

Dutch urged to cut Groningen gas output by almost half

February 1 2018



One of many cracks in a farm building in Middelstum, some 10km from Groningen

Dutch mine safety officials on Thursday urged the government to almost halve production at Europe's biggest gas field, amid increasing anger

from residents over damaging earthquakes in the Groningen region.

"A major intervention is necessary in order to probably meet the safety standard and to reduce the risk of damage," the Dutch State Supervision of Mines told the economics ministry.

Although no-one can predict when earthquakes will happen in the northern region, "we advise the minister to reduce the gas production as soon as possible to a maximum production level of 12 billion cubic metres per annum."

This would be well below the current gas production of some 21.6 billion cubic metres, which was set in April 2017.

The statement came as about 30 farmers were descending on The Hague in their tractors to protest against continued Groningen gas production ahead of a parliamentary debate.

Residents have increasingly called for all gas production to be halted in the region.

Groningen has been plagued in recent years by relatively low magnitude earthquakes said to result from huge air pockets left underground because of gas extraction.

But tempers have risen after more than 900 homes were damaged in early January when Groningen province was hit by a 3.4-magnitude quake—its largest since 2012.

Following the advice of the mines body, Economics Minister Eric Weibes Thursday swiftly ordered production to be halted in four locations close to the village of Loppersum.

And he said he would likely advise the government to cut gas production to 12 billion cubic metres "as soon as possible", the Dutch news agency ANP reported.

But Weibes said he first wanted to weigh all the pros and cons, and discuss the issue with neighbours France and Germany, before informing parliament of his decision in March.

Gasunie, which transports gas in the Netherlands and northern Germany, said however it believed such a radical cut in output would not guarantee enough supply, and risked leaving homes without heating next winter.

'Conservative estimate'

Inspector General of Mines, Theodor Kockelkoren, admitted on Thursday that there were large "uncertainties in this assessment".

"We therefore choose to be on the conservative side. After all, it concerns the safety of the inhabitants of Groningen," he added in a statement.

NAM, the energy company responsible for the [gas extraction](#), is half-owned by Shell and ExxonMobil and has been extracting gas from the massive Groningen field since 1963.

Last year, a total of 18 quakes measuring 1.5 magnitude or higher were measured in the Groningen gas field, according to the Royal Dutch Meteorological Institute (KNMI).

And on Wednesday, the government announced it was setting up a new independent commission next month to assess all claims for compensation.

The body will deal with some 6,000 outstanding claims filed before March last year, as well as another 8,000 registered since then.

The aim is to have as many claims as possible settled by July, with the government then claiming the money back from NAM, the economics ministry said.

The Netherlands has dramatically reduced [gas production](#) at Groningen over the years, scaling it back in stages from 53.9 billion cubic metres in 2013.

And in January, the Dutch government ordered more than 200 of the country's biggest businesses to stop using gas from the quake-prone and seek out sustainable energy sources or use gas from abroad.

© 2018 AFP

Citation: Dutch urged to cut Groningen gas output by almost half (2018, February 1) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-02-dutch-urged-groningen-gas-output.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.