

## Aktuelle Information

### Open-ended research in NRW not possible

- **BASF subsidiary criticizes restrictions for basic research in North Rhine-Westphalia, an important industrial location**
- **Wintershall abandons plans to carry out scientific research into shale gas in the “Rheinland” and “Ruhr” concessions**

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**Düsseldorf/Kassel.** Wintershall, Germany’s biggest crude oil and natural gas producer, has abandoned plans to carry out further scientific research into shale gas in the “Rheinland” and “Ruhr” approved fields in North Rhine-Westphalia.

A new fracking law came into force in mid-February 2017. It still allows the use of hydraulic fracturing in traditional natural gas production, albeit subject to stricter regulations. In unconventional reservoirs, only a small number of research projects will initially be possible.

In order to carry out basic research and further scientific exploration work, Wintershall had merely planned to take rock samples at a depth of up to 300 meters – with no deep wells or fracking. Although this is eligible for approval in accordance with the latest legislation, the Arnsberg District Government rejected an application to extend the permits for “Ruhr” and “Rheinland” at the end of January 2017, officially stating that it “wanted to set an example”.

“It’s regrettable that scientific findings and technological expertise have so little weight in this decision and that open-ended exploration is being politically blocked in NRW, an important location for industry and science. In reality, Germany cannot afford to block knowledge,” criticized Wintershall board member Martin Bachmann.

“As far as unconventional resources in Germany are concerned, we want to carry out basic research. First of all, we want to find out what there is underground. In a country like Germany with scarce natural resources, we must ask ourselves what resources will be available to us in the future,” said Bachmann. As he explained, however, Wintershall does not intend to pursue

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its application to extend the permits for the “Rheinland” and “Ruhr” approved fields further.

In accordance with the package of fracking regulations which was passed by the Bundestag in summer 2016 and is now fully in force, the blanket ban on hydraulic fracturing in unconventional reservoirs will be checked again after a pilot phase in 2021. Referring to the mining authorities’ decision to reject Wintershall’s application, Bachmann pointed out that at the present moment the mining authorities have no way of predicting what the state government’s attitude to fracking projects will be in four years’ time. Instead, the focus should now be on making the maximum of four pilot projects set out in the law possible – with scientific supervision, transparently and with the involvement of all the relevant stakeholders.

What’s more, the fracking ban in the NRW State Development Plan to which the Arnsberg District Government refers in its decision has been declared illegal by an expert report commissioned by the Federal Association for Natural Gas, Crude Oil and Geoenergy (BVEG). Because the fracking ban inadmissibly infringes on specialist legislation (water resources, nature and landscape conservation, mining laws), it breaches constitutional law.

**Wintershall Holding GmbH**, based in Kassel, Germany, is a wholly-owned subsidiary of BASF in Ludwigshafen. The company has been active in the extraction of natural resources for 120 years, and in the exploration and production of crude oil and natural gas for over 85 years. Wintershall focuses on selected core regions where the company has built up a high level of regional and technological expertise. These are Europe, Russia, North Africa, South America, and increasingly the Middle East region. The company wants to expand its business further with exploration and production, selected partnerships, innovation and technological competence. Wintershall employs about 2.000 staff worldwide from 50 nations and is now Germany’s largest, internationally active crude oil and natural gas producer.

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