

Aberdeenshire licences for shale exploration spark political row

ENERGY

BY NEIL JOHNSTON

A row broke out last night over the plans to issue fracking licences in Aberdeenshire.

North-east Labour MSP Richard Baker said he was "surprised" by the announcement, adding that there would need to be "at the very least, lengthy consultation" on any plans to drill for shale gas in the region.

Nigel Don, SNP MSP for Angus North and Mearns, urged the UK Government to "proceed cautiously".

But others backed the

plans, including north-east Conservative MSP Alex Johnstone, who rounded on critics of the process.

He said: "The attacks are fabrications, inventions, they are fictitious and there is no evidence to support any of the suggestions that are being made by the opponents of the industry."

James Stuart, chairman of Mearns Community Council, said: "Personally, I don't have a problem with it. We've got to capitalise and I can't see why we shouldn't utilise the gas in the ground."

He said any drilling would need to be "sensibly governed".

Conservative councillor

for Mearns, George Carr, stressed the need to get "all the facts on the table," adding that "real discussion" was necessary, rather than "scaremongering".

There was also division on the relationship between fracking and the north-east's already strong oil and gas industry.

Mr Johnstone said the sector was important and that it was "vital to support that industry".

But Mr Baker said there were "real questions as to why fracking needed to be part of the mix in the north-east". "We've already got such a huge industry in established energy technologies," he added.