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Press release

Fracking: Not essential for the “Energiewende”

The German Advisory Council on the Environment (SRU), in its statement published today “Fracking for shale gas production – A contribution to its appraisal in the context of energy and environment policy”, advocates a more rational approach to the opportunities and risks associated with fracking. Shale gas is not essential for transforming the energy system. For the moment the fracking technology should not be used for commercial production of shale gas, in view of serious gaps in our knowledge about its environmental impacts. Fracking will not be justifiable until pilot projects have yielded favourable results.

Production of shale gas in Germany will not reduce energy prices, neither will it make any appreciable contribution to the security of energy supply. From the point of view of German energy policy, there can therefore be no interest in such production. Present knowledge indicates that the domestic potential for economically profitable extraction subject to appropriate environmental conditions is far too small to have any appreciable influence on gas prices in Germany. It would be misguided to revise our energy and climate policy in the light of cheap shale gas from the USA. Its impact on the industry's competitiveness is often exaggerated.

As regards the environmental risks of fracking, the SRU notes that there are still considerable uncertainties and gaps in our knowledge. The following aspects in particular have yet to be clarified:

- environmentally sound disposal of the resulting waste water,
- the safety of boreholes and production systems, especially as regards groundwater conservation,
- the long-term impacts of such operations and
- the climate balance of shale gas.

For precautionary reasons, fracking must not on any account be used within the catchment area of existing or potential drinking water protection areas. The SRU furthermore recommends a step-by-step approach to clarifying outstanding questions, in which initially only pilot projects will be permitted.

Fresh information should be obtained above all from such demonstration projects accompanied by close scientific monitoring. The process of planning and implementing these pilot projects should be transparent, and should involve participation by the public. In accordance with the polluter pays principle, the resulting costs should be borne by the extraction industry.

The statement “Fracking zur Schiefergasgewinnung – Ein Beitrag zur energie- und umweltpolitischen Bewertung” (available in German only) can be downloaded from www.umweltrat.de or ordered from the SRU Office.

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For over forty years the SRU has been advising the German Federal Government on environmental policy issues. The Council is made up of seven professors from a range of different environment-related disciplines. This ensures an encompassing and independent evaluation from a natural scientific and technical point of view, as well as from an economic, legal, and political science perspective. The Council is a member of the network of European Environmental and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils (EEAC).

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