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Ecopetrol warns of 'legal obligations' for fracking pilots

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Colombian state oil company **Ecopetrol** has pledged to move forward with its fracking pilot projects despite assurances from President-elect Gustavo Petro that the practice will soon be outlawed.

On Wednesday, incoming environment minister Susana Muhamad said the new administration would fulfill its campaign promise to stop hydraulic fracking, or fracking, as part of wider efforts to wean Colombia off its dependence on fossil fuels.

Ecopetrol responded with a statement in which it alluded to legal ramifications if the Petro administration proceeds with its plan.

"We currently have two contracts signed and in force with the [hydrocarbons agency] ANH for the execution of the pilots ... from which legal obligations are derived for the company with which we must comply," **Ecopetrol** said in a statement published by newspaper El Tiempo.

The comments come as **Ecopetrol** and partner ExxonMobil prepare to jointly frack the Kalé and Platero unconventional pilots in Santander department. The companies have already obtained an environmental license for Kalé and have reached an advanced stage in the Platero permitting process.

In addition to halting fracking, Petro has vowed to end all new conventional oil exploration drilling and instead focus on accelerating investments in clean energy alternatives such as wind and solar power.

According to **Ecopetrol**, fracking could increase the lifespan of Colombia's oil and gas reserves by 12-15 years, helping to guarantee the country's long-term energy security.

Opponents warn that chemicals used in the fracking process can contaminate water supplies, posing

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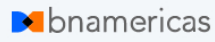
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