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Uncertainty over Scottish independence is putting jobs and investment in the North Sea at risk, a new report from a respected energy consultancy has said today.

Edinburgh-based analysts Wood Mackenzie (WoodMac) have said that Nicola Sturgeon's fresh drive for separation could deter investors from committing to new projects.

The report states that prospects for the future tax take are being overshadowed by questions about who will subsidise decommissioning liabilities.

While WoodMac points to 11 billion barrels of oil equivalent (boe) lying in Scottish waters, there is also an obligation to break-up the majority of fields, equating to 80% of the total UK decommissioning bill.

The report adds: "Critically, political uncertainty could deter investors from committing to new projects. With new investment and jobs at risk, and the complicating factors of boundaries and decommissioning tax relief, much is at stake."

Scottish Conservative Energy spokesman Alexander Burnett said:

"It is clear from this report that the currently fragile recovery we are seeing in the North Sea could be put at risk by Nicola Sturgeon's reckless and irresponsible drive for independence.

"Wood Mackenzie have correctly pointed out that the uncertainty caused by the looming threat of a repeat vote on separation could deter crucial investment in the sector.

"The SNP spent part of yesterday's conference in Aberdeen bemoaning the apparent lack of support from the UK Government, which has delivered £2.3 billion in tax breaks in the last three years.

"Far from supporting the industry, the SNP's obsession with independence

could cost jobs, reduce investment and cause huge confusion for the decommissioning market.

“Nicola Sturgeon does not have public support for a referendum, and she is now being warned that it will be damaging for the economy. She should drop these plans immediately.”