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Hundreds of Garda deployed to protect Shell's machine from the people of Ireland

Andrew Flood

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A huge secretive Garda security operation last night swung into operation in Dublin Port as Shell's Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM) left the port as part of a huge convoy of Garda vehicles. News of the operation had leaked at the last minute meaning that with only an hours notice a handful of Shell to Sea campaigners managed to get down to the port entrance despite the pouring rain. Most of us were pulled over and questioned by Garda at least once and the Garda helicopter stayed overhead as various Garda vehicles including a van load of riot cops with the door open drove past us repeatedly.

Our presence appeared to cause some delays as the convoy left the port over 90 minutes past the planned departure time. Such was the huge Garda force present that all we could do was film the convoy as it left the gates, the video is below. Other campaigners who followed the convoy reported that there were Garda on every overpass on the motorway leading out of town and individual Garda every 50 or so meters along

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the road. They reported that it reminded them of the level of policing deployed during the British Queen's visit last year. No one was allowed overtake the convoy which moved at about 50km as it headed west.

A Shell to Sea press release described "a huge convoy that included four riot vans, numerous other police vehicles and four minibuses of private security. The huge police operation saw check points every five miles and on top of every motorway bridge as it passed." This huge police presence indicates an awareness of just how unpopular the Great Oil & Gas Give-away has become with the population and a fear that if news had leaked out sooner significant attempts to stop the convoy leaving the port would have been possible.

At the time of writing it must still be heading west towards Erris where for over a decade the community have resisted the imposition of Shell's experimental gas pipeline and refinery. Any information on the progress of the TBM and convoy could be useful so please let Rosspoint Solidarity Camp know it's whereabouts, preferably to the camp phone (085-1141170) or by email (rosspointsolidaritycamp@gmail.com) or on Twitter using #corribTBM

So far the mainstream media have refused to report at all on this huge operation, quite why is not clear. This machine is intended to complete the last phase of that project that will link the pipeline to then refinery by boring a 4.2m wide, 5km long tunnel through Sruwaddacon estuary, a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The TBM is 140m long and weighs almost 500 tonnes. It was built in Schwanau in Germany by Herrenknecht. The TBM is comprised of 14 sections. The front part contains the 28-tonne cutter head which will drill under Sruwaddacon Bay next year. The cutter head consists of 21 14" cutter discs, 32 scrapers and six buckets and requires two 400kw motors to turn it.

An appeal has gone out for anyone who can make it to get down to Erris to help prepare resistance to the convoy getting to the compound where the tunnel will be started.