



# **Participation Commitment report for the Scottish Government public consultation on Unconventional Oil and Gas**

September 2016

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## **Report**

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passionately in a democracy where citizens are able to take and influence the decisions that affect their lives. Through both research and practice we seek to radically transform the relationship between citizens and their governments to better use the creativity, energy, knowledge, skills and resources of all.

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## Context

In August 2016 Involve, who are specialists in supporting organisations to design public engagement activities, were asked to host 3 roundtable discussions for the Scottish Government as part of the planning process for their forthcoming consultation on Unconventional Oil and Gas (UOG).

The purpose of these roundtables was to provide an opportunity for key stakeholder groups to present their ideas and opinions about how the Scottish Government should conduct the public consultation in a way that will best:

- present the public with impartial, trusted information on UOG in ways that will generate informed dialogue and debate around the issues;
- give the general public, local communities and stakeholder groups the opportunity to express their opinions on the issues that matter to them;
- provide Ministers with a fair representation of public and stakeholder views; and
- support the Scottish Government's evidence led approach to UOG.

This report brings together the outcomes of these meetings: focusing on principles for framing the consultation, the production and presentation of information, preferred methods, and Involve's key observations for the Scottish Government in relation to moving forward with planning and delivering the consultation.

## Overview of the Roundtables

In August/September 2016 a series of 3 roundtable discussions were held with staff from the Scottish Government's Energy and Climate Change Directorate and representatives from key stakeholder groups representing community, environmental and industry interests.

- 23<sup>rd</sup> August – Roundtable with Environment Link
- 23<sup>rd</sup> August – Roundtable with UKOOG (the Industry body)
- 7<sup>th</sup> September – Roundtable with the Broad Alliance (a network of community based campaign groups)

Each roundtable lasted for 3 hours and was facilitated by Kaela Scott, Involve's engagement lead in Scotland. The roundtables were also attended by Clive Mitchell, Deputy Director at Involve, whose role was to provide insight into Involve's experience of best practice in engaging the public around complex and controversial issues and provide impartial input on design principles and methods.

The agenda for the roundtables covered:

- a) Applying the principles of good public engagement to planning for consultation around UOG in Scotland
- b) Preferred methods and approaches
- c) Criteria for evaluating the success of the consultation process

A record of discussion for each of the meetings was prepared and distributed to participants for comment and endorsement.

## Key points raised in the roundtables

While there was considerable agreement across all of the roundtable discussions about what stakeholders would like to see featured within the consultation process, which have been

synthesised in the body of this report, there were also a number of points of emphasis that distinguished the priorities of each group from the others. These are outlined below.

#### Environment Link

- Participants expressed the view that there was significant public cynicism already in place regarding the proposed consultation and that it may be very difficult to assure the public that the consultation was genuine, that their contribution would be valued and therefore that it was in their interest to engage with it.
- In this discussion emphasis was placed on the need to consider UOG not simply in a local context but as part of a national, and global, discussion of sustainable energy options.
- There was particular interest in pursuing methods that involved stakeholder and campaign groups in dialogue together to get to a bottom line i.e. what can both sides 'live with'.
- Emphasis was placed on ensuring that the consultation period operated on a realistic timetable that allowed time for the discussions to develop and spread throughout the community.
- There was also significant concern expressed about the potentially damaging role of the media, social media and lobby groups in gaining a real understanding of the general public's perceptions and concerns.

#### UKOOG

- Participants in the discussion questioned the value of undertaking a consultation without the Scottish Government stating a clear position on the matter in advance.
- They noted that the industry's understanding is that communities are expecting this consultation to be a 'big deal' and that there is liable to be significant criticism of the government if its purpose is not clear, if it is not widely promoted, widely engaged in and decisive.
- The group felt that a key challenge in ensuring a fair and balanced process will be overcoming a negative starting point in public opinion and making it clear to the public that the proposed consultation is not a yes/no referendum on UOG. Emphasis therefore was placed on the need for qualitative analysis of responses and clarity about how campaign driven 'form letter' responses would be considered.
- There was particular emphasis from this group in ensuring that the consultation is truly national and engage people from areas unlikely to be directly impacted by UOG activity to ensure the results are not dominated by reactive responses from small geographic areas, but genuinely reflect the considered views of the wider public.

#### The Broad Alliance

- Transparency in the process, including how the information generated will be used by government, was a key feature of this conversation.
- There was also considerable focus on ensuring the consultation was accessible to the wider public and actively encouraged participation of diverse groups by using a variety of mechanisms and routes for engagement.

- The importance of not just discussing UOG in isolation but as part of a wider discussion of energy futures featured strongly in the discussion here. There was however also considerable emphasis given to the need to firmly ground the consultation locally so that the direct impacts on communities can be acknowledged and discussed.
- The importance of public confidence in the process featured strongly in this discussion on the basis that, if public feedback on the consultation process shows that participants felt their involvement was worthwhile, that they had access to relevant and useful information, and felt that their views were heard, then people are more likely to accept the decisions that emerge as a result.
- The Broad Alliance also indicated that there was a wide range of additional types of information that needed to be made available to the public in order to enable them to form informed opinions including social equity analyses from areas where UOG extraction has taken place and specific details of proposed economic benefits.

## **Participation of stakeholders in the process**

While all stakeholder groups acknowledged that they were encouraged by the Scottish Government's invitation to be involved in the planning process through the roundtable discussion there was a general hesitancy to make a commitment to further involvement or endorsement of the process at this stage. This stemmed from a range of reasons including:

- Concerns whether all members of the network would support a completely uniform position;
- A lack of resources to commit to the process;
- Uncertainty about the purpose of the consultation process and the consideration it will be given by government;
- Reputational risk.

There was however a general openness to continuing the conversation and contributing to the review of information being prepared for the consultation, while also reserving the right to remain independent voices outside the process.

## Framing the Consultation

One of the key outcomes hoped from the roundtables was to identify the factors that would enable the consultation process to be seen by various stakeholder groups, and therefore hopefully by the wider public, as robust, fair and credible. The goal therefore was to establish a set of framing principles that will inform the planning and delivery of the consultation.

### Purpose

It was clear from the 3 roundtables that there is currently uncertainty about the purpose of the Scottish Government's intended consultation. This is in part because, unlike most consultation processes, the government does not have a stated position or a range of discrete options it is consulting on.

The purpose of the Scottish Governments' planned consultation on UOG was presented at the roundtables as being to:

- use the independent reports commissioned by the Scottish Government into various aspects of UOG (and due to be published imminently) to stimulate informed public discussion;
- engage widely in order to provide the Scottish Government and Ministers with a better understanding of public opinion about the matter;
- use the evidence gathered through the consultation to help inform future Ministerial decisions and government policy.

Using the language of public engagement, as shown in the table to the right, the proposed consultation process therefore is actually one of **involving** the public in shaping the direction of policy from the outset i.e. initiating a public dialogue to explore the issue and inform minister's future decisions.

Even within the context of direct discussions of the purpose during the roundtables it was clearly difficult for some stakeholders to fully appreciate this difference. There were also concerns raised that the public is expecting this consultation process to be decisive, and in some cases definitive.

It will therefore be vitally important, when introducing the process to the wider public, to make a very clear statement about the purpose of the consultation and openly acknowledge that it is different to normal approaches.

Levels of Engagement	
<b>Inform</b>	To provide the public with balanced and objective information
<b>Consult</b>	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions
<b>Involve</b>	To work directly with the public to explore an issue in order to understand their concerns and aspirations.
<b>Collaborate</b>	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision, including defining the issue, developing alternatives and preferred solutions.
<b>Empower</b>	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public - to delegate

### Key points to emphasise in moving forward:

- the purpose of the process is to initiate a national discussion informed by impartial information
- that the government is doing something different
- the reason for engaging with the public is to better understand their concerns and aspirations
- the process is about collectively exploring the issues

- that the goal is to provide Ministers with evidence of public opinion to help them in future decisions

## Transparency

Directly related to the issue of purpose are expectations of transparency. From the outset therefore it would be beneficial to be able to state a commitment to transparency:

- **In process** – by being able to clearly outline how the consultation has been framed, including the contribution of stakeholders, how information has been produced and by whom, and how the public is able to engage.
- **Of analysis** – by making a commitment to independent analysis of consultation responses, including emphasising the focus on qualitative analysis and public deliberation. (Key concerns for stakeholder groups included how ‘form letters’ will be accounted for in the analysis and how the responses from different parts of the country would be assessed against each other and if possible it would be advantageous to be able to answer this publicly from the outset) Ideally there would also be a commitment made to publish this independent analysis, as many participants felt that transparency here is just as important as in the consultation documents for ensuring people have confidence in the process
- **Of scope of influence** – by clearly stating that the consultation is not intended as a poll, but rather is a tool to inform Ministers of public opinion in order to help shape future government policy. Stakeholders and the public however will also be keen to see that their input will be purposeful and enable ministers to act decisively in a timely manner as a result.

## Key points to emphasise in moving forward:

- That the government is openly giving the public access to the best information it has about the issues i.e. the results of the independent research commissioned.
- Impartiality – demonstrated through the involvement of stakeholders in the planning process, and hopefully, through their endorsement of the consultation process.
- Independent analysis and open publication, if possible.
- That the consultation is meaningful and is intended to enable the government to act decisively.

## Instilling confidence

Given the suspicion many stakeholders initially expressed about the consultation, and the evident public cynicism about the impact of government consultations in general, gaining the confidence of all in this process from the outset will be vital.

Key to this it seems will be acknowledging that not only is identifying an approach to UOG in Scotland an important issue for the country as a whole, but that it is a complex and controversial one on which there is no right or wrong position. Further, from that starting point, the government will need to be able to say clearly and convincingly that it is approaching this engagement process with an open mind.

- **Public Confidence** – in order to maximise public confidence in the process the government will need to ensure the neutrality of the information provided and be

seen to be promoting, encouraging and actively seeking out different opinions from across the country. If it is to be seen as genuinely doing something different then the government also needs to resource and present the consultation in a way that makes its importance obvious to people so that they see their participation as worthwhile.

- **Stakeholder Confidence** – from the roundtable discussions it appears that stakeholder confidence in the process will rest on it being seen as impartial, transparent and inclusive (as discussed below). Attaining high levels of participation was also seen as vital for stakeholders, ensuring that it really was a ‘national conversation’ and allowing the outcomes to be considered both credible and representative. It was also clear that they all saw it as important that the evidence generated through the process leads to the government taking a clear position which will enable both communities and industry to know where they stand.
- **Ministerial Confidence** – levels, breadth and depth of engagement will also be important for the government if Ministers are able to feel that the process has provided them with robust evidence of public opinion. Stakeholder support for the process will also add weight to the outcomes of the engagement.

#### **Key points to emphasise in moving forward:**

- That the government needs to be seen to approaching this with an open mind.
- Stakeholder support for the process will rely on being able to demonstrate its impartiality, robust mechanisms for analysis and high levels of public participation.
- All stakeholders, including the public, need to be confident that their input will be meaningful and contribute to the decision making process.
- Both numbers and breadth of participation are necessary to give the outcomes credibility, given the controversial nature of the subject and the potentially different impacts UOG may have for different areas of the country.

#### **Impartiality**

As already noted, demonstrating the Scottish Government’s neutrality in this consultation process will be a key challenge. It will however be vital to its success.

In addition to some of the points raised above, the availability of independent, impartial research will be the key resource the government has to project impartiality. The consultation therefore will benefit from being framed in a way that demonstrates that the government is putting the best information it has into the public domain; so it can be understood, considered, examined and then responded to by the wider public. As highlighted during the roundtables however, in the case of UOG, the ‘facts’ themselves are often disputed. There was also little confidence expressed that stakeholders themselves would be able to agree what constituted ‘neutral’ information.

The way information about UOG is presented (i.e. the consultation documents) and how the consultation questions are framed will therefore be very important. Given this, the preparation and presentation of information itself is looked at in more detail later in this report.

#### **Key points to emphasise in moving forward:**

- That the government is openly giving the public access to the best information it has about the issues i.e. the results of the independent research commissioned.

- That information has been independently produced.
- That, where possible, stakeholder groups from all sides of the debate have had the opportunity to comment on and contribute to how the consultation has been framed.

## **Contextualising UOG**

All of the roundtables advocated that there was a need to contextualise discussions of UOG within wider socioeconomic issues, however the emphasis of various stakeholder groups varied. All agreed however that UOG could not be debated in isolation without consideration of:

- energy sources and uses and the wider matter of energy futures locally, nationally and globally
- the industry in a comparative context with other industries (to set data on impacts against industries the public may be more familiar with)
- how exploration and extraction will have different impacts in different local areas
- impacts and opportunities on other sectors e.g. tourism, manufacturing, environmental management
- Scotland's wider energy strategy

As UOG also covers a wide range of potential activities, extraction methods and fuel sources there also needs to be clarity from the outset about the technical scope of what may be under consideration.

## **Key points to emphasise in moving forward:**

- That UOG cannot be effectively debated in isolation.
- That the consultation must be framed within a discussion of wider energy needs and options rather than focusing simply on concerns, questions and opportunities related to extraction methods.
- There needs to be clarity from the outset about the technical scope of the methods etc. that may be relevant in Scotland.

## **Building Dialogue**

If the purpose of the consultation is to understand public concerns and aspirations regarding UOG then the process needs to place emphasis on generating constructive public conversation i.e. developing dialogue between individuals and groups that encourages the exchange of views and promotes understanding rather than debate. In practice this will mean creating a process that allows space for different perspectives to be presented, thereby demonstrating trust in the public's ability to process information and develop informed positions if given time, adequate information and the opportunity for dialogue and deliberation.

Discussions at the roundtables also highlighted that, if the consultation genuinely wants to help ministers better understand public opinion, then it also needs to focus on finding out the 'why' behind people's opinions and what information has led them to that position; their drivers, values and understandings. It was also raised that there is value in trying to ascertain what the factors are that lead to people changing and/or embedding their initial opinions.

Patterns of Interaction			
	DEBATE	DIALOGUE	DELIBERATION
Purpose	Seeks to promote opposing positions and gain support	Seeks to build understanding of different positions	Seeks to build consensus in order to solve problems
Pattern of interaction	Oppositional: Participants argue, compete and try to persuade	Collaborative: A process of shared inquiry exchange, listening and reflecting	Collective Reasoning: weighing options and making choices together
Impact	Entrenches established points of view	Enlarges and possibly changes points of view	Aims to stimulate fresh thinking on an issue
Outcome	Aims for a result - usually Win / Lose	Remains open ended as orientated towards discovery	Seeks a decision - ideally Win / Win but at least something all can 'live with'

#### Key points to emphasise in moving forward:

- The consultation process should help create opportunities for public dialogue and deliberation rather than simply debate.
- The framing of the consultation questions and the ways people are encouraged to respond should give emphasis to the reasons behind opinions.

#### Inclusion and Diversity

As UOG extraction will potentially have very different impacts (and therefore meanings) in different parts of the country, there was agreement at all of the roundtables that, in order for this to be a consultation process that truly explored public opinion, the Scottish Government had a responsibility to actively seek responses from a wide cross section of the population. Indicators that this had been successful would include:

- that high numbers of responses are received
- that responses reflect the geographical diversity of Scotland
- that a range of opinions are submitted i.e. not just responses initiated by campaign groups.

Achieving this will involve making the consultation process meaningful and accessible to people and communities who do not normally respond to formal government consultations. This will necessitate using a variety of methods to generate public awareness, provide information that is accessible and meaningful to people, and allow people to respond in different ways.

#### Key points to emphasise in moving forward:

- To be credible this consultation needs to be as much about the Scottish Government actively going out and seeking input as it is about waiting for people to respond.
- To achieve wide and diverse engagement a variety of different methods will need to be used.

## Defining success

Establishing what stakeholders felt would define a successful consultation process was also addressed at the roundtables and there were a number of common features that emerged.

It was clear that all stakeholders felt that evidence of wide public awareness of the consultation was key to it being considered credible, almost as much as the need for high rates of response. There was considerable interest in being able to monitor how public awareness and understanding of the issues involved had increased, even if this did not lead to individual consultation responses, although this may be very difficult to achieve in practice.

The breadth and range of responses received (i.e. evidence that the consultation had reached beyond campaign and stakeholder groups) was also seen as very important if the government was to achieve a genuine understanding of people's values and concerns. This also related to expectations that the responses submitted would not simply be evaluated quantitatively (i.e. just numbers of responses that are positive or negative) but analysed to demonstrate the basis of people's hopes and concerns.

A final criteria for success was that the process, reporting and outcomes from the consultation are seen as fair and trusted by the public and stakeholder groups. It was felt that if public feedback on the consultation process shows that participants felt their involvement was worthwhile, that they had access to relevant and useful information, and felt that their views were heard then people (and stakeholder groups themselves) are more likely to trust and accept the decisions that emerge as a result.

### Key points to emphasise in moving forward:

- Being able to demonstrate breadth and diversity of responses may be more important than simply the number of responses received.
- That the outcomes of the consultation should be published in a way which demonstrated that people's contributions have been valued and listened to (i.e. not just quantitative reporting) and also shows how this information will be used by government.
- Public and stakeholder trust in the integrity of the process will be vital regardless of the outcome.

## Participation Commitments

In line with the intention stated at the outset of this process, the government should produce a statement of commitments that will underpin its approach to the consultation.

Based on the key points emphasised in the previous discussion this should include:

- A commitment that the Scottish Government is entering into the consultation with an **open-mind** i.e. that this is an honest process of exploring the issues with the public before policy positions are decided.
- A recognition that the government is doing something different by undertaking this consultation before establishing its own position **in order to better understand the wider public's concerns and aspirations** in relation to UOG and the reasons behind these opinions.

- A commitment to **evidence based policy making**, and that the evidence of public opinion gathered throughout this process will be part of the pool of evidence used by Ministers to inform their future decisions.
- A commitment to providing the public with the best evidence it has about the issues i.e. the results of the independent research commissioned, to enable the public to develop informed opinions about the issues on the basis of **impartial information**.
- A recognition that the issues surrounding **UOG cannot be considered in isolation** but rather must be understood within wider social, economic and environmental contexts (locally, nationally and globally) and as part of Scotland's wider approach to energy security.
- A commitment to **supporting a fair and balanced debate** about the issues which will create space for different perspectives and argument to be presented and considered.
- A commitment to conducting the consultation in a way which promotes open discussion and the exchange of opinions (**i.e. dialogue**) between the public, industry, campaign groups and the government throughout.
- A commitment to transparency throughout the consultation process – including committing to **independent, qualitative analysis** of the consultation results and the **publication** of the resulting report.
- A commitment to **actively seek participation from a broad cross-section of the Scottish population**, as individuals and communities, by using a range of methods and approaches designed to make both the information, and the opportunity to respond, easy and accessible to everyone.
- A commitment to recognise the public's time and energy in participating in the consultation and **give all contributions fair and due consideration**.

## Presentation of Information

A central focus of discussion throughout all of the roundtables was the need for the government to present impartial, factual information on UOG to the public, and to do so in a variety of formats to ensure that it was accessible and meaningful. This will be absolutely critical if the consultation process is to be able to generate balanced and informed public discussion of the issues and be assessed as transparent and neutral by stakeholders and the wider public.

## Production of Information to inform the Consultation

The Scottish Government has already made a commitment to policy making on UOG being evidence led, and to support this has commissioned a range of independently produced research reports covering a range of topics including health, environmental and economic impacts and risks. These will be made publically available as part of the consultation process.

It was felt throughout the roundtable discussions that the timing of the publication of this research should be closely tied to the consultation process. Further that there needed to be a clear statement from the Scottish Government at that time about the purpose of the research it has commissioned and the role of this information in generating informed public discussion. If possible, supplementary information (as discussed in the section below), should be made available at the same time to ensure that the scope of the information provided is accessible to the public and minimise the risk of the formal consultation process being prejudiced by unrepresentative aspects of the reports being given dis-proportionate media or social media attention and overshadowing other aspects of the reports.

As already acknowledged in this report however ‘facts’ surrounding UOG are often themselves disputed by experts and stakeholder groups on opposing sides of the issue, as any analysis of the evidence is open to accusations of subjectivity in its conclusions. Despite the Governments’ best efforts to secure neutral, factual evidence to underpin the consultation therefore there is a risk of this neutrality being challenged.

At the roundtables there was considerable discussion about the role stakeholder groups could play in endorsing the neutrality/factuality of the information produced to support the consultation. While all agreed in principle that this was desirable there was concern that, with such differing perspectives, it may prove unrealistic in practice. Nevertheless, it is an approach that appears worth trying to deliver on.

Given the disputed nature of the evidence on UOG there were discussions about whether there should be an opportunity for alternative perspectives and arguments to be directly included within the information provided as part of the consultation document. There is however a risk in doing so that any information provided could be unbalanced, unrepresentative and further disputed, and therefore potentially call into question the government’s impartial position. Instead, possibly the consultation documents/site could refer to a separate repository of information where stakeholder and campaign groups could upload their own evidence statements or analysis in response to the independent research. This could become a dynamic and flexible space that evolves throughout the consultation period. This approach may help demonstrate the government’s openness to creating space for public debate, yet holds these different perspectives at arms-length from the neutral information provided by government.

### **Suggestions for action:**

- Consider how both the timing and format of publication of the research reports can be directly tied to both the purpose and the format of the consultation process from the outset.
- That a small number of representatives from key stakeholder groups are invited to work together to review the factuality of the information produced to inform the consultation process and agree its neutrality.
- That an arms-length repository of responses to the evidence from stakeholder and campaign groups be established and linked to the consultation site.

### **Presentation of Information to inform the Consultation**

The consultation document and the information produced around it needs to be, and needs to be seen to be, accurate and impartial if it is both to support and drive an evidence based national discussion.

Most importantly however is that the information associated with the consultation needs to be accessible, relevant and meaningful to the general public. This will require recognising that people have different levels of interest, time available and abilities when it comes to engaging with the discussion and producing a suite of documents that allows people to approach the information in different ways, including:

- a. A series of 1 page ‘fact sheets’ written in plain English and designed to be clear and visually appealing (including using diagrams and illustrations where appropriate). As a series they should, at minimum:
  - cover the outputs from the independent research
  - explain the industry and extraction methods
  - put UOG in the wider context of energy needs and options
  - be explicit about the geographical areas in Scotland where UOG activity is likely and acknowledge potential local impacts
  - position UOG issues for Scotland within the context of wider global climate and economic issues (i.e. not just local impacts right now)

These should be independently produced if possible and, as discussed above, stakeholder groups should have the opportunity to ‘fact check’ and endorse them.

- b. Standalone executive summaries from the independent research.
- c. The full research reports as submitted to the Scottish Government.

These documents should all be inter-referenced and together provide a route for the public to dig deeper into aspects of UOG that interest or concern them.

Recognising that UOG is a complex subject, and one that people will come at from a variety of perspectives, one suggestion to make it easier for people to navigate their way through the information would be to develop an on-line, interactive flow diagram. This could help take people through the issues – starting from the big themes and the big questions – enabling them to easily access information from the basis of their own interests as a starting point. One example of where this approach was used was the Edinburgh City Council budget consultation. A website like this could also be used to track numbers engaging with the information and identify key interest areas.

### **Suggestions for action:**

- That a suite of information documents is associated with the consultation process – from ‘fact sheets’ through to the full research reports commissioned by the Scottish

Government – allowing people to access information at a level that meets their own needs.

- That the ‘fact sheets’ or equivalent are independently produced and designed to be accessible and visually appealing.
- That a small number of representatives from key stakeholder groups are invited to work together to review the factuality of the information produced to inform the consultation process and agree its neutrality.
- That the Scottish Government explore options for designing an on-line interactive flow chart as a tool to make it easier for people to navigate through the information.

## **The Consultation Document and Questions**

The consultation document itself, and the questions for response, must also be seen to be impartial. Further, if the purpose of the consultation is to generate dialogue across communities, and dig deeper into the reasons behind public opinions and concerns, then the framing of the questions must be open and clearly call for this type of reasoned response. While this will add significantly to the need for (and therefore costs of) qualitative analysis it will be an important way of demonstrating that the government is serious about understanding, rather than just recording, public views.

While there will clearly also be a need for the consultation to produce quantitative data perhaps, rather than using binary questions responses could be collected along a scale e.g. On a scale of 1-5, how likely are you to support UOG extraction in Scotland after reading the information provided?

Ideally, to reinforce the government’s neutral position the consultation document and the associated questions should be independently produced. If, however this is not feasible, then stakeholder groups should have the opportunity to review and endorse it before publication.

### **Suggestions for action:**

- If possible the consultation document and the questions for response should be independently produced and stakeholder groups given the opportunity to review and endorse it before publication
- Ensure that the consultation questions are open and designed to capture the reasons behind public opinion.
- Consider using sliding scales rather than binary questions to generate quantitative data.

## Methods

Across the 3 roundtables there were a range of potential methods suggested by participants to enable the Scottish Government to reach out to the wider public and encourage responses from those outside established campaign organisations and from areas less likely to feel a direct impact from UOG exploration and extraction. Some of the methods proposed included:

- Encouraging a debate by the Scottish Youth Parliament
- Town hall debates
- Media campaign to raise public awareness of the issues
- On line Q&A sessions with experts
- Webinars and discussion groups
- Engaging young people and families through a game format (e.g. To frack or not to frack as previously supplied)
- Going where people are – information stalls and surveys at supermarkets for example
- Representative polling (although there were concerns that polls can be too simplistic and tend to require an immediate, potentially uninformed or unconsidered response)
- Citizens Juries
- Deliberative polling
- Consensus Conferences

Central to these discussions however was the need for people to have the opportunity to explore the relevant information and arguments in meaningful and accessible ways (as discussed above), engage in dialogue with others and be able to respond to the consultation in a variety of ways. While many of the above suggestions could be achievable and add value to the consultation, Involve's recommendation would be that the Scottish Government focusses on a small number of additional initiatives and delivers them well within practical constraints of the time and resources available to them.

There were 2 particular approaches that gained traction during the roundtable discussions and seem particularly useful in this case:

- Distributed Dialogues
- Deliberative Engagement Events

The rationale, benefits and requirement of these methods are discussed in detail below.

### Distributed Dialogues

If the consultation on UOG is to genuinely reflect wider public opinion, focus on developing dialogue within communities, and reach out to people who may not respond to a standard written consultation document then ideally conversations about the risks, benefits and opportunities associated with UOG need to be taking place in communities across Scotland. At all of the roundtables however it was recognised that it was both impractical and unrealistic to expect the Scottish Government to organise local meetings widely across the country, and this was generally not seen to be a role suitable for stakeholder groups either. It was also recognised that, once public awareness of the consultation is raised, community leaders and communities themselves have a responsibility to be proactive if they want their voices to be heard

One option generally endorsed by all of the roundtable meetings was to use a distributed approach. Distributed dialogues is a term used to describe an engagement method that encourages community based groups to host their own discussions on an issue, using a standard format, and feed the results back to a central point for analysis. Using a distributed dialogue methodology can be a cost effective way of encouraging wide participation in the

consultation and empowering communities to take responsibility for initiating local participation.

There are however risks to this method, most obviously the inability of the central organisers to ensure that information is presented fairly and impartially at dispersed events and that the responses fed back for analysis fairly present the views of those present. That said, there are a number of things that can be done to help mitigate these risks, including:

- Producing a standard presentation to be used at events that presents factual information, alongside the perspectives of those on different sides of the debate in a fair and balanced manner to instigate the discussions.
- Providing organisers with detailed discussion guidelines – including a meeting format and discussion questions linked to consultation document.
- Providing information handouts for participants with links to further information and the main consultation response site.
- Ensuring consistent promotion of the events as part of a discussion series by providing press releases and leaflet templates.
- Encouraging web-casting and/or live tweeting during the local meetings to encourage wider public scrutiny.

There was also some discussion about whether these types of events should function as information giving / learning events (through which participants are then encouraged to provide individual responses to the consultation) or opportunities for communities to generate collective responses to the consultation questions. Realistically though, if there is not a mechanism for the outputs of the meetings as a whole to feed into the consultation process then there is a risk of the evidence generated being lost, as many people attending, particularly those without strong positive or oppositional views, will be unlikely to respond individually. If however they are designed to directly feed into the consultation responses then there is also a need for:

- a structured response format to ensure consistency from across the discussions
- organisers to make a written commitment to providing a response that fairly reflects the discussions that took place and making the response available to participants
- a method for collecting basic demographics about participants that will be included in the response
- a standard evaluation form for participants, including questions about how the information was presented and how the discussion was facilitated, with their responses to be included in any submission.

In the roundtable discussions it was maintained that if this option was pursued that the materials should be independently produced, with the contribution of stakeholder groups, and then agreed by all stakeholders.

There were also a number of specific suggestions made regarding what types of groups should be encouraged to host local events including;

- Community Councils (or networks of Community Councils)
- Community Planning Partnerships
- Housing associations / tenants groups
- Youth sector networks
- Existing campaign networks, enabling them to more accurately reflect the views of all of their members
- Academic and interest groups – e.g. Royal Society for Chemistry or the Chartered Institute for Water and Environmental Management

Involve's recommendation is that, while the opportunity should be open to any local group that wants to host an event, the government's main focus should be on promoting the method to Community Council (or networks of Community Councils through Community Planning Partnerships) as they have a responsibility to represent the views of local communities to government. Consideration however needs to be given as to what practical support could be given to groups hosting events including the distribution of printed materials and/or financial support to cover venue costs, publicity etc.

## **Deliberative Engagement Events**

Deliberative engagement events are designed to bring a representative sample of citizens from an area together to learn about an issue, hear different perspectives, question experts and deliberate together to reach conclusions and/or recommendations. Because of the time given to learning about an issue deliberative engagement events are able to address quite complicated and technical issues and address value-laden and controversial questions (experts generally attend to give information and advise but do not participate in the deliberations). Events like this are usually designed to give decision makers an insight on public opinion on a contested issue based on the public having access to thorough and unbiased information and time for deliberation.

To be representative of the population participants for events need to be recruited fairly and therefore events like these are not generally open to voluntary attendance and as such can be an effective way of involving members of the general public who may not have a pre-existing opinion on the matter. For an issue like UOG a deliberative event would usually be run over 1-3 days (sometimes with a break between sessions to allow participants to seek further information on the matter if they choose to do so). There are also limitations to the number of people that can take part however, to overcome concerns about the lack of numbers involved in a process organisers will often run a number of events on the same topic, especially if it is an issue of national or regional relevance.

Deliberative approaches are particularly valuable for gaining insight into and a greater understanding of what may lie behind people's opinions. They can also reveal how people's views can develop and change as they are given new information or through discussions with others on an issue. It should be noted however that, as participant's views are developed through deliberation, the outcomes cannot necessarily be taken to be representative of the views of the wider public, since they have not experienced the deliberative process.

In the context of the forthcoming consultation on UOG convening a series of deliberative events in different areas across Scotland could be a valuable way of gaining a greater understanding of informed public opinion about the matter. While there may be a temptation to focus on areas that are most likely to be directly impacted upon by UOG activity it would also be important to convene one or more in an area where there will be no direct impact to enable greater analysis of the different factors that affect public opinion.

If the Scottish Government chooses to build a series of deliberative events into the consultation process there are a number of practical factors that will need to be considered:

- Deliberative events can be designed to work with a range of different numbers (from Citizens Juries which tend to operate with 12 – 20 people, to Citizens Assemblies which often bring 200+ people together).
- It needs to be recognised from the outset that recruiting a representative sample of the population can be a costly and resource intensive process.
- Deliberative events need thorough planning and tend to work best when independently facilitated.

- They also rely on the participation of ‘experts’ – from industry, campaign groups, academia etc.

While Citizens’ Juries tend to be the most widely known deliberative event structure we would suggest they are not the best option in this case. Firstly a Citizens Jury tends to work best when convened around a clearly framed question or set of choices. Secondly, the name itself can imply a decision making process which is not appropriate to this consultation process. Instead we would suggest either using the term Citizens Panel or developing a bespoke name.

## Summary of Key Observations

Based on the suggestions emerging throughout the roundtable discussions and our own professional reflections on the context and sensitivities surrounding the subject, we offer the Scottish Government the following observations in relation to forward with planning for a public consultation on UOG.

### Framing the Consultation

1. That from the outset the government makes a virtue of the fact that it is doing something different in going to the public before they have established a position on UOG. Making a clear statement that, in recognising that UOG is a complex and contentious issue around which there are already strong and divergent public views, Ministers feel it is important to have a deeper understanding of public opinions before developing a policy position will help counteract any criticism that the consultation is ill defined.
2. That information about public opinion is firmly positioned within the context of evidence based policy making as one of the sources of evidence that Ministers will consider in making future decisions. This not only clearly identifies the purpose of the consultation but also demonstrates to the public and stakeholders the importance of getting involved at this stage.
3. That the Scottish Government should use the principles identified in this report to produce a statement of commitments, or a participation pledge, that is used to frame the consultation process. This can then be used to assess whether the process has achieved its goals and can be used by stakeholder groups to hold the government to account for delivering the consultation in a fair and agreed manner. If it was later considered necessary, this could also be used to underpin an external evaluation of the process, as has been conducted on a number of the [Sciencewise public dialogues](#).
4. That the Scottish Government gives further consideration to the timing of the publication of the independent reports to allow for their release and reception to be clearly integrated with the plans for the consultation process. Alongside this there also needs to be clarity about how this consultation is integrated with work being undertaken within the government on Scotland's wider energy strategy.
5. That the consultation document, and the questions included within it, should emphasise the Government's desire to get beyond binary statements of support or opposition and understand the reasons behind people's opinions. If possible there should be an opportunity for representatives from stakeholder groups and/or the wider public (see recommendation 7) to review and endorse these before publication.
6. That the responses received to the consultation should be independently analysed, with an emphasis placed on qualitative analysis, and the report of this analysis published.

### Presentation of Information

7. The presentation of impartial, accessible, trusted information on UOG is vital to the success of this consultation and there is evidently a need to produce information at varying levels of detail (as discussed on page 15 of this report) and which contextualises UOG within wider social, environmental, energy and economic settings. Where possible this information should be independently produced and stakeholder groups given the opportunity to review and endorse its accuracy. While participants in the discussions informing this report themselves acknowledged that

reaching agreement may not be possible, a roundtable discussion with a limited number of representatives from each group to assess materials (particularly the consultation document, questions and ‘fact-sheets’) and reach compromise positions that at least ‘everyone can live with’ could be a valuable way of demonstrating both transparency and integrity in the process.

8. That the Scottish Government explore options for designing an on-line interactive flow chart as a tool for making it easier for people to navigate through the array of information that will need to be made available. This could prove a very useful tool to help people make sense of the information provided by enabling them to use their own initial interests or questions as a starting point.
9. That, rather than trying to create space for responses from stakeholder and campaign groups to the independently produced evidence within the consultation document/site itself, an arms-length repository for documents should be established. Providing a direct link to this from the consultations site would however demonstrate the government’s openness to consider differing viewpoints while also preserving the impartiality of the information presented directly by the government.

## Methods

10. That, given that being able to demonstrate both high levels and breadth of participation will be necessary to give the consultation credibility and generate public, stakeholder and ministerial confidence that it has delivered evidence of public opinion, the Scottish Government will need to actively seek the participation of those less likely to self-select to respond to a consultation paper. While a number of different approaches to doing this were identified during the roundtable discussions it would be prudent for the government to choose a small number of outreach methods, and commit to doing them well, rather than attempt to do too much within a context of limited time and resources.
11. Supporting a distributed dialogue approach (as outlined on page 18 of this report) would be an effective way of promoting wide community participation in the discussion, encouraging local dialogue and resourcing communities themselves to be proactive in responding to the consultation. The Scottish Government should therefore prepare, or commission, a discussion pack (in line with the framework outlined on page 19 of this report) that can be used by community groups of all kinds to initiate local discussions and submit responses to the consultation. Particular effort should also be made to encourage Community Councils, who have a representative role in communities, to utilise this pack.
12. That the Scottish Government convene a series of deliberative events in different areas across Scotland to gain an in-depth understanding of informed public opinion about UOG. While there may be a temptation to focus on areas that are most likely to be directly impacted upon by UOG activity we suggest that it would also be important to convene one or more in an area where there will be no direct impact to enable greater analysis of the different factors that affect public opinion.