

DRILL OR DROP?

Minister tells anti-fracking MPs to “accept victory”



Ruth Hayhurst

3 months ago



Energy minister, Kwasi Kwarteng, with Alexander Stafford (centre) and Lee Rowley (right), 28 September 2020. Photo: Parliament TV

Two Conservative MPs who opposed fracking in their constituencies have won their campaigns, the energy minister, Kwasi Kwarteng, told parliament tonight.

He said the government has sent a “clear message” to the industry that fracking was “extremely unlikely” to happen in England.

Mr Kwarteng praised MPs Alexander Stafford and Lee Rowley, who have fought against plans by Ineos to explore for shale gas at Harthill and Woodsetts in Rother Valley and Marsh Lane in North East Derbyshire.

Mr Kwarteng said:

“They clearly made their voice and more importantly the voices of their constituents heard in this place and they have been listened to and the object for which they have campaigned very passionately over a number of years ... that object has been obtained. They have been successful.

“I enjoin them graciously to accept victory, as it were, in this particular debate.”



Kwasi Kwarteng, 28 September 2020. Photo: Parliament TV

Mr Kwarteng said the government “had no plans whatsoever” to review the moratorium on fracking in England.

This was imposed nearly a year ago after fracking by Cuadrilla in Lancashire caused a series of earth tremors. The largest was 2.9ML, the most powerful fracking-induced tremor in the UK.

Mr Kwarteng said he had been in his post for just three weeks when the 2.9 tremor happened:

“It was immediately apparent at that point there would be no further fracking, as far as I was concerned.

“The government has made it very clear that we will take a presumption against issuing any further hydraulic fracturing consents in this country.

“I think that this sends a clear message, not only to the sector but the local communities concerned, that fracking on current evidence will not be taken forward in England.”

The minister said:

“We will not support fracking unless the science shows categorically that it can be done safely and without inconvenience.

“This is extremely unlikely to happen as far as I am concerned.

“There will be no fracking for the foreseeable future”.

The minister said “the world has rather moved on from fracking”. It had been described as “a technology of the past”, he said, and it was not something the government envisaged in its progress towards net zero greenhouse gas emissions.



Alexander Stafford, 28 September 2020. Photo: Parliament TV

The moratorium applies to high volume hydraulic fracturing which meets the definition in the Infrastructure Act. It does not cover small-scale fracking, acidisation or exploratory drilling.

Mr Stafford, a former oil company employee, warned that fracking companies might seek to exploit this loophole.

He also said his constituents faced what he described as “continuous uncertainty”, the “great sword of Ineos hanging over their head”.

[The moratorium] has not stopped Ineos circling around its sites at Harthill and Woodsetts like vultures, biding their time and waiting for the moratorium to be lifted.

“I speak directly to Ineos when I say you will never be allowed to frack in Rother Valley. Your best endeavours will come to nothing. Leave my constituents in peace to enjoy the fruits of their labour. Do not come back.”

He also urged Rotherham Council to stop wasting time, money and resources on preparing for a shale gas site at Harthill.



Lee Rowley, 28 September 2020. Photo: Parliament TV

Lee Rowley said:

“The strength of feeling in Marsh Lane, the strength of feeling in Eckington parish and the strength of feeling in North East Derbyshire about fracking, about how we need to retain this moratorium remains as strong as it was.”

DrillOrDrop has invited Ineos to respond to the remarks made in the debate.

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