

Shale gas pockets found in the Karoo, Mantashe says

The highly contentious issue of fracking is back on the agenda after mineral resources and energy minister, Gwede Mantashe told Parliament that exploratory drilling operations found pockets of shale gas in the Karoo,



Mineral resources and energy minister, Gwede Mantashe. Image: sanews.gov.za

The department went ahead with plans to drill a 3,500-metre stratigraphic hole in the Karoo to establish and test the occurrence of shale gas in September last year, and has reached a depth of 2,750 metres. "The first pocket of gas was intercepted at 1,734 metres with a further substantial amount intercepted at 2,467 metres spanning a depth of 55 metres. To date, a total of 34 gas samples have been bottled in canisters and taken to one of our laboratories for analysis," he told a mini-plenary sitting during his budget vote on Tuesday afternoon.

Civil society organisations have opposed fracking for shale gas in the Karoo in the past on environmental grounds. The Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE) faced legal action from the Karoo Action Group, AfriForum and Karoo farmers, after it granted permits to three companies to explore for shale gas but they are not allowed to use fracking. The Supreme Court of Appeal (SCA) ruled that the minister did not have the power to make regulations for petroleum exploration and production.



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Wilmien Wicomb 15 Aug 2019



The two gas finds, the onshore gas operation in the Free State, coupled with more prospects that are under way along SA's western and eastern territorial waters were delivering positive signals that the country will succeed in developing the resources in line with its ocean's economy agenda, Mantashe said.

But he said that he was expecting opposition to these activities. “Most of the time when we make these discoveries, we get people who resist, particularly on the basis of environmental impact. And what we forget is that the most developed countries that actually attack us, to move from high carbon dioxide emissions to low carbon emission actually went through this development path and they expect us to just switch off.

“We are a developing economy and that should inform our strategy in whatever we do in developing. But our commitment to low carbon emissions is unwavering, we know that it is going to be a journey, that's why we talk of a transition, it's just a transition. It is not going to be moving from one extreme to another,” said Mantashe.

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