

# Why fracking is not the answer to the UK's energy problems

## Tony Bosworth, Friends of the Earth

The American satirist HL Mencken wrote 'for every problem there is a solution that is neat, simple and wrong'. So it is with fracking as an answer to the UK's energy problems.

### **Why is this?**

The first reason is climate change. Meeting the targets we have committed to under the Paris agreement means keeping most known global fossil fuel reserves in the ground. If we can't burn what we already have, why look for more? UK ratification of the Paris agreement will count for little if the Government pushes ahead with fracking.

**We are told** that we need to frack to stop us being dependent on unpalatable regimes and unstable regions for our gas. But our main source of gas imports is Norway.

**We're told** that UK shale gas will be 'our gas'. But we're part of an interconnected European gas grid and if drilling companies can earn more by exporting the gas, they will. The best energy security solution is to use less gas so we don't have to import so much.

**Boosting renewables** and energy saving would save twice as much gas as we could produce from fracking in the UK.

**Government and industry claim** that fracking will create tens of thousands of jobs. But the figures are overstated and often the jobs are short-term. The respected UK Energy Research Centre reports that investing in renewable energy and energy saving creates three times as many jobs for the same investment.

**We are told** that there will be no risks to health or the environment. But the emerging evidence from the US paints a different story. For example, analysis of health data from heavily-fracked Pennsylvania shows that living in areas with the most shale gas drilling is associated with 40% increase in risk of premature birth and a 30% increase in the chance of a high-risk pregnancy. No wonder that 20 leading UK health experts last year said the argument against fracking on public health grounds was overwhelming.

**Government and industry claim** UK regulation will be stronger. But there are major gaps in the regulation and regulators' budgets are being cut. And regulation can only make fracking safer – it can't make it safe. As the UN Environment Program wrote "Fracking may result in unavoidable environmental impacts even if [the gas] is extracted properly".

**Fracking has been banned** or put on hold in France, Holland, Scotland, Wales, Bulgaria and New York State. And wherever fracking is proposed in the UK, it is strongly opposed by local communities.

The UK Government is increasingly isolated in its support for this risky industry. If it put the same political will behind renewables and energy saving, we would be much closer to finding a real solution to our energy problems.