

Aberdeen expert says UK Government taking 'unique' risk on North Sea amid global energy tensions

Professor Paul de Leeuw says the UK has a "big lesson" to learn in relation to energy security.

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Liza Hamilton

Robert Gordon University Energy Transition Institute director Professor Paul de Leeuw in Aberdeen.

Aberdeen's oil and gas sector faces mounting uncertainty as the UK Government delays decisions on future North Sea investment, a leading energy expert has warned.

Professor Paul de Leeuw, director of the Energy Transition Institute at Robert Gordon University, said global instability and a lack of domestic-policy clarity have put Britain's energy security under renewed pressure.

"These are eventful times," he said ahead of talks between Chancellor Rachel Reeves and North Sea industry leaders.

"You don't want to be at the end of a pipeline. You want to be at the beginning of a pipeline. That's really why having domestic resources is so important."

Aberdeen expert on North Sea uncertainty

Professor de Leeuw said rising tensions in the Middle East and ongoing geopolitical uncertainty have sharpened focus on where the UK sources its energy.

While other European nations including Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands have adjusted policies to support domestic oil and gas production, he said the UK was taking a different approach.

"The UK is quite unique and actually is going a different route," he said.



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BP's ETAP Facilities, North Sea.

The UK consumes around 2.5 million barrels of oil and gas per day but it produces just around a million, leaving a shortfall of 1.5 million barrels imported from overseas.

“We are one-and-a-half million barrels of oil imported every single day,” he said.

“By not doing this in the North Sea, all we’re doing is shifting the demand, especially in the short term, to imports.

“That is a policy decision, deeply in the land of politics. I’d rather have it on our doorstep. We control it and we know where it is coming from.”

Frustration over Energy Profits Levy silence

The Chancellor’s spring statement offered no update on the future of Energy Profits Levy (EPL) – the Windfall Tax on North Sea producers – prompting frustration across Aberdeen’s North Sea community.

Professor de Leeuw said industry had entered discussions with UK Government expecting greater clarity. The absence of any announcement has sent a concerning signal.

“There was an expectation that something would be done,” he said. “By not saying anything, there’s a consequence.

“What message does it send to the supply chain and the workforce and the investment community here?

“There’s a risk by waiting too long, people just move on.”



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Chancellor Rachel Reeves will meet North Sea industry leaders this week. Image: Kami Thomson/DC Thomson

He warned delays already affect exploration, appraisal, and project activity, with capital increasingly being deployed overseas.

While existing operations will continue for now, he said a lack of new developments would accelerate decommissioning activity over time, weakening the domestic supply chain and eroding local expertise.

Transition and security

Professor de Leeuw stressed that domestic production does not need to contradict the transition to renewable energy. While renewables remain critical, the UK still needs reliable oil and gas for energy security and economic stability.

“The world is changing,” Mr de Leeuw said. “People are looking very much at energy security as a strategic lever. I think that’s a very big lesson for the UK to learn.”

A broad coalition of operators, developers, universities and trade unions, and industry advocates have urged policymakers to manage North Sea resources wisely rather than curtailing activity prematurely.

Industry figures including renewable entrepreneur Dale Vince and Octopus Energy chief executive Greg Jackson have also called for a pragmatic approach to maintaining energy security during the transition.

“All the voices are aligned,” said Professor de Leeuw. “By not using that alignment – what is the message you are sending back to the supply chain and particularly the workforce and their families?”

“Because this is real people being affected.”