



NATIONAL OFFICE

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Fracking Moratorium: WESSA Position Statement

This position statement reflects the Vision, Mission, Aim, Style and Values of WESSA. The position statement should be used to guide WESSA (internally), as well as seek to position WESSA (externally), as an active and credible influence on environmental governance in South Africa.

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This position statement replaces all other WESSA position statements relating to this issue that pre-date this one.

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WESSA (The Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa) cannot support Minister Shabangu's recent lifting of the Department of Mineral Resource's Moratorium on Hydraulic Fracturing in the Karoo Basin of South Africa. WESSA believes that the precautionary principle enshrined in the National Environmental Management Act (1998) should be exercised. We believe that there has been insufficient application of the precautionary principle which obligates the proponents of an activity to provide proof that it will not cause harm to the natural environment or people, for the activity to go head. Some of the potential threats to the environment and people include:

- Water (in the context of a dry region of a water-scarce country) the quantity of fresh water needed
 operationally in competition with many more primary human needs in the region and the impact of operations on
 water quality at groundwater and surface levels with associated ecosystem and social impacts as already
 experienced in other fracking areas of the world.
- Opting for continued reliance on finite energy sources which distract the country from the commitment to renewables which would create more sustainable jobs in the long term with fewer externalised costs.
- Change of character of a landscape which has deep ecosystem and heritage meaning for the sake of comparatively short term gains.
- Major social impact as a result of decisions being taken without the levels of public capacity development and participation that would have made such decisions responsible and legitimate.

However, before and if shale gas prospecting is to proceed, WESSA believes that the following should be addressed:

- The National Government must undertake a strategic environmental, social and economic assessment of the entire Karoo Basin thereby defining both positive and negative potential impacts of hydraulic fracturing;
- A strategic cap on the number and location of prospecting sites;
- In its experience working in the Karoo, WESSA believes that most communities have not had reasonable opportunity to participate in a fully-disclosed environmental impact assessment process;
- A full disclosure of the Technical Task Team's report describing all data so as to inform decision-making processes for both relevant government entities and civil society organisations;
- The formulation and implementation of policies, legislation, regulations and conditions around which prospecting and extraction may take place;
- The opportunity to engage in a holistic governance process with regards to hydraulic fracturing and not just in an environmental impact assessment process which is largely mitigatory in nature;
- The aforementioned point presents opportunity to engage in public participation processes prior to decision-making around prospecting and, eventually, extraction. This process may include public parliamentary hearings.

South Africa is a water scarce country. Any pollution, particularly in the Karoo Basin, could cause disastrous social and economic consequences.