

Support for fracking is at an all-time low, says new survey

October 13 2016, by Charlotte Anscombe



As the Government gives the go-ahead to resume fracking in the UK, a new survey from The University of Nottingham has shown that public support for the extraction and use of shale gas has fallen from over 58 per cent in July 2013 to just over 37 per cent in October 2016.

For the very first time, the 2016 survey shows overall support for fracking in the UK as negative, just at the point where horizontal drilling has been given Government approval in Lancashire.

The University of Nottingham 'Survey of Public Attitudes to Shale Gas Extraction in the UK' has been running since March 2012. The survey has tracked changes in awareness of shale gas, and what the UK public believes to be the environmental impacts of its extraction and use, as well as its acceptability as an energy source.

Falling public support

Since the first survey in 2012, [public support](#) for shale gas in the UK has followed a very distinct pattern. Up to and including July 2013, support for shale gas was increasing across almost all indicators. The results showed the public becoming less concerned about the potential negative impacts of fracking, such as earth tremors and water contamination, and increasingly convinced that shale gas would provide cheaper and cleaner energy.

However, following the Balcombe protests in Sussex in August 2013, support has plummeted. Whether or not the protests were the actual trigger, public support has continued to decline over a three-year period.

The September 2016 survey found that there has been a significant drop in the level of support for [shale gas extraction](#) in the UK over the last 12 months, with levels of support now standing at just 37.3 per cent whereas opposition to fracking in the UK now stands at 41 per cent.

Additionally, some of the key concerns highlighted by the protestors at Balcombe, notably the risk of water contamination, continue to be a major issue for the UK public and in September 2016 the survey saw the number of respondents associating shale gas with [water contamination](#) increase to over 49 per cent, the highest level since the survey began.

A clean energy source?

Despite industry claims that shale gas is a clean energy source, especially compared to other [fossil fuels](#) such as oil and coal, the British public has not been convinced.

In the March 2012 survey, only 25.3 per cent considered shale gas to be

clean, compared with 44.8 per cent who did not, giving a negative rating of -19.5 per cent. Since then, this gap has widened significantly and in September 2016 stands at nearly -26.5 per cent – the largest negative differential in the history of the survey.

The survey also asked whether shale gas should be part of the UK energy mix, alongside a range of alternatives including fossil fuels, nuclear and renewable energy sources. Since this question was first posed in July 2013, shale gas continues to lag behind other energy sources and according to this latest survey, it remains the energy source the UK public are least likely to want in the UK's 2025 energy mix.

Long-term implications

Professor Sarah O'Hara from the School of Geography at the University and co-director of the survey, said: "The sharp downturn in support for the extraction and use of shale gas in the UK over the last 12 months is hugely significant, as is the fact that for the first time since we began running the survey in March 2012 more people are against shale gas extraction than in favour.

"It is clear that people are not only concerned about possible impact on their immediate environment, something that dominated early debates around shale gas but importantly are beginning to think more broadly about the implications for greenhouse gas emissions and future climate change."

Professor Mathew Humphrey from the School of Politics and International Relations at the University and co-director of the survey, said: "In over four years of running The University of Nottingham shale gas [survey](#), these are the most negative overall results that we have seen, just at the time when the government has approved the UK's first horizontally drilled well in Lancashire.

"The downturn in [public attitudes](#) that we first saw after the Balcombe protests in 2013 has persisted for far longer than we might have expected. This may partly reflect lower energy prices making the apparent need for [shale gas](#) less urgent, and so less worthy of the potential risks. The results show that the government will increasingly have its work cut out selling fracking to the UK public."

Provided by University of Nottingham

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