



The politics of fracking in Scotland: where do the parties stand?

Friends of the Earth Scotland supporter Briefing

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Fracking has been a hot topic in Scottish politics over the last few years, and it just keeps on getting hotter!

With a Moratorium announced by the Scottish Government in January 2015, a 'highly skeptical' First Minister and a surprise vote in June 2016 by the newly elected Scottish Parliament to ban fracking, it can be hard to fathom why we haven't already got a ban in place.

This briefing explains the differences between the various parties' positions, and why, even though Holyrood officially voted to ban it, fracking is still very much a live issue.

Scottish Government and SNP

The Scottish Government put a moratorium in place on shale gas fracking and coalbed methane in January 2015, beginning a process of detailed evidence gathering on what the industry might look like in Scotland and what its impacts would be. At the time there was huge public opposition towards fracking, and it's been growing ever since. A further moratorium followed 8 months later on underground coal gasification, and became a ban in October 2016, when Energy Minister Paul Wheelhouse announced that it had 'no place in Scotland's energy mix.'

While the moratorium on shale gas and CBM is in place, evidence is being compiled on public health, climate change, economics, traffic, seismicity and decommissioning. The Scottish Government will also run a public consultation over the winter of 2016/2017. Throughout the evidence-gathering and consultation process, the SNP Government is neutral on the issue, saying that it will review the research findings when they are published and listen to the results of the public consultation before making a decision on whether to ban fracking.

At the top level, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has said she is personally 'highly skeptical' of fracking.¹ Under public pressure during the 2016 Scottish elections, she went as far as to say that unless it can be proven 'beyond any doubt' that there are no risks to health, communities or the environment, there will be no fracking in Scotland, and the SNP 2016 manifesto used the same language.² It is difficult to see how an SNP Government could allow fracking to go ahead given the wealth of evidence about the damaging impacts of fracking from around the world.

Within the SNP itself there is strong opposition to fracking. A large section of the grassroots is vocal in calling for a full ban, with a group called 'SNP Member Against Unconventional Gas' or SMAUG forming to keep pressure up within the party.

Conservatives

Now the official opposition in Holyrood, the Scottish Conservatives support shale gas fracking and coalbed methane and oppose the ongoing moratorium, arguing that these industries will help meet our energy needs particularly in light of the challenges facing the North Sea, and also cut reliance on imports of natural gas. This is in line with the UK Conservatives' strong support for fracking in England that has seen the UK Government overturn Lancashire County Council's decision to refuse planning permission for Cuadrilla's fracking plans in Lancashire, despite massive local opposition. The Scottish Conservatives were opposed

¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-35783026>

² <http://www.snp.org/manifesto>

to the Scottish Government's ban on underground coal gasification, calling it a 'missed opportunity' claiming the industry 'could provide thousands of jobs and inject millions into the economy.'³

Labour

The Scottish Labour Party is opposed to fracking and would ban the technology if they were in Government. In its 2016 manifesto, the party made clear; 'We can't meet our climate change targets and dig yet another fossil fuel from the ground at the same time, so we will ban fracking in Scotland.'⁴ In doing so, Labour were key to raising the stakes at the Holyrood elections on fracking, putting the issue in the spotlight and piling pressure on the SNP. Labour are also opposed to fracking because of the environmental and community impacts of the industry. This is similar to UK Labour's recently strengthened position under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership which has seen the party commit to banning fracking in the UK because it would 'lock us into an energy infrastructure that is based on fossil fuels long after our country needs to have moved on to renewables.'⁵ Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale has said "no ifs, not buts, no fracking" in Scotland under Labour.⁶

In November 2016, Environment and Climate Change spokesperson Claudia Beamish MSP lodged a private members' bill to ban fracking in the Scottish Parliament on grounds of climate change.⁷

Greens

Like its England and Wales counterpart, the Scottish Green Party has long opposed fracking and other unconventional fossil fuels on the grounds of climate change, environment and community impacts.⁸ The party has played a crucial role in continually raising the issue in Parliament over several years and keeping the Scottish Government's actions under close scrutiny.

Liberal Democrats

The Scottish Lib Dems are opposed to fracking on climate change grounds. Leader Willie Rennie's position is that no matter what the evidence says on, for example, public health and community impacts, Scotland should not be investing any more in fossil fuels;⁹ 'our focus must be on supporting renewables rather than increasing carbon emissions.'¹⁰

Holyrood against fracking!

In June 2016 Labour, the Lib Dems and the Greens joined forces to vote for a ban in the Scottish Parliament during a debate on environment and climate change, while the SNP abstained, and the Conservatives voted against. The motion being discussed was non-binding on the Scottish Government, which is why no ban has since been enacted. However, the vote has powerful significance as the official will of the Scottish Parliament. Crucially, it also demonstrates the new balance of power within Holyrood, and puts pressure on the now minority Scottish Government. Now that Scottish Labour has proposed a private members' bill to ban unconventional oil and gas, the delicate maths of the Parliament could prove vital in securing a legislative ban on fracking.

Take action, find out more and sign up for updates at: www.stopfracking.scot



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

³ <http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2016/10/now-snp-bans-underground-coal-gasification/>

⁴ <http://www.scottishlabour.org.uk/manifesto/environment>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/sep/26/fracking-no-shale-gas-wells-to-be-drilled-in-uk-this-year>

⁶ <http://stv.tv/news/politics/1347146-kezia-dugdale-promises-most-radical-manifesto-ever/>

⁷ <http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/101886.aspx>

⁸ <https://greens.scot/scotland-can-ban-fracking-once-and-for-all>

⁹ <http://www.libdemvoice.org/willie-rennie-reaffirms-scottish-lib-dems-opposition-to-fracking-despite-conference-vote-49663.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-35729185>