

ESSO

ESSO – THE WORLD’S NO. 1 CLIMATE CRIMINAL

‘ExxonMobil, the biggest (oil company), is also the world's most powerful climate change sceptic. If the world's biggest purveyor of fossil fuels ever accepts openly that global warming is real, that may turn out to be more important to the planet than any Kyoto deal.’

The Economist, December 2001

Climate change is caused by the world’s dependence on dirty fuels like oil and coal to run our cars and power our industries and homes. The changing climate affects us all. Increasingly frequent floods, storms and droughts threaten the way we live. According to the World Health Organisation, 150,000 people are already dying every year from the effects of climate change.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND OIL

The burning of oil as fuel is one of the biggest single contributors to climate change. It alone accounts for over 23% of global greenhouse gas emissions.¹ If even a fraction of the world’s remaining oil resources are exploited, the effect on the climate will be devastating.²

To prevent dangerous climate change, we need to rapidly phase out the use of oil and other fossil fuels and switch to clean forms of energy, such as wind and solar, as well as energy efficiency in heating, light and transport. Whilst this change is possible, vested interests who profit from oil have been the biggest blocks in stopping the world from taking action, both through their reluctance to diversify their own business and through a determination to scupper the political processes that facilitate the necessary global response to climate change.

Governments and industry both have a role to play in reducing our addiction to oil:

Government must

1. strengthen regulations, such as the Kyoto Protocol, that will enforce a reduction in fossil fuel use
2. implement domestic policies to enable the switch to clean energy.

Industry must

1. stop blocking government action to tackle climate change
2. take the lead in investing in clean renewable energy and energy efficiency

WHY ESSO? THE DENIAL AND DECEPTION

When President Bush announced that the US would be pulling out of the Kyoto Protocol in March 2001, there were many clues that the fossil fuel industry was behind his policy. One company stands out from the rest in its efforts to bring about Bush's climate climb-down.

Esso (known as ExxonMobil in the USA) is the world's biggest and most profitable oil company. It operates in 200 countries and is one of the UK's largest petrol retailers. In 2004, Esso made \$25 billion in profits worldwide³ – more than any other company in history.

For more than a decade, Esso has been working consistently and systematically to derail any international action to tackle global warming. While Esso's opposition to Kyoto is no secret⁴, it has made a concerted effort to turn its interests into US government policy. It has steered the US away from international action, not only through direct lobbying but also through covert funding and support for industry lobbying organisations and climate-sceptic scientists.

Esso continues to deny the link between fossil fuels and global warming, and has used its money and power to keep the world hooked on oil and heading towards climate catastrophe.

1. CLIMATE CRIME: ESSO IS THE POWER BEHIND BUSH'S THRONE

Esso gave \$1.376 million to the Republicans in the 2000 election cycle – and gave more than any other oil company in 2004⁵. Around 90% of its political donations went to the Republicans. As soon as George Bush became president, he pulled the United States out of the Kyoto Protocol, the only international agreement to address climate change. This is exactly what Esso was promoting.

The similarities between Esso's and Bush's statements at the time of Bush withdrawing from the Kyoto Protocol were uncanny and probably not coincidental. In April 2001, Esso paid for advertisements that described the treaty as 'fundamentally flawed' and 'fatally politicized.' After Bush rejected the Kyoto Protocol, he described the agreement as 'fatally flawed in fundamental ways.'⁷

As Bush embarks on his second term, once again with Esso's backing, he seems as resolute as ever in opposing action on climate change. As the USA is responsible for 25% of the pollution that causes climate change, Bush's stance has a massive implication for the world's efforts to tackle the problem.

2. CLIMATE CRIME: ESSO HAS DONE MORE THAN ANY OTHER COMPANY TO UNDERMINE ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

FUNDING PROPAGANDA FRONTS

Using tactics perfected by tobacco companies, Esso has funded multi-million dollar propaganda fronts to confuse the public and policy makers in the US about climate change and to sap the political will to address it.

Esso has run advertising campaigns in the US press condemning the Kyoto Protocol and dismissing climate change. Esso has also funded think-tanks and lobby groups to the tune of \$12 million since 1997⁸. These groups are involved both in lobbying governments directly and appearing in the media as 'independent experts' who question the reality of climate change and oppose efforts to address it. The mass media has been fooled to call upon groups and individuals funded by Esso to comment on a broad range of issues. Recurring themes include: denial of climate change; creating unwarranted fear about the costs of tackling climate change; and creating suspicion about those who advocate action. Groups funded by Esso include:

The Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI)

The CEI has argued that climate change would actually create a 'milder, greener, more prosperous world' and that 'Kyoto was a power grab based on deception and fear.'⁹ In 2004, one of the CEI's directors, Myron Ebell appeared on Radio 4's Today programme claiming climate change is a myth cooked up by the EU to 'hamper American competitiveness.' As the UK Government's respected chief scientist, Sir David King, announced that climate change was the biggest threat facing humanity, Ebell condemned him as an 'alarmist' who is 'promoting this ridiculous claim.'

American Petroleum Institute (API)

Esso is a financial supporter and sits on the board of the API. In 1998, Esso helped plan a \$7million API public relations offensive to undermine scientific consensus on the threat of climate change. The plan stated that 'victory will be achieved when those promoting the Kyoto treaty on the basis of extant science appear to be out of touch with reality.' Among other tactics, API planned to recruit and train 'independent scientists' without any track record of participation in the climate debate to undertake media work against established climate science and the Kyoto Protocol.¹⁰

'We do not now have sufficient scientific understanding of climate change to make reasonable predictions and/or justify drastic measures... Some reports in the media link climate change to extreme weather and harm to human health. Yet experts see no such pattern.'

Lee Raymond, Esso chief executive ¹⁶

The Frontiers of Freedom Foundation

The Frontiers of Freedom was founded to fight environmental regulations and calls itself the 'antithesis of the green movement'. The Frontiers of Freedom Foundation has pushed the view that climate change isn't real, saying, 'Climate has always varied, often with large swings...These dramatic climatic ebbs and flows are naturally occurring events.'¹¹

UNDERMINING INTERNATIONAL ACTION

In negotiations leading up to the formulation of the Kyoto Protocol, Esso was present to try to sabotage the process. It funded lobby groups such as the Global Climate Coalition whose website proclaimed 'Good Riddance Kyoto'.

Esso also attempted to meddle in the work of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) whose findings on climate change have shaped global policy. For example, in September 2001, the draft final report of the IPCC included the line: 'The Earth's climate system has demonstrably changed on both global and regional scales since the pre-industrial era, with some of these changes attributable to human activities'. Esso lobbied hard to amend the text by deleting 'with some of these changes attributable to human activities'. The IPCC rejected Esso's attempts.¹²

Within days of Bush entering the White House, Esso faxed the new Bush Administration with a hit list of scientists it wanted removed from international climate negotiations. At the head of this list was the chair of the IPCC, Dr Robert Watson. Dr Watson is a well-respected, former NASA climate scientist who had held the unpaid post for nearly six years and is vocal about the IPCC's conclusions on the causal role of fossil fuels in climate change.

The fax sent by Arthur G. Randol III, senior environmental adviser for Esso, was prefaced with a comment that he would 'call to discuss the recommendations regarding the team that can better represent the Bush Administration'. Randol went on to specifically ask: 'Can Watson be replaced now at the request of the US?' When the post of IPCC Chair came up for renewal, the US did not re-nominate Dr Watson and successfully lobbied to have him removed at an IPCC meeting in April 2002.

UNDERMINING THE SCIENTIFIC CONSENSUS AND DENYING THE LINK BETWEEN BURNING FOSSIL FUELS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Of 928 peer-reviewed papers on climate change published between 1993 and 2003, not a single one disagrees with the fact that global warming is due to increased greenhouse gas concentrations.¹³ But Esso still claims that the science remains 'inconclusive'¹⁴ and refuses to accept that changes to the climate are a result of the burning of fossil fuels such as oil.¹⁵ Even though the impacts of climate change are already being felt, Esso is keeping its head in the sand.

Lee Raymond, chief executive of Esso, has said: 'We do not now have sufficient scientific understanding of climate change to make reasonable predictions and/or justify drastic measures... Some reports in the media link climate change to extreme weather and harm to human health. Yet experts see no such pattern.'¹⁶

This is not true. Respected climate scientists are attributing recent severe weather events to human-induced climate change. The UK Met Office's Hadley Centre for Climatic Research, for example, concluded that man-made climate change could be blamed for the 2003 heat-wave which killed 27,000 people across Europe.¹⁷

Lee Raymond has also made his case by citing a petition signed by '17,000 scientists' dismissing climate change. The petition had already been discredited, after it was found to have misled recipients into thinking it came from America's respected National Academy of Sciences and that it had not been organised by climate scientists. Signatories included fictional TV characters.¹⁸

3. CLIMATE CRIME: ESSO IS DISMISSIVE OF CLEAN ENERGY

Clean energy – in the form of renewable technologies such as wind, wave and solar power – is a key part of the solution to climate change, yet Esso has dismissed it as unprofitable. Esso says, 'In our view, current renewable technologies do not offer near-term promise for profitable investment relative to our core business.'¹⁹

This is in contrast to BP and Shell, who each have renewable businesses. Esso continues to dismiss the potential of renewable energy, suggesting that 'non-petroleum sources of energy' are merely 'fashionable'.²⁰

Instead, Esso is aggressively expanding its oil and gas production, and lobbying for access to search for new oil in pristine areas such as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. In 2003 Esso spent \$12 billion on oil and gas exploration and production – and not one dollar on clean energy.²¹

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- 1 Greenpeace The Carbon Logic 1997
 - 2 Greenpeace The Carbon Logic 1997
 - 3 The Guardian ExxonMobil Reports Annual Profits of £25 billion 31 January 2005
 - 4 e.g Exxon OpEd Moving Past Kyoto 2001 www.exxonmobil.com/Files/Corporate/170401.pdf
 - 5 Centre for Responsive Politics www.opensecrets.org
 - 6 ExxonMobil OpEd An Energy Policy for the New Administration 18 January 2001 www.exxonmobil.com/files/corporate/010118.pdf
 - 7 For example, this was said by Bush in a Rose Garden statement: 'President Bush Discusses Global Climate Change,' Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, 11 June 2001; available from www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/06/20010611-2.html
 - 8 www.exxonsecrets.org
 - 9 R. Brunet, 'It Just Ain't So, Say These Reputable Scientists' Alberta Report, 10 November, v.24 1997 p20-21
 - 10 American Petroleum Institute, Global Climate Science Communications Action Plan, 1997
 - 11 Frontiers of Freedom, 'Science Hill Watch' 2/2/04
 - 12 Greenpeace A Decade of Dirty Tricks 2001
 - 13 Naomi Oreskes BEYOND THE IVORY TOWER: The Scientific Consensus on Climate Change Science, Vol 306, Issue 5702, 1686, 3 December 2004
 - 14 ExxonMobil A Report on Energy Trends, Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Alternative Energy 2004 p10
 - 15 e.g. in evidence given to the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology 11 December 2003 <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200304/ldselect/ldscitech/999/3121101.htm>
 - 16 ExxonMobil, Global Climate Change – A Better Path Forward, April 2000.
 - 17 Hadley Centre News Release Man Mostly to Blame for 2003 Heatwave 1 December 2004
 - 18 Dr Lloyd Keigwin, December 2000, quoted in How ExxonMobil is misleading Shareholders, Policy makers and the Public about Global Warming, Campaign ExxonMobil, 2001
 - 19 ExxonMobil A report on Energy trends, greenhouse gas emissions and alternative energy 2004
 - 20 Harry J. Longwell, Senior Vice President of ExxonMobil, Spindletop speech, 10 January 2001
 - 21 ExxonMobil Summary Annual Report 2003

DEMANDS

INDUSTRY: ESSO MUST FACE FACTS

- Esso must immediately accept the scientific consensus that climate change is caused by the burning of fossil fuels
- Esso must support government action on climate change, including mandatory cuts in greenhouse gas emissions
- Esso must stop funding climate-sceptic front groups or those that lobby against action
- Esso must support development of clean energy technologies

GOVERNMENT: STAND UP TO CLIMATE CRIMINALS

Tony Blair has said that he will use his presidency of the G8 in 2005 to make climate change a global priority and to shift the US position. However, there is speculation that he will attempt to do this by offering George Bush a raft of new, weaker measures, being referred to as 'Kyoto-Lite'.

- Tony Blair must not do Esso's bidding by offering George Bush a soft option for tackling climate change

PUBLIC: DON'T BUY ESSO

When Esso recently changed its communications strategy in an attempt to sound more environmentally friendly, one Esso Vice President said 'There's no doubt that the boycott is one of the major factors behind the change.'*

By not buying Esso's products you can affect the one thing Esso cares about - its profits.

*Weekly Petroleum Argus , v32 , n44 , p4, 11 November 2002

Greenpeace's clean energy campaign is committed to halting climate change caused by burning oil, coal and gas.

We champion a clean energy future in which the quality of life of all peoples is improved through the environmentally responsible and socially just provision of heating, light and transport.

We promote scientific and technical innovations that advance the goals of renewable energy, clean fuel, and energy efficiency.

We investigate and expose the corporate powers and governments that stand in the way of international action to halt global warming and who drive continued dependence on dirty, dangerous sources of energy, including nuclear power.

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