

Fracking

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Summary and Recommendation:

This report is a brief update on the topic of Fracking – the hydraulic fracturing of shale rock to extract gas.

Recommendation: The contents of this report are noted.

1. Background

On 13th December 2012, the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) lifted the 18 month ban on hydraulic fracturing (fracking) of rocks for shale gas in the UK. The ban was introduced in 2011 after a report was released linking fracking with seismic activity and earthquake tremors near Blackpool. Calls have been made by campaigners to halt hydraulic fracking due to the potential for contamination of groundwater, pollution of surface water and the ecological impact of the drilling sites.

In May 2012 the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) carried out a consultation on the future of Fracking within the UK. Copeland Borough Council responded to the consultation expressing concern at the exploratory nature of this relatively new technology and called for further research and more stringent safety requirements to be put in place.

Although the ban has been lifted, some additional safety requirements have been introduced to limit the potential impacts of seismic activity caused by hydraulic fracking, these include:

- A prior review assessing the seismic risk and the existence of any faults before fracking commences;

- A plan showing how seismic risks will be addressed is to be submitted to the regulator. The regulators for the UK are several different bodies including DECC, HSE, the respective Environment Agency and Local Planning Authority.
- Monitoring of seismic events before, during and after fracking at the site; and
- A “traffic light” system for stopping work under certain conditions

2. House Of Commons Climate Change Committee on Fracking

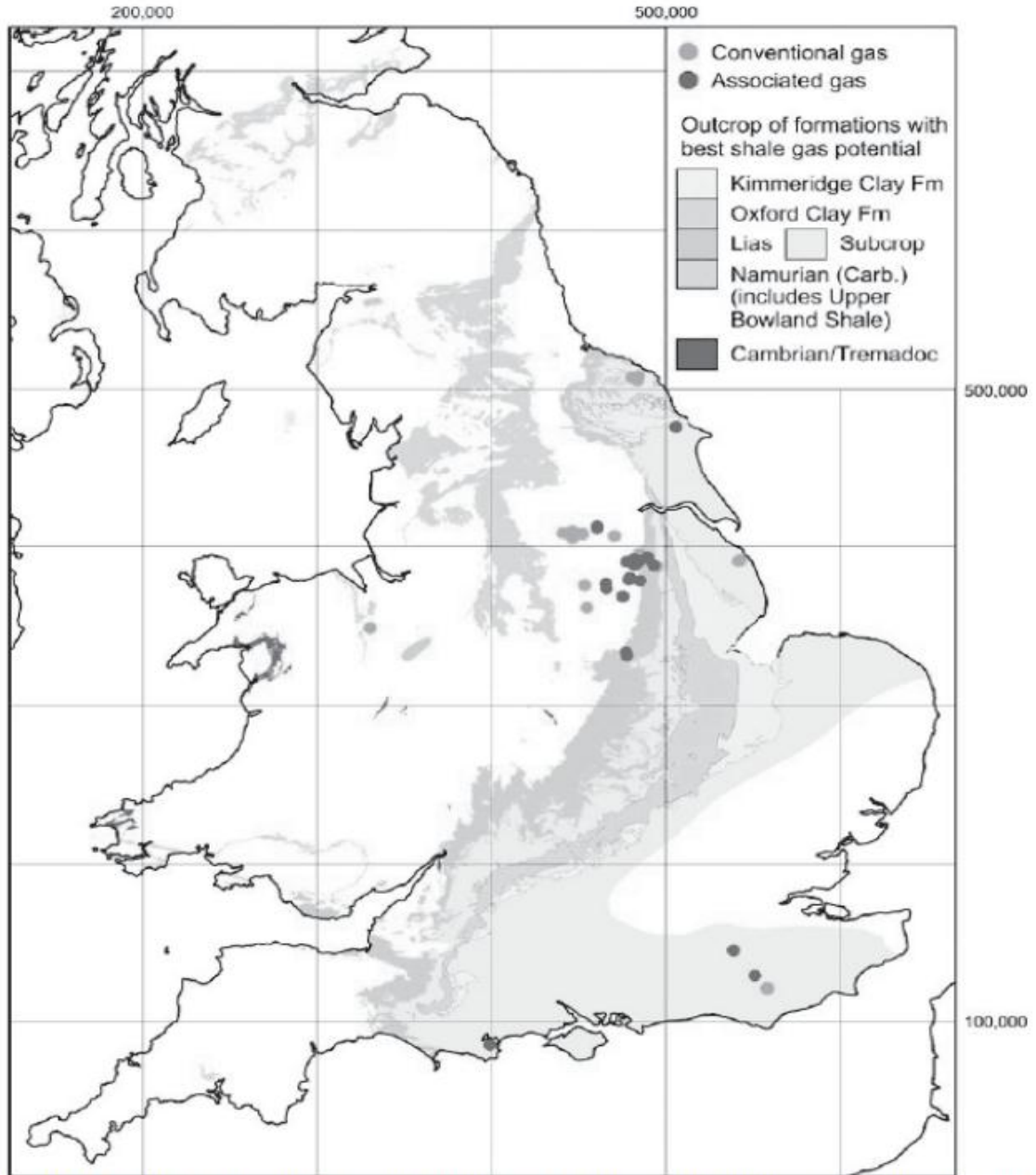
- 2.1** The House Of Commons Climate Change Committee has held several evidence gathering sessions investigating ‘The Impact of Shale Gas on Energy Markets’, following a report published in May 2010 it was stated that the level of Shale Gas in the UK was not seen to be a ‘game changer’ⁱ.
- 2.2** The Committee held an oral evidence session on the 16th Jan 2013 hearing evidence from EDF Energy, INEOS, SSE and the National Gridⁱⁱ. The general consensus from the hearing is that while the reserves in Britain may not be as substantial as that in the USA they are still worth exploring and Fracking as an option should be progressed.
- 2.3** Those giving evidence recognised the importance of gaining community acceptance and made positive recommendations towards community benefits. *“Beyond the requirement to mitigate within the planning system that there is already, there should be some benefit in the standard of living of the people who are affected by any form of infrastructure. We believe that should apply to shale gas as much as it does to nuclear power stations or to wind farms.”* (Paul Spence, EDF Energy).
- 2.4** It was also stated that at this time onshore shale gas is financially viable whereas off shore, such as those deposits in the North Sea, are not.

3. Way Forward.

- 3.1** There has been an increase in the interest in Fracking from developers in recent months and whilst there are currently no planned wells in the Cumbria region, it is an evolving new technology which we need to keep a watching brief on. Refer to Appendix 1: A map of on-shore gas resource of Great Britain.
- 3.2** The impacts of Shale gas on the UK economy and contribution to the energy markets are still uncertain but it is not anticipated to have the same impact that it has had on the USA economy.

Appendix One:

Figure 1—Onshore Shale Gas Resources of Great Britain



Source: DECC, *The Unconventional Hydrocarbon Resources of Britain's Onshore Basins-Shale Gas*, December 2010, Cover

ⁱ House of Commons Energy and Climate Change Committee, *Shale Gas*, Fifth report of session 2010 - 2012

ⁱⁱ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmenergy/c785-iii/c78501.htm>