I am responding to this enquiry because I am very concerned about the damaging effect that fracking would have on rural tourism in England, and in the rest of the UK. In particular, I would like to raise the following points:

1 Fracking will result in the industrialisation of the countryside
Fracking is a heavy industrialised process that would require tens of thousands of wells to produce meaningful quantities of gas. Shale gas companies are already talking about drilling hundreds of wells per 10x10 km² licence area, and much of England’s most precious landscape is already licenced for fracking, with PEDL (Petroleum Exploration and Development Licences) covering vast areas of the country. This widespread industrialisation of the countryside for shale gas production is incompatible with EFRA’s aim of developing sustainable rural tourism.

2 Fracking will impact businesses near well-sites
Drilling and fracking are 24-hour-a-day activities, and will be allowed within 400m of rural villages. The noise, light pollution, air pollution and general disruption that this industrial activity would create will have a detrimental effect on tourist businesses in these rural areas, particularly for businesses that are close to a well-site, such as campsites, B&Bs, pubs, hotels, etc. Visitors to rural areas are unlikely to want to spend their holidays in the shadow of a fracking well-site.

3 Fracking will result in a huge increase in heavy traffic
Each fracking well in full production will require thousands of HGV movements to and from the site, resulting in a huge increase of HGV traffic on country roads. Each fracking well-pad is likely to have between ten and fifty wells, resulting in tens of thousands of HGV movements per well-pad. This will cause excessive noise and air pollution and make travelling around rural areas far more difficult for tourists. This huge increase in HGV traffic along small country roads is also likely to result in more queues, traffic accidents and damage to roads and verges. The extra delays this will cause would impact on rural businesses such as farms, shops and small factories, all of which rely on prompt deliveries for their businesses to function effectively. The peace and quiet of the countryside – a key factor in choosing a rural holiday - will also be destroyed.

4 The health impacts of fracking and the perception of those impacts will deter tourists
Fracking is banned or restricted by moratoria in many other countries, such as France, Germany, Bulgaria, Holland, Scotland, and also in a number of US states such as Maryland and New York State. These bans and moratoria are mainly because the health impacts of fracking on public health are considered by experts to be too dangerous to allow this process in their country or state. Dr. Howard A. Zucker, NY State Health Commissioner, who recommending a fracking ban in his home state, said, "Would I let my family live in a community with fracking? The answer is no. The potential risks of fracking are too great. In fact, they are not even fully known." If fracking were allowed across the English countryside, many people would be discouraged from visiting because of legitimate health concerns for themselves and their families regardless of claims that UK regulations would reduce those impacts.

5 Fracking will reduce employment in the rural tourism sector
Tourism provides millions of permanent jobs for the rural economy (over 3.1 million in 2013, according to Visit Britain). Fracking, in contrast, would only provide a small number of short-term jobs at each well-site, most of which would go to itinerant specialists brought in on fixed contracts to do a particular task. However, widespread fracking on the scale envisaged by the government
and the shale gas industry would threaten thousands of permanent jobs in the tourist industry, as visitor numbers fall.

6 Fracking will affect the reputation of agriculture and food produced in tourist areas
Rural economies depend on farming and food production as well as tourism, and these two industries are often complementary. Some areas of the country have become known for their high-quality produce and rely on this reputation to attract tourists to local food fairs, farmers’ markets, restaurants, etc. The introduction of fracking in these areas may compromise the quality and reputation of the locally produced food, or result in the perception that food from farms grown near fracking wells could be contaminated, resulting in lower sales, falling tourist numbers, and lower rural employment.

7 Our most treasured nature and wildlife sites are under threat from fracking
Our nation’s protected areas, such as National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), World Heritage and Ramsar sites, etc. are hugely important for rural tourism and attract millions of visitors each year. Current legislation allows fracking well-pads to be situated just outside the borders of these protected areas, and fracking wells themselves can be drilled horizontally underneath these areas. This may result in National Parks, AONBs and SSSIs being encircled by fracking wells, each of which would require thousands of truck movements to and from the site. The resulting noise, pollution and traffic would destroy the amenity of the country’s most precious and wildlife-rich natural places, and would most likely result in a dramatic fall in the number of tourists visiting the area.

8 Fracking will negatively impact wildlife tourism
Many tourists visit our countryside to enjoy the wildlife that lives there, and wildlife tourism is a growing sector in rural England. However, widespread fracking, with potentially hundreds of wells per 10x10 km² PEDL licence block, is likely to have a very damaging effect on wildlife populations, particularly if fracking wells are situated around the edges of areas that have been specifically protected to preserve wildlife, such as those mentioned in the previous point. The noise, air pollution, light pollution and increased traffic created by fracking well-sites are likely to result in many native species suffering a loss in numbers or simply leaving the area completely, and the 24 hour-a-day nature of drilling and fracking would have a detrimental effect on protected nocturnal species such as owls and bats. This in turn would have a disastrous effect on wildlife tourism in rural areas and a drop in visitor numbers.

9 Water contamination from fracking could permanently impact an area’s reputation
Fracking also brings with it the threat of water contamination, either through leaking wells – which could contaminate the aquifers that provide our drinking water - or surface spills, which could pollute streams and rivers. It would only take one incident of contaminated drinking water, or a catastrophic explosion at a well-site, to permanently damage the reputation of a popular tourist area for many years, which would result in a precipitous drop in tourists visiting this area. Currently fracking companies are not required to post a bond to pay for environmental clean-up, if indeed such clean-up were possible.

10 Fracking will reduce property prices, which will discourage rural investment
Fracking is expected to have a negative effect on house and property prices in fracking areas, particularly for properties within one mile of a well-site. The DEFRA Shale Gas Rural Economy Report stated: “A study in Texas concluded that house prices valued at more than $250,000 and within 1,000 ft of a well-site saw their values decrease by 3-14%.” The same report went on to say: "House prices in close proximity to the drilling operations are likely to fall. There could be a 7% reduction in property values within one mile of an extraction
This drop in property values will in turn have a negative effect on rural business investment, as it will discourage people from investing in new and existing rural businesses in areas where fracking is taking place.

12 Public perception of fracking is overwhelmingly negative
Despite the government’s attempts to promote the shale gas industry over the last five years, fracking is extremely unpopular with the general public, with only 21% of the population supporting the process, according to the latest Government Wave 18 survey. Even recent suggestions that people would be paid up to £10,000 to allow fracking on their doorstep met with a lukewarm response, with only 33% of people supporting the policy. Most people don’t want fracking, and are unlikely to want to go on holiday to an area where this industry is established. Therefore the perception by the public that a particular part of the countryside is in a fracking zone will discourage people from visiting this area, reducing tourist numbers.

12 Defra’s own report says that fracking would negatively impact the rural tourist sector
Defra’s draft Shale Gas Rural Economy Impacts Paper, which was eventually published unredacted in July 2015, states the following: “Shale gas may transform a previously pristine and quiet natural region, bringing increased industrialisation. As a result, rural economy businesses that rely on clean air, land, water and/or a tranquil environment may suffer losses from this change, such as agriculture, tourism, organic farming, hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation.” This paper also went on to say that fracking “may reduce the number of visitors and tourists to the rural area, with an associated reduction in spend in the local tourism economy.”

As you will know, the first time the Defra draft Shale Gas Rural Economy Impacts Paper was published it was redacted 63 times, including sections on house prices, economic impacts, social services, local services and the executive summary. The unredacted report was finally published in July 2015, only because the government was forced to do so by the Information Commissioner after a long-running public outcry. On its publication Defra distanced itself from the report’s conclusions, claiming that it was an early draft of an internal document, was not analytically robust, and that work on this report had been discontinued. However, one must wonder why the report was discontinued, instead of being re-drafted so that it was considered to be ‘analytically robust’ and suitable for publication.

This also means that Defra, by its own admission, has never completed a comprehensive survey on the effect of fracking on the rural economy – which of course would include the rural tourism sector, the subject of this enquiry – and thus does not have the relevant information they

Conclusion
I am strongly opposed to fracking in rural areas for all the reasons given in this submission, and I believe that the shale gas industry is one of the greatest threats facing rural tourism in England.

I further recommend that the EFRA Select Committee should commission a new independent report of the impact of the shale gas industry on the rural economy, including rural tourism.

Until such a report is produced, the EFRA Select committee should demand an immediate moratorium on fracking and other forms of unconventional gas production.

September 2016