

## Influential MEP calls for shale gas regulation

Jo Leinen is proposing a European directive that would penalise or even ban the exploitation of the controversial fossil fuel

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3Legs Resources, a British company, drilling in shale gas deposits near Lebien, Poland. MEPs are increasingly worried about the role of shale gas in the world's energy mix. Photograph: Michal Fludra/Corbis

One of the most influential members of the European parliament is proposing a new directive that would penalise or even ban the exploitation of shale gas, the controversial new fossil fuel that is tipped as the major energy source of the future.

Jo Leinen told the Guardian he wanted a new "energy quality directive" that would mean fuels with adverse environmental impacts - such as shale gas and oil from tar sands - were stringently regulated within the EU.

Leinen chairs the EU parliament's main body overseeing environmental regulation, the influential committee on the environment, public health and food safety. He has the power to bring forward proposals that could make it into law within a few years.

Leinen said there was likely to be support for such a legislative intervention, as many MEPs are increasingly worried about the role of shale gas in the world's energy mix. Shale gas extraction has been linked to a wide variety of environmental problems, including pollution of the water supply, excessive use of water resources and potential seismic effects. In France, further expansion of the shale gas industry has been banned, and in the UK drilling operations have been halted after two small earthquakes near the exploration sites.

Although gas produces only half of the carbon dioxide emissions associated with coal when burned to produce electricity, one study from Cornell University has suggested that the true emissions related to shale gas could be greater than those from coal, if factors such as methane leakage during the extraction process were taken into account.

"We need to be looking much more carefully at shale gas, and at the consequences of pursuing it," said Leinen.

Although there are few details yet of what an energy quality directive would look like, the EU already has rules on transport fuel quality. A new directive could impose effective limits or financial penalties on shale gas use, depending on the environmental consequences associated with the fuel.

Other "unconventional" fossil fuel resources could also fall under the remit of such a directive, such as oil from tar sands.

Plans for a directive on energy quality are likely to be fiercely resisted by the gas industry, which for months has been lobbying strongly for shale gas to be accepted as a "green" alternative to renewable energy. Earlier this year, the European Gas Advocacy Forum adapted a report on the expansion of Europe's renewable energy industry to show instead that gas could deliver greenhouse gas savings at a lower cost than adopting renewables. The interpretation was rebuffed by the renewables industry, and the NGO that commissioned the original report.

A report from the International Energy Agency also found that gas was not a "panacea" and that pursuing gas as the main energy source for the future would cause global warming on a serious scale, raising temperatures by much more than the 2C that scientists regard as the limit of safety, beyond which climate change becomes catastrophic and irreversible.

There is dispute over the environmental effects of shale gas drilling, fuelled in part by the secrecy of the gas industry in the US, a pioneer of shale gas exploration. Several studies are now under way, including one spearheaded by Rajendra Pachauri, the chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, through the institute he also chairs, and one undertaken by the US Environmental Protection Agency.

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