

Technical Working Group on Environmental aspects of unconventional fossil fuels, in particular shale gas

Fourth Meeting on 24 June 2013, Brussels

Minutes

In this meeting, representatives from 15 EU Member States (MS) and from services of the European Commission (ENV, ENER) were present.

Welcome and Introduction

The Chair welcomed the participants and provided a summary of the stakeholder meeting held on 7 June 2013. This event was attended by about 100 representatives from industry, public authorities, environmental NGOs, European institutions and some individual citizens. A similar number of people interacted via an internet discussion platform. The event was webstreamed and the recording is available on DG ENV website¹. The objective was to provide an opportunity for all interested parties to further express their views on the measures needed to address the potential climate and environmental challenges of unconventional fossil fuels (e.g. shale gas), as well as on possible action required at EU level. The discussion covered for instance the need for overall planning and site selection, operational aspects and community impacts of shale gas exploration and exploitation. In particular, questions related to the disclosure of chemicals, strategic planning, baseline monitoring, geological conditions, well integrity and health issues were touched upon.

Summary of the public consultation

DG ENV provided an overview of the results of the public consultation in a presentation. The consultation attracted more than 22 000 responses from individuals, and about 700 responses from organisations and public authorities. Participation from individuals was very high in France, Poland, Romania and Spain. The results show diverging perceptions, with three categories of respondents: those who support fully the development of unconventional fossil fuels in Europe, those who support it provided there are proper environmental and health safeguards in place, and those who oppose it in any case. There were diverging opinions on which policy option should be implemented to address challenges and risks, but the option "do nothing at EU level" was clearly the least favoured by most respondents, reflecting a call for EU action.

Participants welcomed the information provided and asked for further clarification on the methodology applied for the weighting of responses. The Chair explained that the methodology for weighting will be further detailed in the final report of the analysis of the consultation, which will be provided for information to Member States.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/integration/energy/uff_event_7june2013_en.htm

Comments on preliminary policy options

A background note was circulated to all MS in advance of the meeting. The note outlined the following policy options:

- A. Specific guidance under existing legislation and other measures,
- B. Amendments of parts of the EU environmental acquis to address specific issues,
- C. Dedicated legislation.

The discussion of the policy options did not identify an option favoured by the majority of participants. MS who took the floor made the following remarks:

- No action at EU level is also an option.
- The analysis of the options should consider the timing required for implementation. Guidance could be produced quicker than legislation. At the same time, some MS raised the issue that guidance alone would not be sufficient to address public concerns and may not be uniformly applied.
- Options should be assessed for their cost-effectiveness.
- The different stages in shale gas development should be differentiated (exploration/exploitation) and should be assessed separately for regulatory requirements.
- A number of MS supported the development of Best Available Techniques Reference Documents (BREFS).
- The analysis could consider permitting for an entire installation instead of permitting for individual pads or wells.

The Chair thanked the participants for their comments and welcomed written comments within ten days.

Roundtable on relevant national developments

Member States provided updates on recent regulatory and non-regulatory developments at national level that were discussed by the group.

Next steps

The next meeting of the Technical Working Group will be held at a date still to be confirmed. The agenda as well as practical details of the next meeting will be provided to national experts closer to the date.