

Palm Beach County board OKs resolution backing state fracking ban

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Images)

WEST PALM BEACH —

Palm Beach County commissioners Tuesday voted 6-1 to approve a resolution calling for a statewide ban on “fracking” for oil and natural gas — but not necessarily forever.

The process of hydraulic fracturing injects water, along with acid or other chemicals, underground to extract oil or natural gas.

According to a county staff memo, similar resolutions have been passed by several other counties, including Miami-Dade, Broward, Monroe, St. Lucie and Martin.

Bills to ban fracking failed this year in the state House and Senate. [Senate Bill 166](#) and [House Bill 19](#), which also propose to ban fracking, have been introduced for the 2016 session, which begins in January. So have [SB 318](#) and [HB 191](#), which would regulate the practice.

“A resolution supporting a prohibition states the potential risk of contamination of groundwater resources and drinking water aquifers and the importance of protecting Florida’s natural resources,” the county staff memo said.

After the staff presented the resolution, Commissioner Steven Abrams noted that county water utilities use a form of fracking to extract some water from hard-to-get places. And he said fracking might later get more safe.

Commissioners then tweaked the resolution to exempt water and to open the door to supporting fracking if it is determined at some point to be safe enough to be practical.

Commissioner Hal Valeche, the sole “no” vote, called for hearings before the county takes a position.

“There’s no such thing any more as settled science. It’s all political,” he said. “I don’t know if fracking is good for Florida or not.”

But Vice Mayor Mary Lou Berger said, “It takes a tremendous amount of water to frack, and we don’t have enough water to do it.”

Commissioner Melissa McKinlay said the process creates a tremendous amount of wastewater “and we don’t have a plan for where that water is going to go.”

Although he voted for the tweaked resolution, Abrams said earlier that only a small southwest corner of Palm Beach County is suitable for fracking, and that the county already has taken a stand in opposition by virtue of having signed a climate compact.

Commissioners also heard from several opponents of fracking, including representatives of the Audubon Society of the Everglades and the Treasure Coast Progressive Alliance. These speakers stressed they weren’t necessarily officially speaking for their groups.

“We need to do everything we can to avoid fracking,” Audubon’s Susan Snyder said.

Michele Gale, an anti-fracking activist and a member of [moveon.org](#), of Coral Springs in Broward County, said, “If you don’t deal with fracking until it occurs, it’s too late.”