



## Fracking: a briefing for Friends

July 2017



Quakers gather at a fracking site in Lancashire to hold a meeting for worship. Photo: Hilary Whitehead

Across the UK, Quakers are taking action on fracking. In February 2017, 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.” Friends have joined with others to resist fracking locally, and called on local and national governments to ban fracking and support sustainable energy instead. This briefing explains why our governments should ban fracking and suggests ways that you can take 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 new and intensive fossil fuel extraction methods being used around the world to secure more reserves of gas, oil and coal. These methods, and the fuels they produce when burnt, emit large amounts of greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change. The fracking process may also cause air and water pollution.

In the UK, the fracking industry is in its infancy and no wells are yet operating fully and long-term. Yet companies hope to start full operations at a number of sites in the near future. If these projects are successful, we could see a significant expansion of the industry in the coming years.

## Why ban fracking?

France, Germany, Ireland and Bulgaria have banned fracking. Yet the UK government supports the expansion of the industry by offering tax breaks to fracking companies, and has overridden a local planning decision to permit fracking operations in Yorkshire. However:

- under the 2015 UN Paris climate agreement, the UK committed to cut greenhouse gas emissions in line with a 2°C temperature rise above pre-industrial levels, and to attempt to limit this to 1.5°C. One estimate suggests we must keep approximately 80 per cent of known global fossil fuel reserves in the ground to achieve this.<sup>i</sup>
- fracked gas is not low-carbon. It is 5 times as carbon intensive as the target recommended by the government's advisory body for the power sector by the year 2030.<sup>ii</sup>
- fracking can create 'fugitive emissions'. These are gases that may escape during extraction. These include methane, a highly intensive greenhouse gas.
- in 2013, the UK government<sup>iii</sup> and fracking company Cuadrilla<sup>iv</sup> admitted that fracking will not help reduce fuel bills. It is therefore unlikely to help those in fuel poverty.

- in some cases, fracking has been found to pollute local water and air. In the USA and Australia, some people living near fracking sites report symptoms linked to exposure to fracking chemicals, including breathing difficulties, nausea, and throat irritation<sup>v</sup>.

The growth of the fracking industry risks further locking us in to an unsustainable energy system. Instead, we need renewable and efficient energy system that is affordable to all.

## Where is fracking happening in the UK?

As of July 2017, no fracking sites are fully operating in the UK. This is partly due to grassroots resistance. However, appraisal or test wells (the stages before wells are fully operational) are due to start operating soon in Kirby Misperton in Yorkshire, Preston New Road in Lancashire, and Broadford Bridge in West Sussex. Exploration wells have also been permitted in Balcombe in West Sussex and Blyth in Nottinghamshire. A fracking company has acquired licences to survey large areas of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Cheshire and North Yorkshire to assess gas reserve viable for 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 generation, efficient buildings and infrastructure, sustainable transport and efforts to reduce energy demand.

To read more about 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](http://www.quaker.org.uk/new-economy)

## The future of the UK's energy policy

The UK government is yet to provide details of how the UK will cut greenhouse gases in line with the UN Paris climate agreement. Ministers says that the forthcoming Clean Growth Plan will answer this. However, current climate and energy policy will not deliver sufficient emissions cuts. The Clean Growth Plan would need, among other things, to increase support for renewables and energy efficiency, to invest in an improved grid, and to improve the climate impact of buildings, transport and land use.

The process of Brexit also leaves many questions unanswered for the UK's energy policy. Currently, the EU Renewable Energy Directive partially supports a UK transition to renewables. Other EU directives help protect water and wildlife from fracking. It's unclear whether a post-Brexit UK will weaken or strengthen these policies. There is a risk that negotiating new trade deals could involve weakening the regulations we need to restrict fossil fuels and support renewable, efficient energy. Now more than ever, the government must make clear how it will build a sustainable energy system.

## Taking action

In 2017, Quakers across the yearly meeting have been taking action on fracking. In May, over 100 Friends climbed Pendle Hill in Lancashire for a 'meeting for worship for witness'. Their action highlighted their concern over the impacts of potential fracking activity in the area and across the world. Friends are now joining protests at Preston New Road in Lancashire and other proposed fracking sites. This has included 'No Faith in Fracking' days at Preston New Road, bringing local faith groups together to take action.

This spring, Quakers who live in Scotland responded to a Scottish government fracking consultation by calling for a ban on the industry. Many have written to their MPs and spoken out in their community against fracking. Concerns about fracking are part of why many Area Meetings, as well as Britain Yearly Meeting, have divested their money from fossil fuel companies.

Here are two suggestions for action that you and your meeting can take:

### **1. Write to your MP**

It's an important time to contact your MP on fracking. Many MPs are new to this issue and, after the 2017 general election result, there is now more potential to resist the government's support for fracking. You could meet with or write to your MP. 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 make your case.
- Call on the government to ensure that the UK Clean Growth Plan, due to be published in the autumn, lays out how the UK will transition to renewable and efficient energy, and leave fossil fuels in the ground. The government claims this document will explain how the UK will fulfil its commitment under the UN Paris climate deal. With Brexit on the horizon, it's especially important that this plan is ambitious.

### **2. Write to your local press**

There may be a risk of fracking in your local area and you could contact your local media to draw attention to the issue. For advice on writing to local press, find our *Reaching the media* briefing at [www.quaker.org.uk/toolkit-for-action](http://www.quaker.org.uk/toolkit-for-action).

If you'd like to explore other ways that you and your meeting can take action, Quaker Peace & Social Witness can help. We can support you to speak out, organise actions, and work with others to resist fracking and work for a more sustainable future.

If you'd like to discuss taking action and get advice on writing to your MP or the press, please contact Chris Walker on 020 7663 1047 or at [chrisw@quaker.org.uk](mailto:chrisw@quaker.org.uk).

## End notes

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<sup>i</sup> '80% of fossil fuels 'should stay in the ground''. Oil Change International (17 June, 2013) see [priceofoil.org/2013/06/17/80-of-fossil-fuels-should-stay-in-the-ground/](http://priceofoil.org/2013/06/17/80-of-fossil-fuels-should-stay-in-the-ground/)

<sup>ii</sup> The carbon intensity of fracked gas is approximately 500g of carbon dioxide per kilowatt hour (500g CO<sub>2</sub>/kWh). The UK Committee on Climate Change recommends a carbon intensity target of 100gCO<sub>2</sub>/kWh for the power sector by 2030 in order to achieve emissions reduction commitments made under the Paris climate agreement. See 'Setting the Fifth Budget. Fifth Session of 2015–16'. (Published 27 April, 2016). House of Commons Energy and Climate Change Committee.

<sup>iii</sup> 'Fracking won't lower energy bills, says Davey.' *The Telegraph*, (9 February, 2013). See [telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/energy/fracking/10296274/Fracking-wont-lower-energy-bills-says-Davey.html](http://telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/energy/fracking/10296274/Fracking-wont-lower-energy-bills-says-Davey.html).

<sup>iv</sup> 'Lord Browne: fracking will not reduce UK gas prices.' *The Guardian*, (29 November, 2013). See [theguardian.com/environment/2013/nov/29/browne-fracking-not-reduce-uk-gas-prices-shale-energy-bills](http://theguardian.com/environment/2013/nov/29/browne-fracking-not-reduce-uk-gas-prices-shale-energy-bills)

<sup>v</sup> 'Overview of Fracking and Unconventional Gas: Friends of the Earth Scotland Supporter Briefing'. Friends of the Earth Scotland, (November 2016) (p.2). See [bit.ly/2IOLwG2](http://bit.ly/2IOLwG2).