

December 22, 2014

Dear Secretary Moniz,

We are writing to urge that you address shortcomings in the Department of Energy's assessment of the environmental and public health impacts of liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports, and to reconsider your support for legislative proposals to accelerate the LNG export authorization process.

As you know, science tells us that in order to avert the worst impacts of climate disruption we must rapidly decrease greenhouse gas emissions. That means we must keep from burning, and keep underground, almost all known fossil fuel reserves and estimated resources. While far from meeting the extent of the challenge, President Obama has announced meaningful targets for reducing U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, marking needed progress in the right direction. Expanding the U.S. export of LNG, however, undermines that progress.

Senator John Hoeven was recently quoted as saying that you are willing to support his bill that would expedite the approval process for LNG export applications. If true, we find this deeply disconcerting. Even with modifications, this bill – and the other similar bills that various Congressmen have put forward – would undermine the Department of Energy's ability to fully assess the environmental and public health impacts of LNG. Endorsement of such a bill would directly contradict President Obama's pledge to reduce the country's greenhouse gas emissions.

Pound-for-pound, methane leaked by the oil and gas industry is 87 times more potent than carbon dioxide at trapping heat over 20 years. This methane (and other harmful hydrocarbons) is leaking at significantly higher rates than officials estimate. The most conservative estimate from atmospheric measurements is that natural gas leakage in 2010, averaged over the country that year, amounted to over three percent of U.S. production. Recent studies in Pennsylvania suggest some wells are leaking 1,000 times more methane and other hydrocarbons than EPA assumes when coming up with its estimates of emissions.

Liquefaction and subsequent transport of LNG significantly increase the climate impact of natural gas. The upstream and downstream greenhouse gases resulting from burning natural gas derived from LNG can be up to 100 percent more than burning natural gas without the liquefaction, transport, and deliquefaction. Reducing DOE's ability to fully analyze the impacts of exporting natural gas will make it harder, if not impossible, for the agency to take into account the full climate impacts of LNG exports in its decisions. Full information of the climate impacts of projects should discourage additional fracking, having made clear that more fracking will only lead to more greenhouse gas emissions.

Beyond the carbon pollution, fracking causes many other deleterious effects on the environment and public health, including long-term risks to underground sources of drinking water. In addition, high levels of toxics, which are known to cause such health impacts as headaches, nausea, blindness, and insomnia, have been found in the air near fracking wells.

Responsible climate and energy policy is to keep natural gas underground and refuse to export it to other countries. Otherwise, we will sink hundreds of billions of dollars in decades-lasting infrastructure, diverting investment from renewable technologies, such as wind and solar. We, therefore, urge you to reconsider your support for legislative proposals to accelerate the LNG export authorization process.

Sincerely,

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