



Fracking: a briefing for Friends

In February 2017, Quakers in Britain called for a ban on shale gas fracking and all forms of intensive fossil fuel extraction. Meeting for Sufferings, the representative body of Quakers in Britain, said “We have faith that we can tackle climate change and build a more sustainable future, but we know this is only possible if fossil fuels remain underground [...] Fracked gas is not the low-carbon solution some suggest that it is and is incompatible with tackling the climate crisis.” This briefing explains why the UK must ban fracking, and suggests ways of taking action.

What is fracking?

Shale gas fracturing or ‘fracking’ uses water or chemicals at high pressure to dislodge gas from rock and shale to then use as fuel. It is one of a number of intensive fossil fuel extraction methods that governments, companies and investors around the world are turning to in order to secure more reserves of gas, oil and coal. Other methods include tar sands oil, coal-bed methane and underground coal gasification. The UK government claims new extract methods are needed to satisfy energy demand, and keep fuel bills down. But these methods are carbon-intensive, use large amounts of energy and other resources (including water), and may cause air and water pollution.

Why ban fracking?

The UK fracking industry is in its infancy. Yet the UK government supports the expansion of fracking by offering tax breaks to fracking companies, and intervening in local planning decisions to permit new wells. However:

- The 2016 Paris Agreement on climate change committed countries to keep global temperatures below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and to attempt to further limit this to 1.5°C. To achieve this we must keep 80 per cent of known global fossil fuel reserves in the ground.¹ The UK must increase investment in renewable and efficient energy instead of extracting more fossil fuels.
- Fracked gas is not low-carbon – the carbon intensity of fracked gas is approximately 500g of carbon dioxide per kilowatt hour.² The UK's Energy and Climate Change Committee recommends a target of 100g of carbon dioxide per kilowatt hour by 2030 and further reductions beyond this.³
- Fracking can also create 'fugitive emissions'. These are gases that may escape during extraction and include methane, a highly intensive greenhouse gas.
- In 2013, the then UK Secretary for Energy and Climate Change, Ed Davey,⁴ and fracking company Cuadrilla,⁵ admitted that fracking in the UK will not help reduce fuel bills, and is therefore unlikely to help those in fuel poverty.
- The fracking industry has been associated with local environmental damage including water and air pollution. In the USA and Australia, communities living in and around gas fields report symptoms associated with exposure to fracking and

drilling chemicals, including breathing difficulties, nausea, rashes, eye and throat irritation, and stress.

Where is fracking happening in the UK?

Full fracking operations are expected to start at Kirby Misperton in Yorkshire in 2017. Fracking has also been permitted at a site in Lancashire, and exploration wells have been permitted in Broadford Bridge and Balcombe in West Sussex, and Tinker Lane near Blyth. A fracking company has acquired licences to survey large areas of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Cheshire and North Yorkshire.⁷ For the latest on where fracking activities may occur, visit www.frack-off.org.uk/locations/fracking-sites.

Fracking and Brexit

With the government preparing for Brexit and embarking on new trade deals, this is an important time for the UK to determine its own policy in support of a green and just energy system. The Brexit process has created uncertainty around the UK's energy and climate change policies, so it is not yet known to what extent the UK will invest in fracking.

Currently, EU directives go some way to support a UK transition to renewables and regulate fracking. The EU Renewable Energy Directive set a target of 15 per cent of energy to come from renewables by 2020. Withdrawing from this directive, and others, leaves some doubt about how UK emissions reduction targets will be achieved. Leaving the single market creates further concerns over investment in green energy, and negotiating new trade deals could involve cutting current

environmental regulations. EU directives on groundwater, mining waste and habitats, and legislating the need for environmental impact assessments, go some way to restrict the local impacts of fracking. Whether, and to what extent, the UK government will replace or strengthen these regulations in UK law is unknown.

Pressure is needed to ensure the government strengthens support for renewable and efficient energy for the UK outside of the EU, and the withdrawal from EU directives provides opportunities to demand a ban on intensive fossil fuel extraction, including fracking.

A sustainable and just energy system

A UK energy system based on renewable, efficient energy is not only urgently needed but increasingly possible. Investment in green technologies offers jobs and local economic opportunities. Our energy system requires large-scale investment in renewable production, however, as well as more efficient buildings and infrastructure. For more on what a better energy system might look like, see the *Energy in the new economy* booklet available for download at www.quaker.org.uk/new-economy.

Take action

You and your meeting can play a part in demanding a UK ban on fracking. Here are some suggestions for how to take action:

Write to your MP

It's an important time to contact your MP on fracking. You could ask them to:

- Call on the government to ban fracking and all forms of intensive fossil fuel extraction. You could use information in this briefing to explain why.
- As part of the Brexit process, and during new trade negotiations, call for a decisive UK strategy in support of green, affordable energy. Ask your MP to call on the government to support investment in renewable, efficient energy.

If you would like support in writing to your MP, contact Chris Walker (see below).

Write to your local press

There may be a risk of fracking in your local area to which you could draw attention. You may simply want to speak out about the impact of fracking on the Earth. For advice on writing to local press, find our *Reaching the media* briefing at www.quaker.org.uk/toolkit-for-action.

Support a ban on fracking in Scotland

If you live in Scotland, you can respond to a current Scottish government consultation on fracking. This is an important opportunity to call for a ban and demand a sustainable and just energy system. You can respond until 31 May 2017. For more information, visit www.quaker.org.uk/toolkit-for-action.

For further information, or for support on taking action, please contact Chris Walker, Quakers in Britain, at chrisw@quaker.org.uk or on 020 7663 1047.

Notes

1 <http://priceofoil.org/2013/06/17/80-of-fossil-fuels-should-stay-in-the-ground>.

2 UNEP (2012) *Thematic focus: resource efficiency, harmful substances and hazardous waste*. UNEP Global Environmental Alert Service (GEAS) November 2012.

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3 Setting the Fifth Budget. Fifth Session of 2015–16. (Published 27 April, 2016). House of Commons Energy and Climate Change Committee.

4 www.telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/energy/fracking/10296274/Fracking-wont-lower-energy-bills-says-Davey.html.

5 www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/nov/29/browne-fracking-not-reduce-uk-gas-prices-shale-energy-bills.

6 <http://bit.ly/2IOLwG2>.