Fund. Various groups have returned this money once they became cognisant of what the mining project entailed. Other tactics such as employing two PR firms and running constant advertisements in local newspapers and online have been used.

Criminalisation and Mental Health

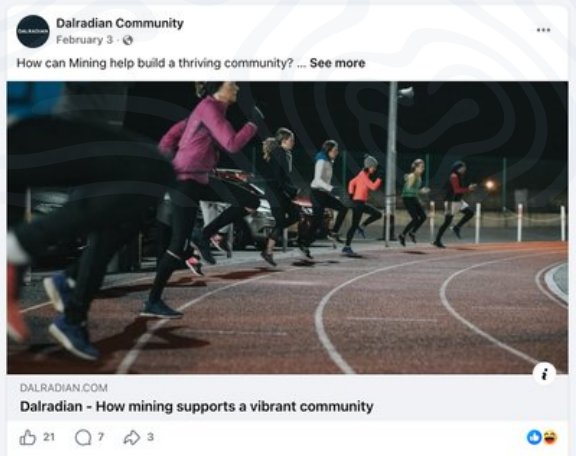
Extractive industries are well known for overtly violent tactics to manufacture consent, repress and criminalise resistance. The same tactics are used in the Sperrins, albeit to a less violent degree than in other parts of the world, such as Latin America. Land defenders have received death threats, faced assault, and surveillance.

In 2022, Save our Sperrins made a Civil Society submission to the United Nations for their review of the UK's record on human rights.

In 2024, CAJ launched "Policing the Protectors – a narrative report of PSNI Policing of environmental protest in the Sperrins", highlighting the selective policing faced by land defenders in the Sperrins.

Extensive resources, time, money and energy, are used attending court hearings, which often last for years. This insidious tactic has had a serious impact on the mental health of local people.

As well as criminalisation, stress is caused by the long term uncertainty of the plans, the fears of loss of home, livelihood and health as well as the divisions within the community.

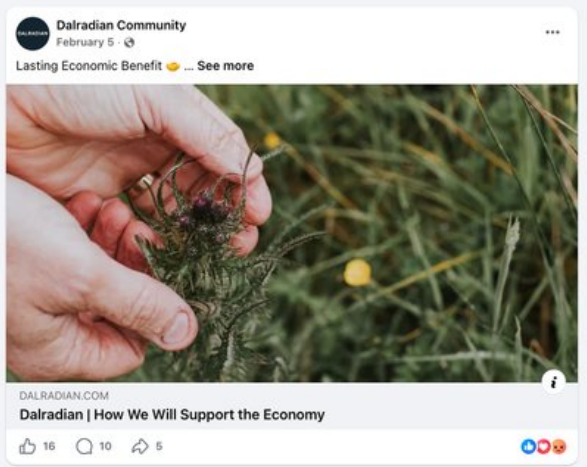


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Images from the 'Dalradian Community' Facebook page



Social Impacts

Procedural Injustice and Democratic Rights

The democratic and participative process required by law for this gold mine application, and associated applications, to progress is flawed in parts and completely absent in others. To date there has been a raft of procedural injustices associated with this planning application which has hampered meaningful public participation.

The operating law in terms of mineral extraction in NI is the Minerals Development Act, 1969, therefore the NI minerals policy regime does not honour the multitude of environmental and public participation laws and regulations that have come into force since.

Friends of the Earth NI have called on the Northern Irish government to refer itself at the High Court, to judicially review their Minerals regime in the context of the past 55 years. On top of this, serious conflicts of interest have repeatedly emerged. For example, in 2020, DfI employed consultant group Golder Associates UK Limited to assess Dalradian's waste management plan despite being the firm that worked for Dalradian when producing the planning application.

Countless times during the process of this application it has been local residents who have raised breaches in law and regulation by the various responsible authorities in the North.

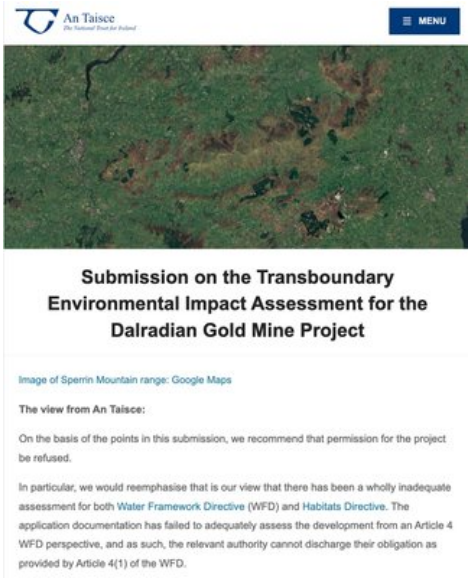
As noted earlier, it was residents from Donegal who highlighted the lack of transboundary consultation, a legal requirement, at the public inquiry in January 2025; not by the Department of Infrastructure, whose job it was to carry it out, and not in 2017, when the Planning Application was first submitted.

Leading to grounded fears the governance system is not equipped to handle an application of this magnitude, not to mention monitor and enforce mining operations at this scale.





The operating law in terms of mineral extraction in NI is the Minerals Development Act, 1969, therefore the NI minerals policy regime does not honour the multitude of environmental and public participation laws and regulations that have come into force subsequently.



An Taisce — the National Trust for Ireland's view is there has been a lack of assessment of Natura 2000 sites further downstream from the development site, including the River Finn and Lough Foyle SPA. This contravenes the requirements of the Habitats Directive.

Social Impacts

Public Participation

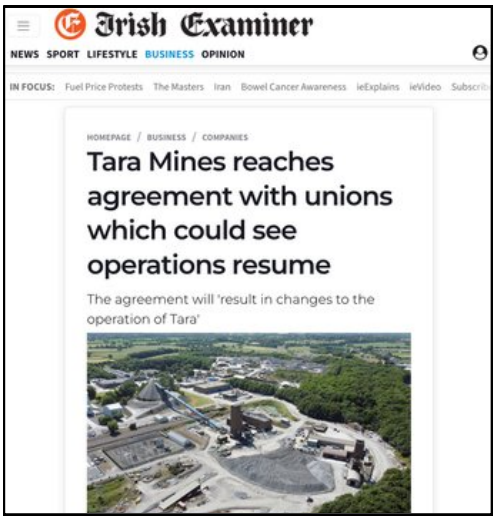
There have been many issues around lack of public participation - from the lack of public consultation around the time of the original application to the flawed public inquiry process.

A petition has been put to the PAC for a series of issues, the main demands include for the inquiry to be live streamed, video record the proceedings and make them publicly available online, and allow expert witnesses to participate online if they cannot be present. In addition, information is either inaccessible or not made public, breaching the right to access information under Article 4 of the Aarhus Convention. Also, the volume of new information presented by Dalradian, at this late stage, without public consultation, is a clear violation of Article 6.5 of the Aarhus Convention. Due to the fact that participation is only permitted in person in Omagh during working hours, the local population have highlighted there is a large disparity in the ability to participate for average working people, or parents of young children, compared to the company and State. Further, the public must finance their own reports, statements, attendance and experts for the inquiry.



Economic Issues

Despite narratives of wealth generation, extractive projects around the world extract wealth from their host countries, are unstable and follow extreme boom and bust cycles and create "enclave economies" (that do not serve the local economy) as seen in both Rosia Montană, Romania and Chalkidiki, Greece. Dalradian's project will extract wealth to the private equity company who ultimately owns them (Orion Mining Finance is based in Delaware but has subsidiaries in key tax havens such as the Cayman Islands where companies do not have to disclose financial details). With the Crown Estate receiving 4% of the royalties (due to the colonial legacy of the precious metals being still owned by the Crown Estate).



The mining industry in Ireland also has a terrible track record when it comes to workers rights, which causes concerns for the Sperrins.

Promises of jobs have varied since plans were announced from 350 to over 1,000. Local residents have pointed out that jobs will be specialised in mining and therefore not, in fact, for the local population. The mining industry in Ireland also has a terrible track record when it comes to workers rights, which causes concerns for the Sperrins. Dalradian estimates the site holds around £4-5 billion of deposits and a life span of 20-25 years, however, this is based on speculation. Land defenders have been quick to highlight that this represents a short term economic benefit for a few (Orion, Dalradian and Crown Estates) with long term environmental and community devastation for local people and communities across the island. This contrasting worldview is summed up by local defender who explains the Sperrins is not just a mineral rich landscape, "To Dalradian it's all about money, but to us it's about our home, our land, our air, our water, that future generations will be able to live here."



Our governments North and South advertise that 'Ireland is Open for Business' - we are considered as one island in the eyes of the mining industry, with many of the same companies present on both sides of the border. Roughly 25% of the land area of Northern Ireland and 27% of the land area of the RoI has already been given out to mining companies under prospecting licences. The extractive and neoliberal economic model in the North and South of Ireland has led to extreme levels of social inequality and degraded ecosystems, inviting in more transnational corporations will only entrench these consequences for people and place.

Social Impacts

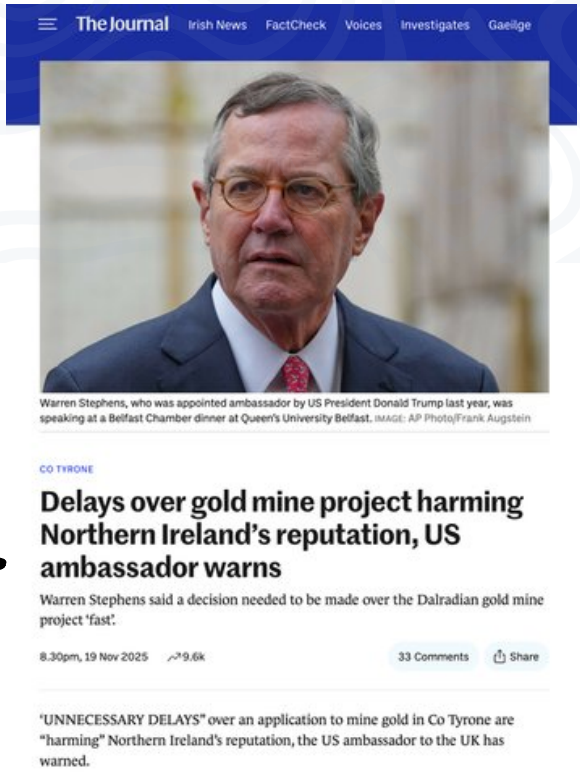
Geopolitical Issues

The proposed mine in the Sperrins sits within a shifting geopolitical context. Dalraidan have added a host of “critical minerals” to their plans despite not appearing in their original planning application.

Communities in the Sperrins and across the globe highlight that the UK Critical Minerals Strategy 2025 will bring devastation to people and place. A recent Global Justice Now report reveals over half of minerals designated as ‘critical’ by the UK play ‘no major role’ in the green transition; instead mining of them is driven in a large way by militarisation.

Ireland, North and South, is deeply tied to US imperial interests and depends on US Foreign Direct Investment. These interests have written to the Northern Ireland executive pressuring them to make a decision on Dalradian’s application.

They include the US ambassador to the UK, four US Congressmen and also former UK ambassador to the US Peter Mandelson - who has now resigned his Lordship due to connections to convicted sex offender Jeffery Epstein.


The Journal Irish News FactCheck Voices Investigates Gaeilge

Warren Stephens, who was appointed ambassador by US President Donald Trump last year, was speaking at a Belfast Chamber dinner at Queen's University Belfast. IMAGE: AP Photo/Frank Augstein

CO TYRONE

Delays over gold mine project harming Northern Ireland’s reputation, US ambassador warns

Warren Stephens said a decision needed to be made over the Dalradian gold mine project ‘fast’.

8.30pm, 19 Nov 2025 9.6k 33 Comments Share

‘UNNECESSARY DELAYS” over an application to mine gold in Co Tyrone are “harming” Northern Ireland’s reputation, the US ambassador to the UK has warned.


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US lawmakers warn over delays to major gold mine in Northern Ireland

Backers fear long planning process for Curraghinalt project could deter other investors in one of poorest UK regions

© Charles McQuillan/FT

Save

Jude Webber in County Tyrone and Myles McCormick in Washington

Published MAY 21 2025 66


Belfast Telegraph

UK Ambassador hosted company behind controversial NI goldmine plans before embassy warned Civil Service over delay 'frustration'

Campaigner say these revelations raise ‘serious legal and democratic concerns’

1/2

A recent Global Justice Now report reveals over half of minerals designated as ‘critical’ by the UK play ‘no major role’ in the green transition; instead mining of them is driven in a large way by militarisation.

Community Resistance

10 years of Save our Sperrins

In the face of these challenges and risks from the proposed mine plan, community resistance has been growing. From a few concerned local people in 2014 to a nationally and internationally recognised campaign for air, water, land and public health with thousands of supporters, the movement against gold mining in the Sperrins is central to discourses of environmental justice on the Island of Ireland today. In July 2025 Save our Sperrins celebrated 10 years of resistance with keynote speaker UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor.

A diversity of tactics has been used by the campaign over the years, including judicial reviews and legal challenges, 100s of public information meetings, anti-mining candidate elected to local council, conferences, an occupation site called the Greencastle People's Office, community celebrations and events, petitions, pickets and non-violent direct actions, education and awareness raising, fundraising and networking. Organisers in the Sperrins have pushed back against mainstream narratives of the company and state by producing important materials on social media, their own website and sharing stories through a podcast series. Land Defenders have spent many hours carefully reading the hundreds of thousands of documents submitted, writing sample objection letters, and preparing Statements of Case for the public inquiry, becoming experts in the process.

The resistance is rooted in people's lived experiences and a deep love for the Sperrins; culture and arts has played a central role in highlighting the important connections people have to place here. Many artists and creative methods have been active in the campaign across visual arts, performance, poetry, sculpture, music, comedy, theatre and more. For example, the Art of resistance festival included an exhibition with over 50 artists, workshops and a music event. Local artists from Park, County Derry, have used their talents to raise awareness and funds for the campaign.







Many artists and creative methods have been active in the campaign across visual arts, performance, poetry, sculpture, music, comedy, theatre and more.

Community Resistance



Event in Dublin May 2025 with speakers from Guardians of the Atrato River Colombia, Save Our Sperrins and An Taisce — the National Trust for Ireland. From left to right; representing Save Our Sperrins, Cormac McAleer and Fidelma O'Kane (Ireland), Guardians of the Atrato River, Bernadino Mosquera, Elaine McGoff, An Taisce, Viviana González Moreno, SIEMBRA (Colombia), Alexander Rodríguez Mena, Guardians of the Atrato River, Rodrigo Rogelis SIEMBRA (Colombia) and the panel was chaired by ecologist Anja Murray.

International Solidarity

The resistance in the Sperrins is deeply rooted in place but at the same time it has become part of a wider global movement protecting people, place and planet in the face of extractivism. In Ireland, organisers in the Sperrins were instrumental in the setting up of CAIM (Communities Against the Injustice of Mining) a network of grassroots communities supporting each other across the island. Save our Sperrins have also been active with The Gathering, another network of environmental protectors, and Slí Eile an anti-capitalist climate movement who facilitate Climate Camp Ireland.

Through collaborations with other networks and collectives (such as the Yes to Life No to Mining global solidarity network), universities, NGOs and UN Special Rapporteurs, many events and visits have been held with Indigenous and Global South Land Protectors who are on the frontlines of resistance to extractivism globally. Connections and relationships have been built with the Lakota Nation, Colombia, Guatemala, Cyprus, Peru, Indonesia, Honduras, Brazil, India and many more.



Members of the local campaign group, Save Our Sperrins, welcomed indigenous and traditional community leaders from South America's Amazon rainforest to the Beaghmore Stone Circles on Sunday.

Amazonian delegation visits Tyrone to highlight 'threat of gold mining'

BY JARLATH COWAN

MEMBERS of the local campaign group, Save Our Sperrins (SOS), recently welcomed indigenous and traditional community leaders from South America's Amazon rainforest to the Sperrin mountains.

The purpose of the visit was to discuss the potential environmental impact of gold mining on the local Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The group from the Munduruku and Kayapo territories, along with representatives from the Lower Trombetas region, brought with them a wealth of experience in combating resource extraction in their own ancestral homelands.

They have been protesting against harmful mining taking place in the lands and forests where they have lived for generations.

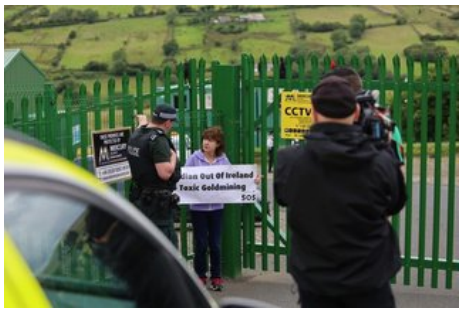
The indigenous visitors paid a visit to the Beaghmore Stone Circles where they learnt about the ancient history of the area.

Photos: Jarlath Cowan

Save Our Sperrins welcoming visitng groups from Munduruku and Kayapo Territories along with Lower Trombetas Region of the Amazon

Key moments in Resistance Timeline













<u>To Mine or to Mind conference</u> held in Sperrins with Friends of the Earth NI.

2018 (February) Greencastle People's Office set up.

2019 (January) Save Our Sperrins member chained himself to a drill rig, stopping Dalradian exploration for a day. Same member was arrested a few days later for "blocking a road" and "resisting arrest."

2018 (July) Chas Jewett visits, community celebration in the Sperrins, marking start of Making Relatives Collective

2019 (November), local resident and member of Save Our Sperrins, successfully challenged the water discharge consent agreed in 2017 in the <u>High Court</u>.

2019 (May) Local anti-gold mining campaigner elected as independent councillor to Fermanagh Omagh District Council in council elections.

2019 (June) Three members of Save Our Sperrins received death threats. PSNI advised they were "credible threats and to take security precautions."

2020 (July) protest on roof of Dalradian compound.

2020 (August) protest outside Omagh PSNI station over selective policing.

2021 (February) CAIM set up.

2021 (March) <u>Local man</u> attaches himself to Dalradain's gates in protest of Dalradian not complying with condition of planning permission.

2021 (April) people of Sperrins assert their Rights of Communities, Rights of Nature in a Declaration in response to the abandonment notice for Crockanboy Road by Roads Division DfI.

2021 (June) Awareness raising walk from Sperrins to Stormont.

2021 (August) Greencastle GPO to Dublin GPO awareness raising to the Dail in Dublin.

2021 (September) Protest outside PSNI headquarters Belfast.

2021 (October) Zapatista visit to the Sperrins- two days of events, visits and sharings.

2021 (November) CAMIO organise sit outs and meditations every night outside Council offices in Omagh to coincide with COP 26.

2021 (December) 12 members of Save Our Sperrins travelled to London for two days of actions, meetings, protests.

Key moments in Resistance Timeline

2022 (July) 2 weeks of Making Relatives events in Leitrim, Sperrins and Donegal.

2022 (December) Photovoice exhibition in the Playhouse Derry.

2022 (December) Save Our Sperrins hold 24 hour fast and sit-out at Omagh Courthouse.

2022 (March) Save our Sperrins submit to UN Periodic Review of UK's record on Human Rights (arising from the proposed goldmine).

2023 (March) A "People and Place" day is held in Omagh celebrating place connection, culture and heritage in the Sperrins.

2023 (May) Chas Jewett visits Greencastle along with two other Lakota water protectors from Standing Rock.

2023 (June) A group of 10 Indigenous peoples from Turtle Island visit for Water Walk.

2023 fundraising activities take place from Clare to Derry and Belfast to raise funds for the public inquiry, including Crowdfunder which is still live.

2023 (November) Art of Resistance festival Belfast

2024 Visits from Indigenous people from the Brazilian Amazon.

2024 (September) CAJ (Committee on the Administration of Justice) publishes a report on the policing of protestors in Sperrins.

2024 (October) Save Our Sperrins submit Statements of case against Dalradian's 8 planning applications.

2024 (November) Save Our Sperrins submit Rebuttals to Dalradian's Statements of Case.

2025 (July) Four members of Save Our Sperrins initiated Judicial Review proceedings against DfE for granting 7 prospecting licences without following due procedure.

2025 (July) Save our Sperrins 10 year anniversary.

2025 (August) A Day of Resistance is held with participants from across Ireland, with talks, ceili, and creative performance.

2025 (December) 16 members of Save our Sperrins went to London for 2 days of advocacy, networking and protest.













Examples above, and on the previous page are from the lively Save Our Sperrins Facebook page. It has over 10k followers and it's used to help keep them up to date on campaign news.

2026 (April) Goldmine Public Inquiry opens





Save Our Sperrins caravan is a focal point for activitiy during the campaign

An Taisce
The National Trust for Ireland

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