

3 August 2023

Efra Group statement on new oil and gas licenses

PCS is concerned by the recent statements by government regarding the decision to award 100 new licenses for oil and gas exploration in the North Sea.

A statement on behalf of the Efra Group Executive:

"We believe this concern is shared by the great bulk of staff in the department.

"Statements made by senior politicians which argue that increasing domestic fossil fuel extraction is compatible with the UK and global net zero commitments are not correct. The science on climate change mitigation is very clear: we need to peak and reduce to zero our extraction and use of fossil fuels in the next few decades if we are to avoid catastrophic climate change. For the UK specifically, this means a reduction of 68% in greenhouse gas emissions (compared to 1990 level) by 2030, a large part of which will require stopping fossil fuel production. The urgent need to move away from fossil fuels is echoed in the Glasgow Climate Pact, a consensus-produced international agreement that refers to the legally binding Paris Agreement of which the UK is a signatory. The Glasgow Climate Pact, which was agreed when the UK was the President of the 26th Conference of Parties (COP) for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, talks about 'phasing down' inefficient subsidies for fossil fuels and unabated coal power. By any standard, setting out plans to 'max out' fossil fuels does not constitute phasing down of oil and gas. The UK is going against the content of an international agreement which it personally coordinated in its role as COP26 President.

"In the field of climate change policy, a commitment to scientifically rigorous policy is essential. The most recent report of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change, made up of the world's leading scientists, policy-makers and economists, issued its report earlier this year. The report makes stark reading as it issues a code red for the planet, stressing that the next few years are critical for scaling up climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. The IPCC report summary states that: 'Net zero CO2 energy systems entail: a substantial

reduction in overall fossil fuel use, [and] minimal use of unabated fossil fuels’.

"The announcement of the release of a hundred new oil and gas licenses flies in the face of the advice of the UK's own Climate Change Committee and the UN Secretary General, António Guterres. Global scientific consensus on climate change runs counter to the statements made by senior politicians. Further extraction of fossil fuels is not compatible with reaching net zero emissions by 2050. Furthermore, the suggestion that further expanding the UK's fossil fuel industry rather than investing in renewable energy and energy efficiency measures is better for energy security and British household's budgets is also incorrect. Investment in wind power and the provision of adequate financial incentives to improve the energy efficiency and insulation of UK homes and businesses would save households money and make the country more resilient, while also fulfilling our climate change commitments. There also appears to be little validity in the suggestion that increasing oil and gas licensing will improve the UK's energy security. Ministers have referenced the global energy impacts of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine as the reasoning behind the decision, this seems highly unlikely given that we only import 4% of our gas from Russia and it will take many years for oil fields to be developed, meaning they will not help ease pressures on households with rising energy bills. On top of this, most of the oil and gas produced by the UK is exported.

"Our members are civil servants who are committed to serving the public. This means they will not provide inaccurate or misleading information to the public, and that policy decisions should be grounded in the best available evidence. These values are grounded in the Civil Service Code. If the Prime Minister was a civil servant he would stand in gross breach of that Code as his announcement is not rooted in evidence and is in fact misleading. It is not possible to 'max' out gas and oil exploration in the North Sea and claim you are heading for net zero.

"In the face of a climate crisis that is destroying crops and killing people worldwide, forcing many to flee their homes as they face floods and wildfires, PCS chooses to call out the Prime Minister on this line that continued extraction of fossil fuels is the best decision for the security of the UK, or the world. We will continue to campaign that that this government, and indeed any future ones, stand by international and domestic climate change commitments. Therefore, we ask that the Government reconsider its decision to issue new oil and gas licenses."