

Fracking for shale gas and oil

Unfounded support for fracking puts corporate wealth before public health. Fracking will accelerate dangerous climate change¹, worsen our dependency on increasingly expensive fossil fuels² and forfeit investment in the clean energy sources we need³ and the many thousands of resulting jobs⁴. Fracking will not prevent significant gas price increases according to the government⁵, which continues to ignore the many differences from the US situation⁶.

Fracking - short for hydraulic fracturing - is an invasive way to extract oil and gas trapped in impermeable shale rocks deep underground. It involves drilling deep wells down which millions of gallons of water; toxic chemicals and sand are pumped at high pressure to fracture the rock, allowing the gas or oil to escape. Fracking is a bubble being inflated by hype and hot air from the fracking industry and its political representatives. Unopposed, it will cause widespread damage before it bursts.

Why does the Green Party oppose fracking?

Pollution: European Commission and US research⁷ have identified significant pollution risks from leaking wells⁸ including contamination of drinking water by methane⁹, heavy metals, radioactive elements and carcinogenic chemicals. Air pollution^{10 11}, noise pollution (often including 24-hour drilling and truck movements) and wildlife loss are also threats¹².

Damage to rural communities: The area of landscape disturbed by fracking is 8-11 times that of conventional gas drilling¹³. Fracking threatens to industrialise our countryside and disrupt tourism, with drill rigs, gas flaring and truck convoys carrying contaminated water down country lanes. In the US, water contamination from fracking has caused livestock sickness, infertility, stillborn and deformed young, reduced growth rates and death¹⁴. Farmland has had to be abandoned¹⁵. The risk of groundwater contamination has also led to a significant fall in property values¹⁶. The enormous amounts of water needed for fracking (up to 29 million litres per well¹⁷) present another serious threat to local farmers and residents, with some US towns running dry¹⁸.



Fracking sites in Southern Queensland, Australia.

Climate incompatibility: Shale gas is likely to be burnt *in addition to* coal¹⁹, causing more severe climate change impacts. Shale gas drilling and combustion are completely incompatible with UK climate change commitments²⁰. Replacing conventional fossil gas with shale gas to generate electricity increases greenhouse gas emissions by up to 11%²¹. Leakage of methane - a greenhouse gas far more potent than CO₂ - will further contribute to the dangerous climate change impacts of fracking.

Higher bills and drilling costs: Instead of investing in energy efficiency to reduce our bills, our government hands 50% tax giveaways to an industry forecast to have rising prices for decades²². Secretary of State for Energy Ed Davey warns: "*what would really be expensive...is if we were over-reliant on gas*"²³. Furthermore, UK fracking is likely to be much more expensive than in the US²⁴.

Forfeits clean energy investment, jobs and infrastructure: By undermining investment in offshore wind power, tax giveaways for shale gas will suppress development of the clean renewable power we need^{25 26 27}. A reckless dash for shale gas could prevent clean electricity being supplied to 7.8 million homes and cost over 40,000 clean energy jobs²⁸.

Bad for manufacturing: Fracking could undermine the competitiveness of our whole manufacturing sector by pushing up currency exchange rates²⁹.

Dubious benefits: Production rates and reserve estimates in the US and Poland have fallen rapidly³⁰. If there are any profits, fracking corporations and the government will divide them up, with communities

receiving token - if any - compensation³¹. As for job creation, fracking firms do not typically buy equipment and supplies locally and jobs normally go to transient workers^{32 33}.

Undermines energy resilience: Locking us into gas power risks making Britain increasingly dependent upon distant and often unstable nations for our energy once the shale gas bubble bursts. European Commission research shows that even in the most optimistic shale gas scenario, by 2040 the EU would need to import 60% of its gas.³⁴

Green Party policy on fracking

As the only mainstream UK political party to oppose fracking completely, the Green Party calls for:

- **A ban on all UK fracking operations** - following a growing number of nations worldwide³⁵ - **and for licences to be withdrawn as soon as possible.**
- **UK and EU governments to close ‘serious loopholes’³⁶ in regulations** to protect our water, air, soil and landscapes from known risks^{37 38}.
- **Destructive fossil fuel subsidies to be redirected** to fund energy efficiency measures, community-owned renewable energy sources and the elimination of fuel poverty.

Don't we need fracking to keep energy bills down and end fuel poverty?

Gas prices are set in an international market, so any gas extracted by UK fracking would hardly affect our bills. To end fuel poverty we must invest in insulation, efficient heating and solar panels that permanently reduce energy bills and ensure everyone receives a living wage so they can afford to pay their bills. We think this makes more sense than using our taxes to subsidise profits of fossil fuel corporations.

How are Greens protecting communities from fracking?

Caroline Lucas MP and **Keith Taylor MEP** have consistently represented concerns of their constituents about fracking. They have written³⁹ to the Environment Agency urging it to halt drilling in Balcombe and to enforce regulations. Caroline has also secured a parliamentary debate⁴⁰ in which she

made a robust case against fracking, questioned energy ministers and called for a public consultation.

Working with other Green MEPs in the European Parliament, Keith commissioned a study revealing gaps in EU fracking regulation, pushed for a ban and for relevant laws regarding impact assessments, licensing, water and waste treatment to apply to unconventional fossil fuels (currently exempt).

Green Party leader **Natalie Bennett**, Caroline Lucas MP and Keith Taylor MEP joined protesters at Balcombe, Sussex⁴¹, where Caroline was arrested⁴² while peacefully demonstrating⁴³ in solidarity with local people and protesters from far and wide against fracking, after they had exhausted every other means of protest available. Caroline has explained⁴⁴ that the protestors were trying to ensure the government recognises that Balcombe is on the front-line of the climate crisis; that fracking is a distraction from investing in the clean energy sources we need; and that we must leave the majority of fossil fuels in the ground to have a good chance of avoiding extremely dangerous climate change impacts⁴⁵.



Caroline Lucas MP protesting in Balcombe, Sussex (Gareth Fuller, PA)

How can I help to secure a fracking-free future?

- **Ask David Cameron** and **lobby your MP** to protect your community from fracking.
- **Chip in** to help the Green Party maintain political pressure to stop fracking.
- **Apply for** or **help to fund** grants to train communities to campaign against fracking.
- Spread the word by sharing this policy pointer with friends, family and colleagues.

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3 See 26-28.

4 See 30.

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28 Calculated using displaced offshore wind capacity of up to 11.6GW from Broderick et al. (2011), using a 32.5% [load factor](#) for unchanged offshore configuration [DECC (2013a)], [average UK household electricity consumption](#) of 4226kWh [DECC (2013b)] and 87,500 [jobs created per 5GW of additional capacity installed per year](#), equivalent to 203,000 full time equivalent years of employment or 40,600 jobs sustained over 5 years [BVG Associates (2010)].

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