

Date

Dear MSP

Concerns about unconventional gas extraction and fracking

I am aware that though there is currently a moratorium on unconventional gas including coalbed methane and fracking in Scotland, companies have licenses to explore and extract unconventional gas, and that these areas could be under threat from development if the moratorium is lifted. If this were to happen, planning applications for unconventional gas could lead to commercial extraction.

I think that the Scottish Government and Parliament should work towards a full and permanent ban on unconventional gas extraction because:

- the risks to the local environment and human health are too great
- exploiting this new source of gas will seriously jeopardise our legally binding climate change targets

Extracting coalbed methane involves drilling vertically and horizontally into the coal seam, pumping out the water and extracting gas. Often, as gas flow declines hydraulic fracturing, or 'fracking' is used to get the last of the gas out. In Australia the industry estimates that up to 40% of coalbed methane wells will be fracked.

There is a growing body of evidence that environmental and health risks associated with onshore unconventional gas extraction, including coalbed methane and shale gas, are inherent and impossible to eliminate.

A key risk is in relation to our climate targets: unconventional gas extraction is energy intensive, and burning the gas contributes to emissions. Moreover, the impact of 'fugitive emissions' of potent greenhouse gas methane through leaks, flaring and venting has led scientists to argue that the climate impact of unconventional gas is greater than that of coal.

There is also alarming evidence about the potentially devastating public health impacts for communities living in and near gas fields. This has led to a number of bans and moratoria around the world, including a ban on all coalbed methane drilling (not just fracking) within 2km of communities and sensitive industries in New South Wales, Australia.

Coalbed methane or shale gas projects tend to need a great many wells, therefore significantly increasing the risk of something going wrong. I would not like to see Scotland unnecessarily open its door to these risks.

Scotland has plentiful renewable resources to harness for clean, green, safe energy in the form of wind, wave and tidal. Exploiting new forms of unconventional gas is a dangerous distraction from the urgent need to transition to renewable energy, in order to avert climate change.

So far over 13 states and countries have implemented bans or moratoria including New South Wales, Ireland, France, Spain and Canada – with more set to follow suit.

I too want to live in a country free of unconventional gas projects and fracking.

I was extremely pleased to learn that the Scottish Government placed a moratorium on coalbed methane and fracking in January 2015. The Scottish Government committed to a thorough assessment of the health, environmental and climate change risks, as well as scrutiny of current legislation and the planning framework. As well as this, the Scottish Government will conduct a thorough public consultation so everyone will be able to air their views. I urge you, along with other MSPs, to hold the Scottish Government to account throughout the moratorium process, in particular to work around the health and environmental assessment and public consultation. It is crucial that the Scottish Government continues in good faith with the moratorium and listens to the real concerns of communities across Scotland.

I am also pleased to see that the new draft of Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) has removed the presumption in favour of unconventional gas that could have been read into the previous SPP, and introduced more stringent guidelines for how Local Development Plans (LDPs) should deal with the industry including the need for buffer zones between sites and communities. I welcome these changes, but think they should be strengthened to specify buffer zones of at least 2km, as in New South Wales.

I am asking you as my MSP to work towards a ban on unconventional gas extraction, through Scottish Planning Policy or another means, or at a bare minimum push for the requirement for buffer zones in SPP to be strengthened.

I look forward to your response.

Name
Address
Postcode