**Fracking - some issues for Christians**

This document accompanies the attached Discussion Paper on Fracking.

It suggests some of the questions Christians may wish to ask themselves, their local councillors and their MP when considering their position on fracking and fracking applications in their area.

Clear answers to these questions should help you form a clear opinion about whether fracking should go ahead.

**The surface view**

*Question: Locally, how long is each phase: well construction, production, decommissioning?*

*Question: What will be the visual impact of each phase?*

*Question: How many times will this be repeated (i.e. how many wells per square mile) over next 25yrs?*

*Question: Will the after-effects of fracking be similar to other post-industrial landscapes?*

*Question: Will it limit future land use? What has been the legacy of past mineral exploitation?*

*Question: Is gas left in decommissioned wells and is there the possibility of leakage?*

**Transport**

*Question: How will use of local roads and facilities be affected?*

*Question: Will it be equitable between drilling companies and locals?*

*Question: Every well-head will need permanent access building. Is this locally acceptable?*

**Water Supply**

*Question: When water shortages occur, who will get priority?*

*Question: If water companies and local authorities make contracts with a fracking company to provide x gallons of*

 *water per hour and there is a drought who will have priority over the water?*

*Question: If there are penalties written into the contract for failure to provide x amount would the cost of those*

*penalties ultimately fall on all water users?*

*Question: Preventing contamination depends on unerring technical skill and robust regulation.*

 *What does past experience teach us?*

**The fracking process**

In simple terms, this involves drilling down into deep gas-bearing shale beds and then pumping water together with additives down the well at high pressure to fracture the rocks and release the gas (about 90% methane – if it escapes a much more potent greenhouse gas than CO2). With current technology, only about 5% of the gas is recoverable. It is estimated that each well would require about a million litres (1000 tonnes) of water. This contains a complex mixture of chemicals, some of which (such as glutaraldehyde) are toxic at higher concentrations. After fracking, the water returns to the surface and has to be decontaminated/disposed of. Each well extracts gas from only a limited area and for a limited amount of time (approx. 3 years). It would take thousands of wells to fully exploit the Bowland gas field. (There is a series of booklets on fracking downloadable from the Department of Energy which describe the process and cover issues such as disposal of wastes. [www.gov.uk/government/publications/about-shale-gas-and-hydraulic-fracturing-fracking/](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/about-shale-gas-and-hydraulic-fracturing-fracking/)

*Question: Could this mean that drilling might be sub-contracted by the main companies with consequent loss of*

*direct management control. Could it also over-stretch the regulators?*

**Regulation** A number of reports state that the process is safe “if properly regulated”.

*Question: How will the Government ensure that the regulatory bodies are properly resourced and supported to*

*carry out the required functions in the long term?*

**Possible health and environmental risks**

*Question: What will be the system for verifying the integrity of the lining for each and every well?*

*Question: The Government has already stated its intention to change the law to allow fracking under private*

*properties. Might it change the parameters for the consents for fracking wastes if they were too burdensome?*

*Question: What are the realistically foreseeable effects of each well on the local infrastructure?*

**Decommissioning**

*Question: How will the companies be held accountable for decommissioning and maintaining decommissioned wells to prevent gas release so that the cost does not fall on the public purse e.g. will the Government require them to lodge a bond to cover the cost before each well is drilled?*

**Economic considerations**

Much is being made of the fact that the Bowland gas field could supply the UK for decades to come - how many decades depends on the report you read). The illusion is thus created that it is British gas for British people. In reality, any gas extracted would not be ring-fenced for the UK, but sold on the international markets where the price is currently rock-bottom – as in the USA there is now a huge over-supply. The benefits of an accelerated fracking programme would be a short-term increase in tax revenues through the taxing of profits.

*Question: How would any such tax revenue be invested -for human well-being e.g. into the NHS or used to fund tax*

*cuts for the rich or a commitment in spending on development of sustainable alternatives?*

In the longer term, we would be selling a priceless asset at rock-bottom prices.

*Question: When the boom years are over and we have sold all the gas, what price might we then have to pay to*

*import gas at the then (probably higher) world prices?*

*Question: What have successive governments done in the past to actively conserve the UK’s fossil fuel resources*

*and what does the Government propose to do in the future?*

*Question: The big moral question is who is going to benefit?*

Clearly there will be significant costs in extraction - indeed some potential areas may be uneconomic.

Local communities have been offered £100,000 plus 1% of the profits (a huge amount for a small village).

The Government will take a slice in tax.

*Question: Where will the rest go?*

*Question : Will it help to reduce inequality in the world or will it increase the gap between rich and poor?*

*Question: North Sea gas was exported. Will British gas only be sold in Britain?*

*Question: What will happen to energy costs when fracked gas (like North Sea gas) begins to run short?*

*Question: Will fracking encourage or delay investment in sustainable energies?*

*Question: How much fracking can be justified to support Britain’s current energy requirements in the face of its*

*consequences for the environment?*

**The World view**

*Question: Will the overall consequences (positive and negative) of fracking leave the World a better place for future*

*generations?*

*Question: Does short-term cheaper energy encourage individuals and governments to live more simply and*

*sustainably? To take just what we need?*

*Question: Do we recognise the beauty and providence of God in the created World, and that it belongs to everyone?*

*Question: How will fracking affect global inequality?*

*Question****:*** *Will burning fracked gas overall reduce global carbon emissions or be an additional source of them?*

*Question: How will this affect poorer countries?*

**Valuing creation**

*The most important question, therefore, is “How can I simplify my life to take just what I need and to have the space to enjoy God’s creation and allow future generations to do the same?*

It is within this framework that we must ask all the other questions about fracking.

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