Citizens' summary

on fracking in the EU to extract shale gas and other hydrocarbons

WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

Production of fossil fuels such as natural gas from conventional reservoirs is declining in the EU. Natural gas from shale formations (shale gas) could provide a partial replacement, and exploration is already underway. Shale gas could meet up to 10% of EU gas demand (i.e., 2-3% of the overall energy mix) by 2035, contributing to EU security of supply and competitiveness.

Shale gas could also offer climate benefits, provided that it replaced more carbon-intensive fossil fuels without displacing renewable energy sources, and that air emissions were properly controlled. Continued improvement of energy efficiency, energy savings and uptake of low-carbon technologies, in particular renewable energies, remain essential for the decarbonisation of the EU economy.

Conventional natural gas comes from underground reservoirs, while shale gas is trapped inside rocks that have to be cracked to release it. This process - high-volume hydraulic fracturing, or fracking for short - involves injecting large amounts of water, sand and chemicals into a borehole to facilitate gas extraction on a scale and at an intensity that are largely unprecedented in the EU.

The environmental impact and risks need careful management. To extract the same amount of gas as in the conventional process, more wells are drilled over a wider area, generally increasing the environmental footprint.

Since most EU environmental laws were drafted before fracking was common practice, they do not fully cover certain environmental issues. This has led to public concern and urgent calls for EU action from firms engaged in fracking and public authorities.

Under the EU Treaty, EU governments decide whether to develop energy resources such as shale gas, bearing environmental concerns in mind. The Commission is responsible for ensuring that EU laws are appropriate and properly applied. It has therefore drafted a Recommendation laying down minimum principles for safe and secure shale gas activities, as a complement to existing EU rules.

WHO WILL BENEFIT AND HOW?

If fully applied, the Recommendation will help achieve the following results:

- **The general public** will benefit from reduced environmental impacts and risks, especially water and air pollution, and increased transparency and consultation.

- **EU governments that develop these resources** will be able to base national action on a set of core principles.

- **Industry** will benefit as the proposed minimum principles will ensure fair competition and provide a stable framework for investments. This may also boost innovation and increase public acceptance.

WHY DOES ACTION HAVE TO BE TAKEN AT EU LEVEL?

The European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions, most participants in the Commission public consultation and several EU governments have called for EU action.

Shale gas resources span national borders, as do environmental effects such as water and air pollution.
**WHAT EXACTLY WILL CHANGE?**

EU governments will be encouraged to apply the minimum principles when regulating fracking. They should

- **plan ahead** and assess environmental impact **strategically** before granting licences, taking into account possible conflicts with other uses of natural resources
- **carefully assess** environmental **impact and risks** before authorising projects
- ensure that **wells are leak-proof**
- **assess environmental conditions** before operations start, so that change can be monitored and liability determined in the event of an incident
- **inform the public** about the chemicals used for each well, and share the baseline data and monitoring results
- **keep air emissions down**
- ensure firms engaged in fracking apply **best practices** throughout the project

**WHEN IS THE PROPOSAL LIKELY TO COME INTO EFFECT?**

EU governments should apply these principles no later than **6 months after publication**.

The Commission will **review implementation** 18 months after publication and assess whether updating or unified legally binding provisions are needed.