

Britain accused of 'sneak' tactics to ease fracking laws

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An anti-fracking and climate protester holds a placard during a rally at the former test drill site operated by British energy firm Cuadrilla Resources in Balcombe in West Sussex, southern England, on January 19, 2014

Environmental campaigners and opposition lawmakers on Wednesday accused the British government of using "sneak" tactics to relax legislation on fracking under national parks despite promising a ban.

The issue was discussed and approved in committee only on Tuesday and the vote is being held under a procedure normally used to speed minor parliamentary business.

Opposition MPs criticised the rush to back fracking, a way of extracting gas by pumping water, chemicals and sand underground that opponents say could pollute water supplies, scar the countryside, and trigger earthquakes.

Labour's chief energy spokeswoman Lisa Nandy accused ministers of using a "parliamentary back door" to try to approve the "weak regulations" without debate.

Liberal Democrat leader Tim Farron said the [government](#) was trying to "sneak" through a decision, labelling such a move "outrageous".

The change would allow shale gas companies to drill sideways under national parks. Before the general election, the government had made a commitment for an "outright ban" on drilling in national parks.

"It's not even a year since the government promised to ban fracking in [national parks](#)," Hannah Martin, energy campaigner at Greenpeace, said in a statement.

"Now it's trying to pull a fast one through an arcane parliamentary process by hawking out the land beneath our most beautiful landscapes to let fracking companies drill sideways deep beneath them," she said.



The site where energy company IGas has permission to carry out exploratory drilling for shale gas at Barton Moss in Manchester, north-west England on January 13, 2014

Friends of the Earth said the government was "pushing through" the changes without a full debate, adding that the rules could endanger drinking water aquifers.

"People won't be fooled by the government's blatant attempt to get around their promises on a technicality—fracking under a national park does not equate to an 'outright ban'," said Rose Dickinson, energy campaigner for Friends of the Earth.

Prime Minister David Cameron's government has pledged to go "all-out for shale", saying it would increase energy security, keep prices down and create jobs.

But there is widespread opposition and there is no commercial fracking under way in Britain yet.

The government's plans were dealt a blow earlier this year when local authorities rejected plans for an exploratory fracking site by [energy](#) firm Cuadrilla in northwest England following protests.

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