

Rt.Hon Sir Keir Starmer KC MP
Leader of the Opposition
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

01 February 2024

Dear Sir Keir,

We at Lawyers Are Responsible are a group of lawyers challenging the legal profession's role in enabling the fossil fuel industry. We have signed a Declaration of Conscience, in which we commit, amongst other things, to withholding our services in respect of (1) supporting new fossil fuel projects and (2) action against peaceful climate protesters. So far just under 200 lawyers have signed the Declaration. The Declaration and further details can be found on our website at www.lar.earth.

We are writing to you **to express our grave concerns over the Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill** currently making its way through Parliament, and **to seek reassurance from you that if the Bill is passed, the Labour Party in Government will seek to repeal it as a matter of urgency.**

Purpose of the Bill

The Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill aims to place the North Sea Transition Authority (NSTA) under an obligation to invite applications for new domestic oil and gas licences annually.¹ The stated purpose of this obligation is to provide "greater certainty to the industry that licencing of the UK Continental Shelf will continue".²

Our concerns about the Bill's impact

On 25 September 2023, we wrote a letter to the Prime Minister in connection with the Government's decision to offer more than 100 new licences for oil and gas extraction in the North Sea, as well as its continued policy of approving new oil and gas fields.³ Our letter outlined the risks of departing from the Government's Net Zero commitments and our concerns over the Government's decision to politicise the need to take action to address the climate and ecological emergency.

We contend that the obligation imposed by this Bill on the NSTA is incompatible with the 1.5C global warming limit established by the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Exceeding this limit has potentially disastrous consequences, including the widespread loss of life and livelihoods, catastrophic harm to health, large-scale population displacements and the destruction of critical infrastructure.

¹ See the Explanatory Notes to the Bill, available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-04/0009/en/230009en.pdf>

² See the Bill's Impact Assessment, available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-04/0009/20231107OffshorePetroleumLicensingBillImpactAssessment.pdf>

³ See: <https://www.lar.earth/letter-to-rishi-sunak/>

Our request

We welcome the Labour Party's opposition to the Offshore Petroleum Bill and commitment to "not grant licences to explore new fields"⁴.

In light of the very real danger of this Bill becoming law, we ask you to commit a future Labour Government to repeal it as a matter of urgency. The award of any new oil and gas licences in addition to those already signed off on by this Government would be, for the reasons outlined above, indefensible.

A pledge to reverse this Government's dangerous climate policy would be a strong signal that the Labour Party intends to put the welfare of ordinary people above the interests of a wealthy minority.

We look forward to your response.

Yours faithfully,

Lawyers Are Responsible

LAWYERS ARE RESPONSIBLE

⁴ *Keir Starmer pledges to end North Sea exploration and let areas profit from clean power*, James Cook, BBC News, June 2023, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-65945214>