

Statement by the Weald Action Group in response to the UK Government's proposed climate compatibility checkpoint for future oil and gas licensing in the UK Continental Shelf



- We are in a climate emergency and no new fossil fuel projects are compatible with maintaining a stable climate.
- The proposed oil and gas climate compatibility checkpoint is an inherently flawed premise that threatens the delivery not only of the UK's net-zero target but, more importantly, of the global stability of the climate.
- The checkpoint will also create doubt on the timings and speed of the UK's move out of fossil fuels, resulting in ongoing job uncertainty for the thousands of oil and gas workers who have a right to a just transition to sustainable and secure professions.
- We urge the Government to scrap the proposed checkpoint and place an immediate moratorium on both offshore and onshore oil and gas projects licensed but not approved, plus all future licensing rounds.
- Much greater political focus is needed on managing demand for energy, which is frequently side-lined in deliberations about energy supply.

If we are to have any hope of keeping global average temperature rise below 1.5⁰c it is crucial that new oil and gas exploration is halted now. Even the [International Energy Agency](#) – who have long supported the interests of the fossil fuel industry – last year recognised that, in delivering a net-zero energy sector by 2050: *“There is no need for investment in new fossil fuel supply”*. Indeed, the Government's own consultation document states that: *“Widely accepted research tells us that the global sum of government's projections for oil and gas production far exceeds what the world can afford to burn if we are to achieve the goal of the Paris COP”*.

The UK bears a huge historic greenhouse gas emissions burden, is a developed country with a diversified economy much less dependent on oil and gas compared to other parts of the world, and has access to significant sources of clean renewable energy. As such, the UK must be one of the countries that goes first in ending new oil and gas exploration and production.

This view is increasingly supported by a wide range of voices beyond traditional environmental organisations and includes:

- UK FIRES – a major research programme made up of a consortium of academics and industrial partners – whose [2021 report](#) assessing the measures needed for the UK to deliver its 45% emissions reduction target by 2030 clearly states that the round of permissions for new North Sea projects granted in June 2021 should be cancelled.
- Scientists from [UCL](#) who recently stated that a moratorium should be placed on all new oil and gas fields in the UK as these would be incompatible with limiting warming in line with the Paris Agreement.
- Medical leaders who this month sent a [letter](#) to the UK Government stating that there should be an immediate end to new North Sea oil and gas licences. The letter states that *“as healthcare*

professionals, we know that any new fossil fuel projects and their contribution to climate change constitute a grave threat to our patients and the resilience of our healthcare system”.

Beyond the flawed premise of the checkpoint, further details as to why it will not prevent damaging projects from going forward include but are not limited to:

- As it is proposed, the checkpoint will only apply to new oil and gas licensing rounds. It ignores the significant climate impact of projects already licensed but not approved. Friends of the Earth have [estimated](#) that the 30 licensed offshore projects expected to be considered for approval before the middle of the decade could emit around a billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent if they receive approval.
- Some of the specific potential tests proposed and the lack of clarity on how they will be implemented clearly risk skewing the checkpoint in favour of allowing further licensing rounds despite the overwhelming evidence that this would be detrimental to the climate:
 - For example, carbon capture and storage must only be used as part of a transition plan out of fossil fuels and not used as a means of extending exploration and production of oil and gas (as is implied by Test 4).
 - There is also a worrying lack of clarity regarding how the different potential tests will be weighted. This risks that potential Test 3, which assesses the UK’s status as a net importer or exporter of oil and gas, will have greater influence over the outcome of the checkpoint than tests which consider scope 3 emissions (Test 5) and the ‘global production gap’ (Test 6).

As a final note we remain extremely concerned that the current political focus on energy production is perpetuating the imbalance between the need for action on the supply side of the energy equation but also critically the demand side. Managing demand for energy has received and is currently receiving significantly less political focus than issues of energy production and is frequently bypassed in deliberations about security of energy supplies.

The [Weald Action Group](#) is an umbrella for local groups campaigning against all forms of oil and gas extraction across the Weald and the Isle of Wight in the Southeast of England.

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