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Colombia shelves ConocoPhillips, Canacol requests for fracking licenses: sources

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FILE PHOTO: Logos of ConocoPhillips are seen in its booths at Gastech, the world's biggest expo for the gas industry, in Chiba, Japan, April 4, 2017. REUTERS/Toru Hara

BOGOTA (Reuters) - Colombia has shelved two environmental licensing requests made by oil companies ConocoPhillips and Canacol Energy Ltd for fracking projects in northern Cesar province, two sources with knowledge of the matter said on Wednesday.

Colombia does not yet allow hydraulic fracturing, known as fracking, but the government says use of the technique could nearly triple Colombia's oil and gas reserves.

An expert commission convened by the government to study non-conventional exploration methods has recommended strict monitoring of three pilot projects to determine whether the techniques should be widely used.

The companies did not meet minimum conditions for the Piranga project, a source from the licensing authority said, while the Plata project raised possible water protection concerns.

U.S.-based ConocoPhillips and Canada's Canacol can request to re-open the licensing process for the projects in the future, the source said, adding the decision is not a definitive no.

ConocoPhillips had an 80 percent stake in the projects and Canacol the remaining 20 percent.

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Canacol will review the decision with ConocoPhillips, a source at Canacol said.

ConocoPhillips did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Several other companies, including state-run **Ecopetrol**, have applied for fracking licenses.

Reporting by Luis Jaime Acosta; writing by Julia Symmes Cobb; editing by Helen Murphy and Susan Thomas

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