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Released on 06-10-2016 11:22

Underground coal gasification blocked

UCG will have no place in Scotland's energy mix.

The Scottish Government will not support underground coal gasification (UCG) developments in Scotland following the publication of an independent report that highlights serious environmental concerns.

UCG should not be confused with hydraulic fracturing, also known as fracking, or coal-bed methane both of which are Unconventional Oil and Gas (UOG) technologies. Today's announcement has no bearing on the policy on either of these technologies, which remain covered by the Scottish Government's moratorium on UOG technologies.

The Scottish Government put in place a moratorium on UCG in October last year so that evidence on the practice could be gathered and considered.

Professor Campbell Gemmell of University of Glasgow was tasked to undertake an independent examination of UCG. Having received his report, Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy Paul Wheelhouse today [Thursday, October 6] updated Parliament on the Scottish Government's response to the findings.

The report finds that it would appear logical "to progress toward a ban" of UCG, based on a variety of reasons, including:

- the UCG industry having a history of incidents of pollution and losses of containment and;
- UCG presenting a serious issue to face in reducing Scotland's carbon/greenhouse gas emissions without an operational storage method, such as carbon capture.

Mr Wheelhouse said:

"Having considered the report in detail, it is the Scottish Government's view that UCG poses numerous and serious environmental risks and, on that basis, the Scottish Government cannot support this technology. Accordingly, UCG will have no place in Scotland's energy mix at this time.

"In Professor Gemmell's report he recommends it would be wise to consider an approach to UCG based upon a precautionary presumption against the technology, and that it would appear logical to progress toward a ban.

"I cannot predict what kind of clean energy technologies may be available in the decades to come, but what is certain is that this resource will still be there. As a result of today's announcement, our Energy Strategy for Scotland will set out an energy mix for the future that does not include UCG. The position I have announced on UCG is a clear validation of the evidence-based approach this government is taking and I thank Professor Gemmell for his work in preparing the report."

Mr Wheelhouse has written to the UK Government, requesting that it issues no further UCG licences in Scotland and that existing licences are revoked. The Scottish Government will continue to use planning powers available to it to ensure UCG applications do not receive planning or environmental permission.

Professor Campbell Gemmell, Professor of Environment Research, Policy, Regulation and Governance at the University of Glasgow, said:

"I have consulted widely, including with industry, communities, regulators, academic specialists and NGOs, and studied the available evidence on the technologies and impacts involved in Underground Coal Gasification, including the variety of international experience. It is extremely difficult to conceive of UCG progressing into use at this time. Despite there being few longer-term operations at scale to consider, and no directly comparable operations in siting, regulatory and policy terms, there is both a history of incidents of pollution and losses of containment.

"In my view, the Scottish Government has responded appropriately to the available evidence on this technology.

"Should industry wish to progress this technology at scale here or overseas at some future date, several key factors would need to be addressed, including managing the potential impact of the greenhouse gases produced. The onus would also clearly be with the industry to demonstrate and provide evidence that it can operate to the high environmental standards that the government and public should expect."

Notes to Editors:

Professor Gemmell's report, which has been informed by the literature and through interviews with academics, industry, NGO's, community groups and regulators, makes the following observations on UCG:

- In regulatory and policy terms, there is both a history of incidents of pollution and losses of containment, and few longer term operations at scale on which to assess potential impacts and industry best practice.
- UCG presents a serious issue to face in achieving Scotland's carbon/GHG (Greenhouse Gas) trajectory without an operational storage method, where CCS would

be able to play a significant role.

- There is a Scottish UCG resource. Technology exists to exploit it. There is related, but not comparable experience worldwide.
- There is very limited peer reviewed information on this industry, best practice and sufficiency of regulatory controls available worldwide.

Read the full report <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/10/2704>

Underground coal gasification (UCG) should not be confused with hydraulic fracturing, also known as fracking, or coal-bed methane (CBM) extraction. Hydraulic fracturing and CBM are entirely different technologies that are both covered by a separate moratorium on unconventional oil and gas (UOG).

Our separate and ongoing investigation into unconventional oil and gas, including fracking, continues. This includes a comprehensive programme of research to examine UOG in more depth and a public consultation. The research projects commissioned are nearing completion and will be published as soon as possible after recess.

Find out more here:

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Business-Industry/Energy/onshoreoilandgas>

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