

Jackdaw approval offers Aberdeen a lifeline – but is it enough to secure the North Sea’s future?

Jackdaw promises a boost for Aberdeen but the battle for the future of North Sea oil and gas is far from over.



Jackdaw gas field has been approved. Image: Adura.



By [Jacob Kvasnicka](#)

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Four years after it was first approved, and following months of speculation, the Jackdaw gas field has finally been given the go-ahead.

The field, about 150 miles east of Aberdeen, could start supplying the UK with gas as soon as the end of October, with flows equivalent to the needs of half the homes in Scotland.

Proponents say this will prove crucial ahead of what is expected to be another difficult winter, amid disruptions to global supplies.

But for the north-east, a region that built its fortune around the industry, Wednesday’s decision means so much more.

A much-needed boost for Aberdeen and the north-east

To say [the announcement](#) has been eagerly awaited would be an understatement.

The industry in Aberdeen and the wider region has been desperate for a win amid years of job losses and company departures.

And while hardly a silver bullet for the region's woes, Jackdaw's approval will come as a huge relief to the north-east.

Adura estimates that the gas field will create 27 new direct jobs.

More importantly, it will also safeguard 273 existing jobs that would otherwise be lost.



The industry in Aberdeen and the wider region has been desperate for a win. Image: Kenny Elrick/DC Thomson

Jackdaw's gas will flow through the Shearwater platform and the St Fergus terminal, helping to keep people employed at both sites.

"We have to keep the North Sea working as we build a new energy future," explains Professor Paul de Leeuw, director of Robert Gordon University's Energy Transition Institute.

"This is giving us a mechanism to keep doing exactly that, to keep a workforce here, keep a supply chain here.

"It gives an indication that we need to bridge to a new renewable future."

Energy security amid global supply disruptions

While actively pursuing the energy transition, the UK remains heavily reliant on oil and gas to meet its needs.

Gas alone provides heating and fuels cooking hobs in 23 million homes.

Gas-fired power stations also supplied more than a quarter of the country's electricity last year.

But domestic production meets just over two-fifths of the UK's needs.

The rest has to be imported, largely through pipelines from Norway or in the form of liquefied natural gas (LNG).

Professor John Underhill, director of energy transition at the University of Aberdeen, says the approval marks an important moment for both the industry and the country.



Professor John Underhill, director for Energy Transition at University of Aberdeen. Image: Aberdeen University

“Jackdaw is the largest undeveloped gas field in the UK,” he explains.

“As the platform is already on location, it is in position to provide the UK with the gas it requires this winter.”

And as Professor de Leeuw explains, the timing could not be more crucial.

“It’s hugely important because we have a real supply crunch at the moment.”

Global supplies have been heavily disrupted by the conflict in the Middle East, having already been under strain as a result of the ongoing war in Ukraine.

That has left countries around the world scrambling to secure much-needed fuel, with the UK having to compete in an increasingly volatile market.

“Jackdaw will give us the benefit of having the gas on our doorstep,” says Professor de Leeuw.

“It is already plugged into the UK gas system, so every molecule will go to the domestic market.”

The trade-off between energy security and emissions

For households across the UK, Jackdaw’s approval will not bring energy prices down, as gas is traded on the global market.

That was one of the arguments made by opponents of the project.

The difference for the average household, they argued, would be negligible, while the field would contribute further to global warming.

But unlike imported gas, production from Jackdaw will generate tax revenues for the Government, giving it additional funds to spend where needed.

The other part of the debate concerns the emissions associated with Jackdaw.

Amid a climate emergency, with the UK experiencing several heatwaves this summer alone, that question undoubtedly weighed heavily on decision-makers.

“This is not where we would wish to be on our journey to the energy transition,” says Professor Underhill.



Professor Paul de Leeuw, director of Robert Gordon University's Energy Transition Institute. Image: RGU

“But the UK is relying on gas and that isn't going to go away soon.

“The key question then is, where do we get the gas that evidently need from and how do we justify that?”

Gas imported from Norway has a lower carbon footprint than domestically produced gas.

But disruptions to the global supply chain, combined with a compressor failure at the Ormen Lange gas field, have pushed Norwegian supply capacity to its limits.

Meeting the UK's gas needs would then require increased LNG imports.

However, [a recent report highlights](#) that LNG has an average emissions intensity more than three times that of domestically produced gas.

“The world got more complicated, and the focus on energy security and where is the energy coming from has to be balanced,” says Professor de Leeuw.

“And I think what has been done is the right outcome for the country.”

Using North Sea revenues to fund the energy transition

The Government appears aware of the need to strike that balance.

Alongside Wednesday's announcement, a new Energy Wealth Fund was established.

The fund is intended to use tax revenues from North Sea oil and gas to invest in renewable and low-carbon energy projects, supporting the green transition.



The new fund aims to use tax revenues from oil and gas to invest in renewable and low-carbon energy projects, Image: True North

It will start with an initial £2 billion injection, with future revenues from the North Sea flowing into the fund over time.

“The wealth fund is a way showing that we can take the funding from one industry and build another industry,” explains Professor de Leeuw.

“It is a really good signal to everybody, showing we are serious about the transition.

“We’re not going to use the money for other things – this is about building a new cleaner future.”

Questions remain for the industry

While Wednesday's announcement answered the question of Jackdaw, many more remain unanswered.

The fate of oil projects such as Rosebank and Cambo still hangs in the balance.

The message from [energy chiefs yesterday was Rosebank should be approved urgently](#).

The industry also remains uncertain about whether the Energy Profits Levy will be removed or revised.

And what about new oil and gas licences? Energy Secretary Miatta Fahnbulleh [told The P&J](#) she is sticking to the UK government's ban on new licences.

"The sector will still be looking at whether licensing opportunities will be allowed, which seems to be the case in out-of-round opportunities," says Professor Underhill.

"Until these issues are also addressed and resolved, sector confidence and industry investment in the UK will remain low."

"It's a step in the right direction, but it's not the whole picture."