

S.Africa extends freeze on shale gas drilling

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A drilling rig exploring for shale gas in Poland. South Africa's mining minister on Thursday said no decision will be made on controversial shale gas prospecting until next year with an existing moratorium extended by six months.

South Africa's mining minister on Thursday said no decision will be made on controversial shale gas prospecting until next year with an existing moratorium extended by six months.

Minister Susan Shabangu froze all new applications and decisions on lodged bids earlier this year and appointed a team to investigate [hydraulic fracturing](#) known as "fracking" in the vast central Karoo.

The department had to engage the public and interim reports had been received "but some issues were not clear and I sent them back," the Sapa news agency quoted Shabangu as saying.

"I can assure you that when it comes to fracking in the Karoo, we will engage with everybody. We will go to the people," she said.

Anglo-Dutch energy giant Shell is among several companies wanting to drill for shale gas, which has drawn a backlash over environmental fears.

"She's putting everything on ice for a further six months so that the task team can complete its work. It has given her an interim report and she has asked them to do further work on that interim report," minerals and resources department spokesman Bheki Khumalo told AFP.

"It simply means that South Africa will not take any decision on fracking and finalise this matter in any way until the end of February next year. Also there will be public consultations once she has got the report."

Seen as a means to release untapped [energy sources](#), fracking pumps water, sand and chemicals deep underground at high pressure to free gas from rock, but has sparked controversy in several countries.

Shabangu said she expected the final report of the study to go to South Africa's cabinet next month.

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