

14 April 2015

Gas extraction suspended in and around Loppersum

For the time being, gas may be extracted in and around Loppersum only if extraction from other locations is no longer possible and if necessary for the security of supply. There is currently no reason to stop gas extraction from the Groningen field in full. This was the ruling given by the interim relief judge of the Council of State's Administrative Jurisdiction Division in an interim judgment today (14 April 2015).

In anticipation of a final judgment by the Administrative Jurisdiction Division later this year, the Minister of Economic Affairs' decision to approve NAM's extraction of gas from the Groningen field has been partially suspended. A foundation known as Friends of Central Groningen and a number of political parties on the Groningen Provincial Council had petitioned for a complete cessation of gas extraction from the field, or in any event from the Eemskanaal and Loppersum production locations.

Urgent procedure

The Administrative Jurisdiction Division's interim relief judge recognised that a final judgment on the legality of the Minister's decision should be given as quickly as possible. However, a thorough consideration of all arguments raised against the decision would require an in-depth investigation that was not possible in an urgent procedure such as the present one. The judge therefore gave an interim judgment after considering all the interests involved. The Administrative Jurisdiction Division intends to hold a hearing in the first half of September 2015 to consider the 40-plus applications for review in depth before giving a final judgment in the case.

Extraction not stopped in full

The interim relief judge saw no reason to stop gas extraction from the Groningen field in full. If production were stopped in full, demand for gas from the Netherlands and neighbouring countries could not be met.

Loppersum

The interim relief judge decided that for the time being gas could be extracted in and around Loppersum only if extraction from other locations is no longer possible and if necessary for the security of supply. The production clusters concerned are 't Zandt, Overschild, De Paauwen, Ten Post and Leermens, which are the areas known to be at greatest risk of earthquakes. Small volumes of gas may be extracted from these clusters solely with a view to keeping them open so that they can meet exceptionally high demand for gas during very cold spells or if there are problems at other clusters.

Groningen field

The Minister's decision in January 2015 approved the extraction of up to 39.4 billion Nm³ of gas from the Groningen field in 2015. The Minister also decided that NAM had to develop a method before 1 May 2015 to minimise the increase in seismic risks and then submit a new extraction plan before 1 July 2016.