



French senators voted to outlaw hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, making France the first country to pass a law banning the technique for extracting natural gas and oil.

"We are at the end of a legislative marathon that stirred emotion from lawmakers and the public," French Environment Minister Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet said late yesterday before the vote. Hydraulic fracturing will be illegal and parliament would have to vote for a new law to allow research using the technique, she said.

Energy companies that plan to use fracking to produce oil and gas in France will have their permits revoked and its use could lead to fines and prison, according to the law passed by a vote of 176 in favor, 151 against by the senators in Paris.

Lawmakers of the ruling UMP party voted in favor of the bill while the opposition Socialists rejected the proposal for not going far enough. Before the French vote, the ban had moved between the upper and lower houses of parliament since March.

Fracking, widely used in North America, uses a mixture of water, sand and chemicals injected under high pressure to break dense rock to release trapped oil and gas. Green groups and politicians led protests across France, saying the method could cause environmental damage. Government ministers and industry representatives say it is the only method currently available to extract hydrocarbons from the rock.

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