

Unconventional oil & gas

What's the issue?

We're fighting on a new fossil fuels front. Scotland has mined coal and drilled for oil for decades, these fuels have powered our economies and societies. But we now know that we cannot continue to burn fossil fuels and maintain the stable climate in which human society has prospered. Some of our coal, oil and gas reserves have to stay in the ground.

Unconventional oil and gas refers to the 'harder to get' fossil fuels. These fuels have been largely ignored in recent times because a plentiful supply of 'easier to get' fossil fuels have been available. Examples of unconventional fossil fuels include shale-gas, coal-gas and tar-sands.

Oil companies use a basket of techniques to harness these 'hard to get' fossil fuels. One of these techniques is called fracking which involves pumping a mixture of water and chemicals underground at high pressures to fracture rock and release gas. Other examples include underground coal gasification and various techniques, like as 'dewatering', to extract gas from coal seams.

Why are people opposed?

Local pollution and health concerns have lead to community opposition. Faulty wells used for fracking in the US have been shown to contaminate local water supplies.¹ Communities in the USA and Australia living in and around gas fields report symptoms associated with exposure to fracking and

drilling chemicals, including respiratory problems, nausea and rashes.²

Any investment in unconventional energy also risks slowing the transition to a low-carbon economy by diverting money from renewable technologies and entrenching the world's reliance on fossil fuels.

Finally, unconventional gas will not lower UK energy prices. The US has seen a boom in fracking for shale gas and this has lowered the price of gas there. But UK is much more densely populated, and the geology suggests the industry will face more hurdles. In any case, because the price of gas is set by an EU-wide market, a shale gas boom in the UK is not going to lower prices.

The Scottish Government has taken a more cautious approach than Westminster's gung-ho industry cheerleading, but they still refuse to rule out fracking and unconventional gas in Scotland through the planning system.

What's happening in the Central Belt?

In 2014 the UK Government offered PEDL licenses to oil companies across the Central Belt – these are licenses issued by the UK Government for companies to start looking for fossil fuel resources. The successful bidders are not yet known and are expected to remain secret until after the UK general election in May 2015.

The British Geological Survey has identified areas in the Central Belt with shale oil and shale gas. Companies are very likely to

¹ <http://www.pnas.org/content/111/39/14076.abstract>

² <http://www.foe-scotland.org.uk/fracking>

focus their interest on the areas within the red line of the map overlaid.³

The most advanced unconventional gas plans in the UK are in Airth, near to Falkirk and Stirling. A planning application to allow Australian company *Dart Energy* to start extracting coal bed methane on a commercial scale was submitted to Falkirk and Stirling councils.

Local concerns and many months of active public campaigning have forced the Scottish Government to 'call in' the decision for the Scottish Government to make. The Government's decision on this application is a test case – if they refuse to rule out the first application other companies are likely to progress their plans in other areas of the country. A decision is expected early 2015.

Green campaigning

Greens have been working to support hard fought community campaigns against the threat of unconventional gas developments. The Scottish Government have the power to

block developments through planning laws.

Green MSP Alison Johnstone led the first ever debate in the Scottish Parliament on unconventional fossil fuels. Green calls for a moratorium were voted down by every other political party but, campaigning with others, we have helped to win a more cautious approach from the Scottish Government.

Green proposals for a 2km buffer zone between fracking sites and communities were narrowly defeated in the Holyrood's Energy Committee but Scottish planning guidance does now require additional risk assessment and community consultation. The Smith Commission has also agreed with Green proposals that the licencing regime is devolved to Holyrood.

Take action

Sign the Scottish Green Party's 'No Fracking' postcard to you MSP and join your local party branch to get involved in local campaigning.

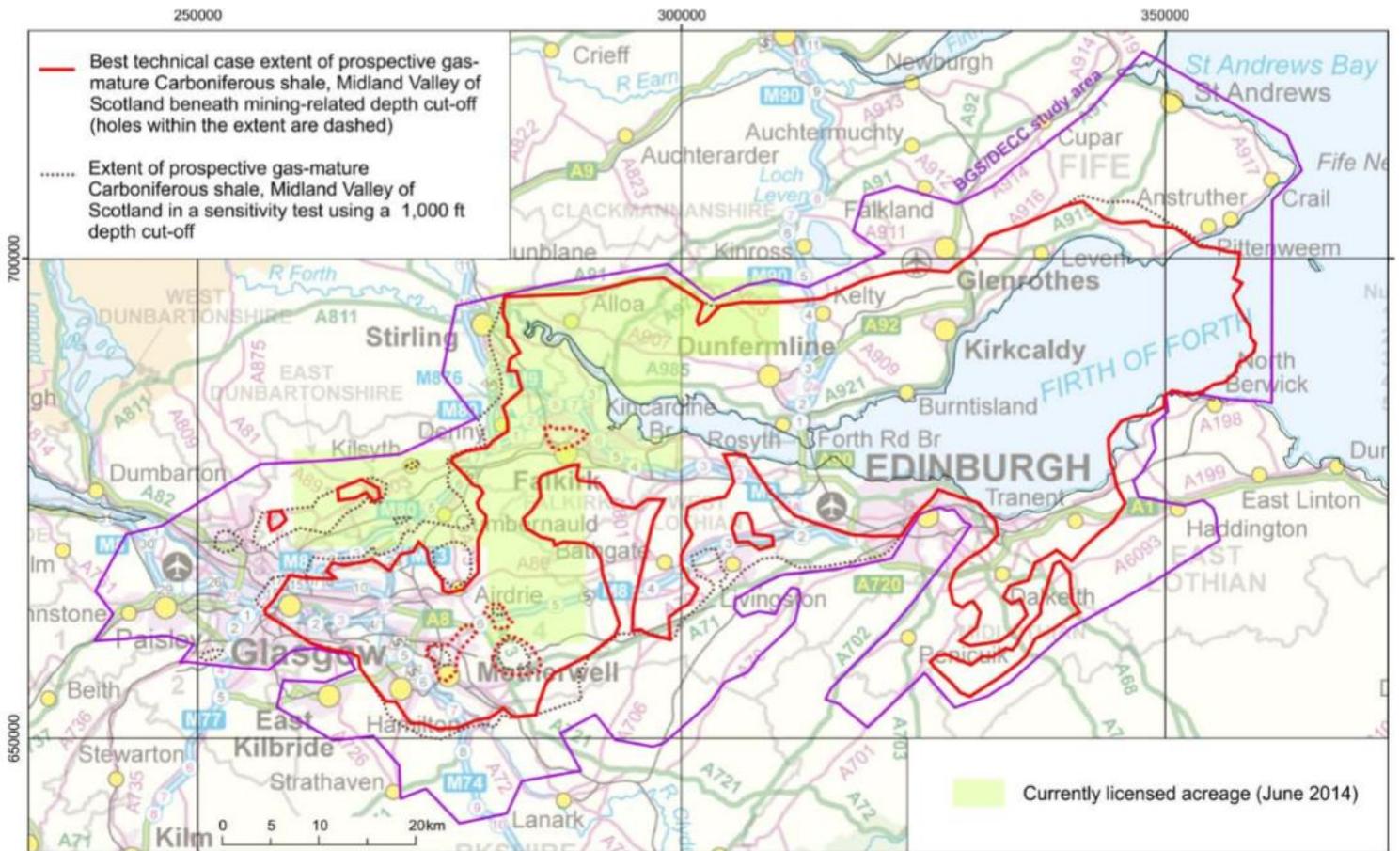


Figure 73 Summary of areas considered prospective for shale gas (red) beneath a mining-related depth cut-off in the Carboniferous shales of the Midland Valley of Scotland. Study area in purple. Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright 2014