

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

Third Meeting on 8 April 2013, Brussels

Minutes

In this meeting, representatives from 14 EU Member States and from services of the European Commission (ENV, ENER, ENTR) were present.

Welcome and Introduction

The Chair summarised the latest developments since the last working group of October 2012. The European Commission has put in its 2013 Work Program an 'Environment, climate and energy assessment framework to enable safe and secure unconventional hydrocarbon extraction'. As per the note sent to the national experts in advance of the meeting, the main objectives of the Commission's initiative are:

- To ensure that shale gas developments are carried out with proper environmental and climate safeguards in place,
- To provide maximum legal clarity and predictability for competent authorities, citizens and operators.

Comments on the explanatory IA document (*circulated in advance of the meeting*)

MS who took the floor made the following remarks:

- The differences between conventional and unconventional fossil fuels extraction should be highlighted.
- Would other unconventional fossil fuels be covered by the analysis? The Chair explained that the current focus is on shale gas due to its largest potential and public expectations.
- Transboundary issues should be addressed.
- A distinction between exploration and exploitation phases could be useful.
- The analysis should be based on all available information, and as much as possible relate to the EU context (and not only to North American data).
- The issue of the available and evolving technologies was highlighted, as well as the need to look at best practices.
- Unintended consequences that action on shale gas might have on other sectors such as conventional fossil fuel extraction or geothermal energy should be analysed. The Chair, while welcoming any specific information on this, explained that a limit will need to be set for assessing indirect impacts.
- The added value of action at EU level should be clear.

The Chair thanked the participants for their comments and welcomed written comments within a week.

Presentation of preliminary findings from the Study "Regulatory provisions governing key aspects of unconventional gas extraction in selected EU Member States":

The Commission and its contractor (MILIEU) presented the preliminary results of a study looking at the regulatory provisions in place in 8 MS (BG, DE, DK, ES, LT, PL, RO, UK) governing key aspects of unconventional gas extraction. Some of the concerned MS asked questions and made remarks on their own situation and how it is reflected in the preliminary findings. The Chair announced that each country draft report will be sent to the concerned MS for factual comments within 5 days, and the final reports will be published as soon as possible.

Presentation of preliminary results of the on-line consultation:

The Commission presented preliminary results of the public consultation that was open from 20 December 2012 till 23 March 2013. Final results are expected to be published by the summer break and a stakeholders' event will take place before.

Roundtable on relevant national developments

The roundtable presented useful information on new concessions granted, new studies launched and new regulatory or non-regulatory developments in MS.

Next steps

The next meeting of the Technical Working Group will be held in May-June 2013 [now set for 24th June]. The agenda as well as practical details of the next meeting will be provided to national experts closer to the date.