

Dutch to shut Europe's biggest gas field after quakes

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The Netherlands' Groningen gas field is the largest in Europe.

The Netherlands said Friday it would end production at Europe's largest gas field on October 1 after years of earthquakes, despite global energy worries sparked by Russia's war in Ukraine.

Wells at the massive Groningen field in the northern Netherlands will remain open for one more year in case of a cold winter but then be shut down forever, the government said.

Residents near the huge site, which opened in 1965, have complained for more than two decades of being terrorized by quakes directly attributed to drilling operations.

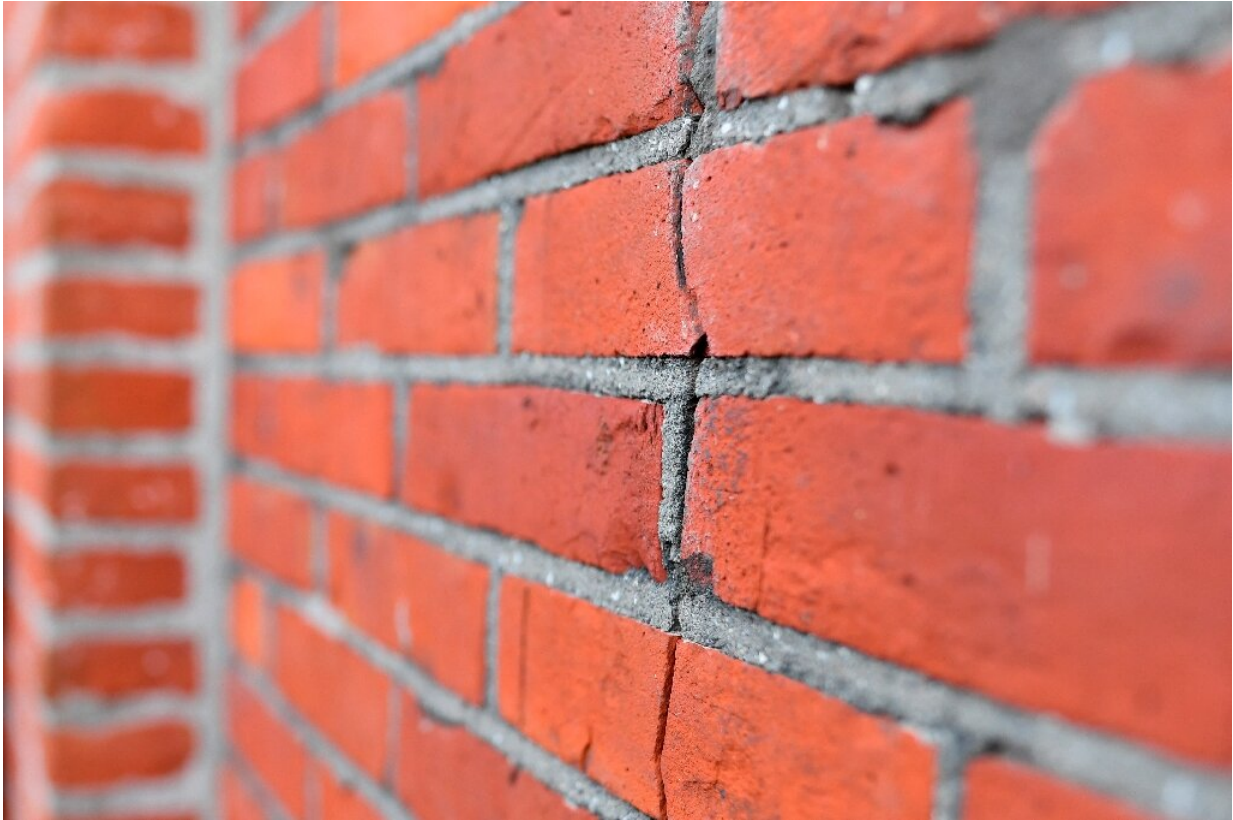
"We are really turning off the tap," said Hans Vijlbrief, the Dutch minister for extractive industries. The decision was an "important moment after decades of gas extraction," he added.

"The problems of Groningen residents have not yet been solved and unfortunately the earthquakes will continue for years to come, but the source of all misery will be closed from October."

The Netherlands first said five years ago that it would close the site by 2030 due to the increasingly severe quakes, which damaged homes and traumatized locals.

Although gas extraction from the field has been almost cut to zero over the last few years, the Dutch government kept the site operational due to the global energy uncertainties prompted largely by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

But Prime Minister Mark Rutte's cabinet decided at a meeting on Friday to completely end production by October 1.



Residents have complained for years of damage from earthquakes blamed on drilling operations at Groningen.

'Uncertain international situation'

The government said that "due to the uncertain international situation" it would be possible to draw gas from the Groningen site for one more year "in very exceptional situations."

These would include "very severe cold" or a gas shortage.

But the final 11 wells would then be "permanently closed" by October 1, 2024, it said.

Oil giants Shell Netherlands and ExxonMobil have equal stakes in NAM, the company responsible for drawing gas from the Groningen field since the early 1960s.

A top Shell official said in March this year that the gas field "must be closed".

So far Groningen's residents, who suffered severe damage to their homes and buildings from the slew of quakes, have received a trickle of compensation. They have been caught in a bottleneck of bureaucratic bungling and red tape, said a report by a parliamentary commission of inquiry earlier this year

The Netherlands, which has around a third of its surface area lying below sea level is particularly vulnerable to climate change. It is also under pressure to cut its reliance on fossil fuels.

An environmental group won a landmark case in 2019 in Dutch courts, ordering the government to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 25 percent by the end of 2020.

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