How effective is the EU approach to shale gas?

Brussels, 15 December 2016

Today the Commission published a report which reviews the effectiveness of the EU approach to shale gas. The report centres around a 2014 Recommendation on minimum principles for shale gas. Member States were invited to follow these principles to address environmental risks posed by high-volume hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”), the technique used in shale gas operations, in order to give investors the predictability they need. The report looks at how effectively the Recommendation has been implemented in Member States, and suggests the way forward.

Over the past two and a half years, only a limited number of shale gas exploration wells have been drilled, in a small number of Member States. Overall, the Recommendation has been applied unevenly, and in some cases in an unsatisfactory manner.

Karmenu Vella, Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, said: "More progress is necessary, both in the application of the Recommendation and in the correct and uniform application of EU environmental legislation. The tool remains essential for managing the risks posed by fracking, and it allows for hydrocarbon development in a transparent manner."

The Commission will now focus on increasing transparency, developing a public database on unconventional oil and gas projects, and will continue monitoring developments at the national level. It will also foster a correct and uniform application of EU environmental legislation across Member States and encourage the use of best practices to address the environmental impacts and risks of oil and gas extraction. It will also look to address the gaps in scientific knowledge on public health impacts and the risks of such activities.

The Recommendation on minimum principles for the exploration and production of hydrocarbons (such as shale gas) using high-volume hydraulic fracturing and the report reviewing its effectiveness are available here:
Studies commissioned to support this exercise are available here: