

Press release: Natascha Engel appointed as Commissioner for Shale Gas

Former MP Natascha Engel was today (5 October 2018) announced as the new independent Commissioner for Shale Gas.

The government understands the development of shale gas exploration and production sites is an issue which directly affects local communities and recognises the need to provide those communities with impartial, fact-based information.

Taking up her post this week, Natascha Engel will be a direct communication link between local communities, the shale gas industry and the industry regulators. The commissioner will be a contact point for residents, to listen to their concerns, refer them to relevant and factual research and help improve communication with regulators and industry.

Natascha Engel, Commissioner for Shale Gas, said:

If extracted safely, shale gas has the potential to be a new, domestic source of energy for the UK. But there is a need for clear, impartial information to be provided to all parties and in particular those local communities most affected by shale gas development.

As the Commissioner for Shale Gas, I look forward to working closely with communities, regulators and industry to ensure facts are easily accessible as the process of shale exploration continues to develop.

Energy and Clean Growth Minister Claire Perry said

It's important we get the facts straight on shale gas and that communities can access the best scientific information when engaging with the developers and regulators.

This new role will provide a single point of contact for local residents to get the information they need and have their questions answered.

As the UK makes progress towards shale gas production, proving a streamlined way for developers to engage with our robust regulators will increase efficiency and help to continually improve our already world-leading regulations in this area.

The UK regulatory regime for shale gas is considered among the most robust and stringent in the world. Regulators ensure the shale gas industry meets the relevant environmental criteria to operate responsibly in the UK and that these regulations keep pace with the development of shale gas exploration.

The commissioner will work closely with the shale gas regulators, although will be distinct from them, as it is not a regulatory role and has no powers of enforcement or investigation. To preserve the independence of the regulators, the commissioner will not comment on any specific regulatory decisions.

The appointment comes as the government announced the set up of a Shale Environmental Regulator Group, which will bring the regulators (Oil and Gas Authority, Health and Safety Executive and Environment Agency) together as a virtual body. The Shale Environmental Regulator Group will act as one, coherent, single face for local authorities and industry, helping to resolve regulatory issues on sites and sharing best practice with local authorities considering shale gas applications.

Natascha Engel was Member of Parliament for North East Derbyshire from 2005 to 2017.

She has first-hand experience of the local impact of shale gas developments and also has experience of working closely with industry, regulators and government on how to best engage local communities on this important topic.

An email address for the Shale Commissioner will be made available shortly.