

Unconventional Fossil Fuels: Supporter briefing ahead of the Holyrood 2016 Elections



February 2016

Why it's important

On 5 May voters across Scotland will go to the ballot to elect the politicians who will represent us in Parliament and Government for the next 5 years. The current Government has introduced a moratorium on unconventional fossil fuel extraction in Scotland including: shale gas fracking, coal bed methane drilling and underground coal gasification. Ahead of the election we have the opportunity to understand what our candidates views on unconventional fossil fuels are, influence them, put pressure on the political parties to come up with stronger positions, and ultimately influence the next Government and Parliament on this crucial issue.

What you can do

- Question your candidates when they come to your door asking for your vote
- Go to a local hustings event and put questions to all of your candidates
- Write to your candidates asking for their views on unconventional fossil fuels & Scotland's energy future

We've come up with some suggested questions you could put to candidates of any party on the doorstep, at hustings or in writing.

Your candidates have to know about an awful lot of things when they are out canvassing for votes, and will be more or less informed on issues to do with unconventional fossil fuel extraction. You may well know a lot more about the issues than they do. We've tried to form these questions so that they are understandable to candidates regardless of how much they know about the issues, and will help get informative answers. For candidates who haven't quite thought some of these things through, or who are in favour of unconventional fossil fuels some of these questions will be quite difficult, and their answers revealing.

At a political hustings event, normally you will get a chance to put your question to all of the candidates. You will probably only get the chance to ask one question, but if you go with some friends, or if you are at a hustings focusing on energy and environment issues, you might get a chance to ask more than one. If you want to dig a little deeper or flesh out some follow up questions, read the footnotes where we've given more information and pointed to sources and evidence.

Questions for Holyrood 2016 candidates

Act to ban fracking

Q. As you'll be aware, a great many people are concerned about the local environmental, health impacts and climate change impacts of unconventional fossil fuel extraction. If elected would you act to ban¹ shale gas fracking and other unconventional fossil fuels?

Moratorium research or ban now

Q. There is a huge amount of evidence from around the world about the very serious public health implications of unconventional gas drilling, the local environmental impacts in terms of water, soil and air

¹ There's a lot of debate in anti-fracking circles about the difference between a ban and a moratorium, and questions around the legality of the Scottish Government implementing a ban. This excellent blog by a legal expert explains the intricacies, and will help you form a follow up point if a candidate claims it wouldn't be legal to ban fracking:

<https://talkingmince.wordpress.com/2016/02/17/its-not-easy-being-green-part-two-along-came-a-lawyer/>

pollution and induced earthquakes, and the consequences for climate change. Do you consider that there is enough evidence to introduce a ban on the basis of the precautionary principle now, or should the new Scottish Government continue with the current research programme² to inform an eventual decision as to whether to ban the industry or allow it to go ahead?

House prices

Q. Shale gas and coalbed methane licenses are located in some of the most populated parts of the country. Evidence from the UK Government shows that house prices will be affected by this industry should it be allowed to go ahead, and a recent investigation by the journalists at the Ferret revealed that house prices could fall by as much as 10%.³ Given that there may be well over 1000 wells needed for commercial extraction, and the associated disruption, health and environmental impacts the industry brings with it, it's no surprise that house prices are predicted to fall. Surely this is reason enough to say no to the industry?

Climate change

Q. In Paris last December, world leaders met to agree a new deal to avert dangerous climate change. The Paris Agreement reaffirms the need to limit global warming to no more than 2°C, but goes further by recognising that we should be aiming for warming of no more than 1.5°C to avoid catastrophic impacts around the world. Given that 80% of known fossil fuel reserves need to stay in the ground to avoid 2°C warming⁴ – more to avoid 1.5°C – wouldn't your party agree that it is irresponsible to open up a new frontier of unconventional fossil fuels by allowing the shale gas, coalbed methane and underground coal gasification industries to proceed?

Energy future for Scotland

Q. Given the current context of unstable oil prices, the long-term unpredictability within this sector, the forthcoming / recent⁵ closure of Longannet, the last coal power plant in Scotland and Scotland's abundant renewable energy resources⁶, what is your parties' vision for where Scotland will get its energy from in the future?

Good luck! With all your letter writing, hustings and doorstep conversations! Remember to take a note of any answers you get – we'd really like to hear from you how it goes.

For more info: www.foe-scotland.org.uk/fracking

Contact: info@foe-scotland.org.uk

Friends of the Earth Scotland's work on unconventional fossil fuels is part of our campaign for a Fossil Free Scotland: A just transition to a 100% renewable, nuclear-free, zero-fossil-fuel Scotland. Find out more at: www.fossilfree.scot



² The current research programme on shale gas and coalbed methane extraction includes a Public Health Impact Assessment and studies on Economic Impacts; Transport Impacts, Seismic Activity and Monitoring; Decommissioning & Aftercare. There will also be work building on that which looks at regulation and planning, followed by a public consultation in winter 2016 / 17. For more info: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Business-Industry/Energy/onshoreoilandgas/EvidenceGathering>. In a separate process, Prof Campbell Gemmill is undertaking an independent review into underground coal gasification. For more info: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Business-Industry/Energy/onshoreoilandgas/UCGIndependentReview>.

³ UK Government Rural Community Policy Unit internal paper. A heavily redacted version was published in March 2014, but after a successful Freedom of Information appeal the full report was published in June 2015: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/440791/draft-shale-gas-rural-economy-impact-report.pdf.

An investigation by the Ferret revealed that house prices could fall by up to 10% in areas where fracking goes ahead <https://theferret.scot/fracking-property-prices-scotland/>.

⁴ There are a number of sources for this figure. This report has a nice clear executive summary setting out where the numbers come from <http://www.carbontracker.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Unburnable-Carbon-Full-rev2-1.pdf>. It considers the problem of 'unburnable carbon' from a financial perspective – that the valuation of some of the biggest companies in the world are based on fossil fuel reserves that we can't burn if we are to avoid catastrophic climate change. If you feel comfortable getting into that, a question on this would be a great one to put to candidates. You could mention that even the Governor of the Bank of England accepts this and has warned top city executives of impending financial crisis.

<http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/publications/Pages/speeches/2015/844.aspx>. NB – remember the important difference between reserves and resource: oil & gas reserves have been evaluated and are likely to be economically viable to extract; oil and gas resources have not been evaluated and may or may not be economically recoverable. Shale gas and coalbed methane in the UK is a resource that has not yet been reliably evaluated, as with much of the resource around the world. Therefore, unconventional fossil fuels are not counted in the 80% figure, and really must stay in the ground!

⁵ Longannet is due to shut down on 31 March 2016. Your hustings could be before this date, but most likely after it.

⁶ Scotland has 25% of Europe's offshore wind and tidal potential, and 10% of its wave potential, as well as significant onshore wind, hydro and solar resources. There are some useful numbers on the Scottish Government <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Business-Industry/Energy/Facts> and industry body Scottish Renewables <https://www.scottishrenewables.com/sectors/renewables-in-numbers/> websites.