

SA favours Karoo gas exploration but wants info on job creation, environment and electricity supply

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Although most adult South Africans were unaware of the possible exploration for natural gas in the Karoo, when introduced to the concept, the majority said that they are in favour of determining the presence of natural gas in the Karoo. Respondents wanted the pressing issues of job creation, economic development and environmental concerns to be addressed in the process. The prospect of natural gas development creating a reliable domestic energy source that would give more South Africans access to electricity was also of paramount importance.

These were the main findings of an opinion poll conducted by Ipsos for Shell during August and September 2011. Ipsos polled more than 2,000 South Africans on exploration for natural gas in the Karoo Basin. Face-to-face interviews allowed the interviewers to describe, inform and question respondents on shale gas, the process of hydraulic fracturing, their views on Shell and their hopes for South Africa.

Mari Harris, Director of Public Affairs at Ipsos, said, "Respondents clearly desire more information; they want to know if there is gas, how it will benefit them and what the impact will be."

Awareness

The vast majority of South Africans (86%) were unaware of the possible exploration for natural gas in the Karoo and only 12% indicated that they had heard the term "hydraulic fracturing"¹ before. As would be expected, awareness by word of mouth is higher among Karoo residents than among those living in other parts of the country, an indication of the greater relevance of shale gas exploration and hydraulic fracturing for people living in this area.

South Africans do want to know if there is gas in the Karoo

However, in spite of the very low awareness, when asked, more than seven in every ten adult South Africans (73%) were in favour of determining the presence of natural gas in the Karoo. If natural gas was proven to be present in the Karoo the same proportion (73%) would be in favour of gas extraction. However the proportion of those who are strongly in favour increases (from 39% to 45%), while the proportion of those in opposition decreases to 21%, with a larger group now uncertain as to how they feel about the issue (6%).

After the ideas of supporters of hydraulic fracturing were presented, about seven in every ten (69%) adult South Africans indicated that they were still in favour of gas exploration. After hearing views expressed by critics of the hydraulic fracturing process, the support for gas exploration reduced marginally to about two-thirds (66%).

South Africans care most about job creation

The study highlighted that job security and job creation remain very important issues in South Africa and more than half (54%) indicated that they would like more information on how gas exploration will benefit economic development and create jobs. Regarding infrastructure development, four out of every ten (39%) want information about how it will benefit the supply of and access to electricity. More information about the environmental impact of hydraulic fracturing was important to 41% and a third (35%) would like to know how clean burning natural gas will be.

¹The process of forcing a mixture of 99% water and sand, with 1% chemicals into shale formations deep underground to release natural gas.

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