

SPEAKING TOUR 2013: FRACKING AND UNCONVENTIONAL GAS

Summary

The fracking speaking tour was arranged by Friends of the Earth UK, FOE Scotland and FOE Ireland in cooperation with local Frack free and Frack off groups. The London University lecture was hosted by the Human Rights Consortium. Onshore extraction of gas through hydraulic fracturing (fracking) is at the early stages in the UK but already very controversial with growing community opposition. However, a depressed economy and a reliance on gas are driving a strong industry and government push for shale gas, coal bed methane and underground coal gasification, probably the most polluting of all.

The first engagement was a presentation to the All Party Parliamentary Climate Change Group meeting on unconventional gas in the UK Houses of Parliament. It provided a great opportunity to speak to UK MPs and other decision makers and gauge their level of understanding of the issues. As we travelled around UK, Scotland and Ireland, we met MPs and regulators who had very little knowledge about the current state of the science around shale and coal bed methane extraction and appeared to have no awareness of pollution issues or concerns regarding public health. Even the relevant EPA regulators knew very little about the chemicals used in hydraulic fracturing and even less about the range of chemical byproducts and releases. Despite this they were providing considerable unqualified support to the industry. Affected councils and local residents were much more aware of the potential downsides and both these groups were eager for information and experiences from elsewhere to support their campaigns opposing the industry.

Wherever we spoke we received strong support and rarely met any vocal opposition. Other than our appearances on BBC TV Newsnight and radio, the companies did not engage in any debate or meetings, despite being invited. Throughout the tour, NTN provided information and outside expertise to support NGO and community campaigns. This helped form new local groups and empower many others. We undertook considerable publicity both through formal media and social media which meant much of the content of the talks is available though youtube. The tour provided new and exciting network contacts in NGOs, academia and the renewable energy industries and helped inform NGOs, business groups and Councils. It also legitimised many of the concerns of local communities and helped provide the confidence to allow them to effectively pursue their opposition to the unconventional gas activities.

The May 2013 speaking tour was arranged by Friends of the Earth UK, FOE Scotland and FOE Ireland in cooperation with local Frack free and Frack off groups.

London

The day after we arrived in the UK (23 April 2013), I presented to the All Party Parliamentary Climate Change Group meeting on unconventional gas in the UK Houses of Parliament organised by a cross-party group of MPs and Peers. Alongside academic, Dr John Broderick from the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, and Eve McNamara from the Ribble Estuary Against Fracking, it was a great opportunity to inform and speak with parliamentarians, other decision-makers, industry, professional bodies, think-tanks etc The meeting was chaired by Caroline Lucas, the UK's only Green MP. We also met with Dan Byles MP, the chair of the new All Party Parliamentary Group on Unconventional Gas & Oil and a member of the House of Commons Energy & Climate Change select committee; and with Tom Greatrex MP, Energy spokesman for the opposition Labour Party. Neither appeared to be aware of any of the downsides to UG extraction.

Preston, UK

On Wednesday 24th April, we travelled to Preston in central UK and spoke at a public meeting organized by FOE UK and the Ribble Estuary Against Fracking community group in Tarleton, Lancashire. This is a very active local community group who have a fracking site in their area, and had organised a Q&A with local election candidates. The audience was primarily local residents, some who were in support of the UG industry, yet had heard nothing of the downsides. The water consultant asked to give the industry's position (when Cuadrilla refused) gave his presentation with one hand in a bowl of produced water! The Q&A gave good opportunity to clarify some incorrect claims by the company, such as only 2 chemicals would be used.



Lancaster and Manchester, UK

Thursday we met with local green councilor then travelled to Lancaster for a public meeting that evening, organised by FOE, local campaigners and the Planet group, a student green group. The other speakers were Tina Rothery from Residents Action on Fylde Fracking and Tony Bosworth FOE UK. The company, again Cuadrilla refused to participate. The audience was made up of general public, local campaigners and local councilors. The presentation was well received and the student group reaffirmed

its intention to work on the issue. Friday we met with Councilors from Manchester City Council, a leading council in the UK who have passed a motion against fracking and local campaigners from Manchester Friends of the Earth. The meeting was very positive and the councilors and their invited chemical engineer expert were enthusiastic to take the next steps to go 'UG free'.

We then left for the 2 weeks ExCOP meeting in Geneva and returned in May.

Bath and Wells, UK

The first week was in southern England hosted by Frack-Free Somerset.

On Monday 13th May, I gave a talk at the public evening meeting in Bath, where a new group of 'Frackfree' was formed. The following day I presented a public meeting with Councilors in Wells. A number of exploration license are proposed for this area of Somerset and a local geologist talked about the geology of the area and what is known and not known about the source of Bath's hot water springs. Both meetings were well attended and the 30-40 councilors who attended the day meeting took the opportunity to discuss their concerns about hydraulic fracturing for shale gas in the Bath area and the risks to the hot springs and tourism. The councilors and the UK Women's Institute expressed their dismay over the UK government's uncritical support for the unconventional gas industry. The Councilors were inspired by north coast Councils and the action of CSG communities.

Brighton, UK

On Wednesday 15th, FOE Brighton organized media interviews and a photo-call with the leader of 'frack-free' Brighton & Hove Council, Jason Kitcat. (eg <http://vimeo.com/66309722>). This was followed by networking meeting with anti-fracking campaigners from southeast England. An evening public meeting 'Shale Gas: Energy Solution or Fracking Hell?' was held at Friends Meeting House in Brighton. Other speakers were Councilor Tony Janio, opposition spokesman on environment on Brighton Council and pro-fracking and Howard Johns, founder of Southern Solar, community renewables expert. The meeting was well attended including members of the council and media.



Balcombe, UK

On Thursday 16th presented to a public meeting in Balcombe, a small village in the stockbroker belt and in the heartland of the Conservative Party etc. Local people are incensed over Cuadrilla Resources, the shale gas explorer, acquiring an exploration licence for Balcombe in 2010. Cuadrilla's fracking was responsible for the two earthquakes in Blackpool in 2011. A local campaigner Katy Dunne, with the help of Frack Free Sussex has initiated a Lock The Gate strategy which was further supported by the over 120 residents attending the evening meeting.



London University

On Monday 20th May, the Human Rights Consortium hosted the Presentation at University of London (<http://extremeenergy.org/event/a-license-to-drill-social-resistance-to-unconventional-gas-activities-is-australias-present-britains-future/>). The talk was attended by academics, students and the media eg The Guardian. The presentation “A license to drill? Social resistance to unconventional gas activities: is Australia's present Britain's future?” is now available at <http://www.sas.ac.uk/videos-and-podcasts/politics-development-human-rights/license-drill-social-resistance-unconventional>



Edinburgh and Falkirk, Scotland

Tuesday 21st began the Coal-bed Methane Tour with Friends of the Earth, Scotland. I presented at the Scottish Parliament Reception in Edinburgh, attended by Scottish MSPs, regulators and others.



The presentation was followed by a panel discussion and Q&A with a health academic from University of Stirling.

The following day we met with the Scottish EPA, Falkirk Council, Stirling Council and AMEC Consultants. While they have been told that the problems in Australia could never happen in the UK or Scotland because they had better regulations, it was an argument easily countered by the decision of Australian company, Dart Energy to leave Australia due to regulatory pressures and in particular NSW 2 kilometres exclusion zone, which if applied in the UK and Scotland would probably effectively exclude the industry altogether. Produce water from the current Dart Energy wells in Scotland is currently being released via a hosepipe into the local waterway with no treatment. EPA considers 6 parameters only and undertakes no testing even though the waste water enters a listed wetlands.

Late last year I had met with Dart, FOE Flanders and the Belgium government when there were public claims by government that Dart would not use any chemicals in their extraction process, a claim they retracted at the meeting acknowledging it was misleading and stating it had been made 'as they did not want to alarm people'

We met with community members prior to the public meeting in Falkirk Old and St. Modan's Parish Church, in Falkirk. Our evening talk was attended by over 120 very upset locals and given a standing ovation by the crowd.



At 10.30pm that night, I appeared on the BBC TV 'Newsnight Scotland', Scotland's main news discussion program. The following day, Thursday we met with Members

of the Scottish Parliament including the Shadow Energy and Environment Minister from the Labour Party.

Dublin, Ireland

On Friday 24th we flew to Dublin, where a press conference and public meeting were held in the Buswells Hotel, hosted by the Irish Doctors Environmental Association and No Fracking Ireland. The meeting looked at the Human Health impacts of fracking and unconventional gas extraction. Speakers included myself and Juliet Duff, Chairperson of Irish Doctors Environmental Association. The presentations are available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mf6i54znf6s>. The Irish government is currently awaiting the publication of an EPA research report into "fracking" (shale gas extraction) before it decides on whether or not to allow companies to proceed with the controversial process.

Belfast, Northern Ireland

On Saturday 25th I gave my final presentation at an event hosted by the Greens MLA in Parliament Buildings in Stormont. An Australian company, Tamboran has an exploration license in Ireland. Their board of directors includes two past directors from Eastern Star Gas including a current non-Executive Director and a past Executive Director from 2000 – 2006 and Chairman in 2007. The history of Eastern Star Gas and its story of pollution in the Pilliga area are often part of my presentations.

