

The case against Esso

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

We know we have a giant target painted on our chests.

Ken Cohen, Esso's head of government relations and public affairs in the US, The Guardian, 17 April 2001

Our weather is careering out of control. Global warming will bring more floods and chaos to Britain and increasingly extreme storms, drought and disease worldwide. The culprit is pollution from fossil fuels such as oil, coal and gas. It is time to break our dependency on oil - if we don't we will wreck the planet for ourselves and future generations.

Esso is fuelling climate catastrophe. Rather than working to provide people with clean energy, Esso continues its reckless search for more oil - Esso is even lobbying for access to the pristine Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. More oil simply means more floods, storms, drought and disease. And more profit for Esso.

Esso continues to deny the link between its business and global warming, and uses its power and dollars to derail international negotiations on action to save the climate.

What makes Esso worse than the rest?

1. It is the power behind Bush's throne

Esso gave \$1,086,080 million to the Republicans in the 2000 election cycle - more than any other oil company. 91% of its political donations went to the Republicans.¹ As soon as George Bush became president, he pulled the United States out of the Kyoto Protocol, the only international agreement to address global warming - exactly the policy that Esso was promoting. As the USA is responsible for 25% of the pollution that causes global warming, this has a massive effect on the efficacy of the protocol.

2. It has been the most active company undermining Kyoto – and has supported corporate lobbying organisations to do the same

Esso uses its wealth and power to stop any international action on climate change. Esso ran an advertising campaign in the US press condemning

the Kyoto Protocol and lobbied Bush to pull out. Esso also funds multi-million dollar propaganda fronts to dismiss the case for action to protect the climate. It frequently exploits selective, outdated or incorrect scientific studies in order to back up its position. Using tactics perfected by tobacco companies, these campaigns confuse the public and policy makers about global warming and sap the political will to address it.

Recent Public Statements

Two days before President Bush's inauguration, Esso published an Op Ed in the US press outlining its recommendations for *"An Energy Policy for the New Administration* stating that *"the unrealistic and economically damaging Kyoto process needs to be rethought."*² Another recent advertisement declared that *"the Kyoto Protocol approach would be a serious mistake."*³

Global Climate Coalition (GCC)

For years, Esso supported the GCC, the industry front-group that took a lead role in undermining initiatives to solve global warming (its website proclaims *"Good Riddance Kyoto."*). BP left the GCC in 1997 when it finally admitted that climate change required action. Large-scale defection of companies such as Ford, Texaco and General Motors occurred in 1999-2000. Esso only left when the GCC decided that only trade associations would be suitable for membership, and ended its corporate programme.⁴ In 2002 the GCC "deactivated", claiming it "has served its purpose by contributing to a new national approach to global warming."⁵ In other words, with the US out of Kyoto the GCC had no need to continue its fossil fuel funded lobbying.

American Petroleum Institute (API)

Esso is a financial supporter and sits on the board of the API. Lee Raymond – chief executive of Esso - was the chair from 1995 to 1997. 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.⁶

US Council for International Business (USCIB)

Esso is a member of USCIB, a corporate lobby group that actively supports the Bush Administration's rejection of the Kyoto Protocol. The USCIB wrote to Bush on 11 April 2001, suggesting that *"the US should move quickly to chart a path forward that will avoid the Kyoto Protocol's unrealistic targets, timetables and lack of developing country participation."*⁷

3. Esso doesn't care about climate change and refuses to accept the link between its business and global warming

The world is heating up. The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, made up of the world's top scientists, recently confirmed that fossil fuels such as oil are causing global warming. They predict that

increasingly extreme weather will put millions of people's lives at risk. Over one hundred and sixty governments agree. Esso still claims that: *"scientifically unfounded scare scenarios were and continue to be promoted in an effort to justify the (Kyoto) Protocol"*.⁸

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."*⁹

However, the IPCC predicts that:

- We will experience more heat waves and floods; in Europe river flooding will increase over much of the continent.
- Glaciers and polar ice will continue melting, with a chance that we may lose the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets completely. This could add around six metres to global sea level.
- The greatest impacts will be on the world's poorest people in parts of Africa and Asia - those least able to protect themselves from rising sea levels and increased drought and disease.¹⁰

UN and UK government scientists predict that by 2080, 94 million people around the world will be at risk from flooding *every year* as a result of global warming. 290 million additional people will also be at risk from malaria.¹¹ By 2025, increasing drought will mean that five billion – or two out of three people – will lack sufficient water and millions more will starve.¹²

4. Esso has a history of misleading the public and its investors by using selective, outdated or incorrect scientific studies

A scientist who authored the report on temperature data for the Sargasso Sea, which is used by Exxon to refute the claim that global warming worldwide was happening, has said *"I think the sad thing is ExxonMobil is exploiting the data for political purposes."*¹³

Lee Raymond, Esso's CEO, has made his case elsewhere by citing a petition signed by "17,000 scientists" dismissing global warming. The petition had already been discredited, after it was found not to have been organised by climate scientists and to have misled recipients into thinking it came from America's respected National Academy of Sciences, which it did not. Signatories included fictional TV characters.¹⁴

5. Esso doesn't believe renewable energy has a future

*"With no readily available economic alternatives on the horizon, fossil fuels will continue to supply most of the world's energy needs for the foreseeable future."*¹⁵

-- Lee Raymond - ExxonMobil CEO, 1997

Four years on, Denmark gets 10% of its electricity from wind power, set to increase to 50% by 2030. Yet Esso continues to dismiss the potential of renewable energy, suggesting that "non-petroleum sources of energy" are merely "fashionable".¹⁶

The company refuses to invest in any renewable energy projects, in contrast to BP and Shell, who will each have invested \$500m over the next three years. 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.

6. Esso is the biggest company in the world – it can afford to take action

Esso made \$15billion in profits worldwide in 2001. In the same year it spent \$7.9billion on oil and gas exploration and production – and not one dollar on renewable energy or green fuels.

Esso operates in 200 countries. It produces 4.5 million barrels of oil and gas each day. Esso is one of the UK's largest petrol retailers, with some 1,500 filling stations. Around 70% of the UK population live within two miles of an Esso petrol station. If any company can afford to do something about global warming Esso can.

Esso chooses to wreck the climate. We can choose not to buy Esso's products. Don't buy Esso!

"As a citizen, sometimes direct action is necessary to make a positive contribution to something you care about."

Esso UK website.

¹ Centre for Responsive Politics, www.opensecrets.org

² Op Ed, 18 January 2001

³ *Moving Past Kyoto*, Op Ed, 17 April 2001

⁴ Campaign ExxonMobil, *How ExxonMobil is misleading Shareholders, Policy makers and the Public about Global Warming*, 2001

⁵ Global Climate Coalition, <http://www.globalclimate.org>

⁶ American Petroleum Institute, *Global Climate Science Communications Action Plan*, 1997

⁷ letter from Thomas Niles, President of the USCIB, to President Bush, 11 April 2001.

⁸ Op Ed, 17 April 2001

⁹ ExxonMobil, *Global Climate Change – A Better Path Forward*, April 2000.

¹⁰ Working Group II of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, on *Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, February 2001

¹¹ *Climate change and its impacts*, DETR, October 1999

¹² Working Group II of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, on *Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, February 2001

¹³ Dr Lloyd Keigwin, December 2000, quoted in *How ExxonMobil is misleading Shareholders, Policy makers and the Public about Global Warming*, Campaign ExxonMobil, 2001

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ speech at the World Petroleum Congress, Beijing, 13 October 1997

¹⁶ Harry J. Longwell, Senior Vice President of ExxonMobil, *Spindletop* speech, 10 January 2001