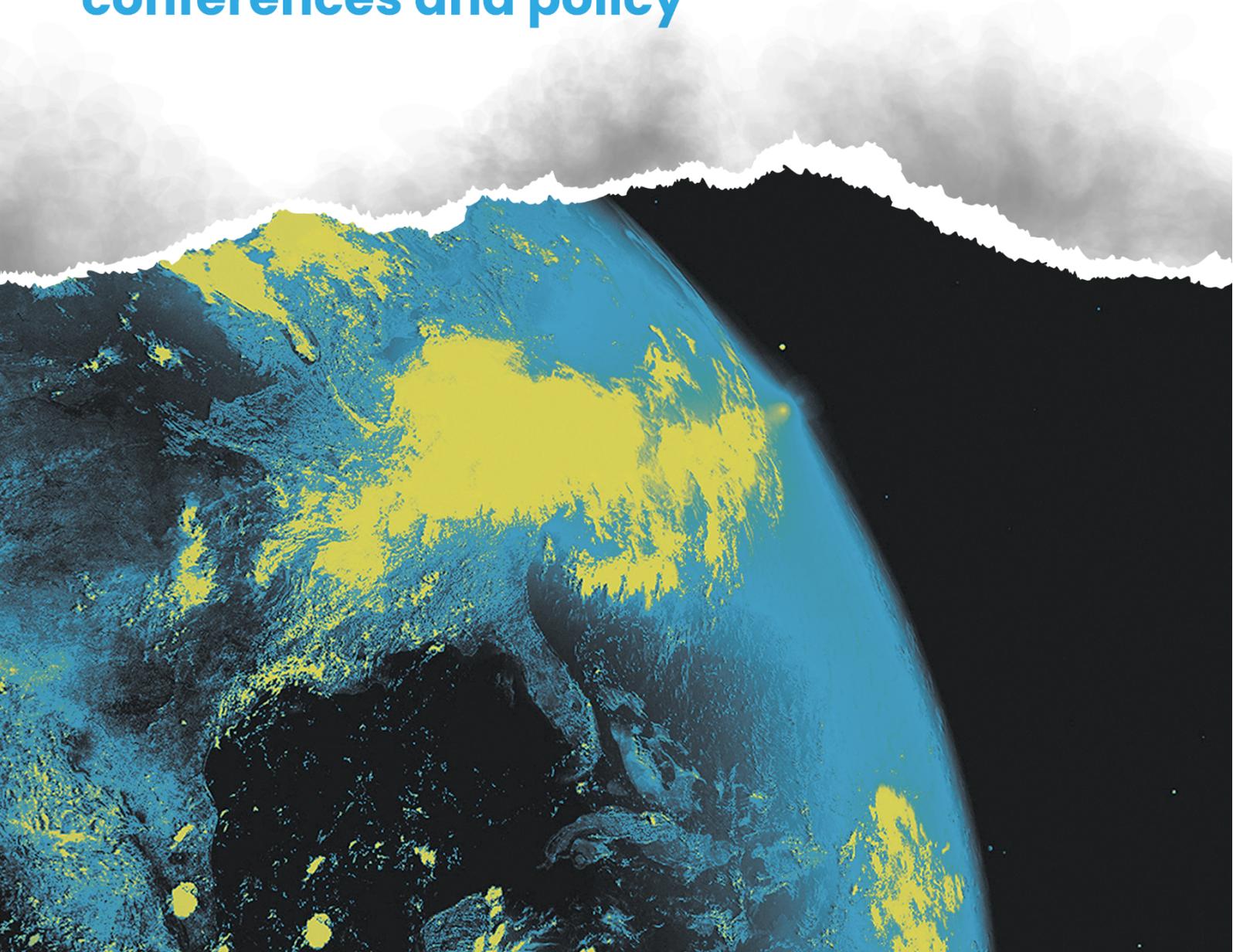


**badvertising**

# **Polluting the Process**

**How marketing and public relations by high-carbon industries distorts climate conferences and policy**





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# Contents



|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Summary</b>   | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>1. Introduction</b>   | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>The honey pot: why polluters keep turning up in climate negotiations – and why it matters</b> |           |
| <b>Section 1:</b>  | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>Background: influence peddling by polluters in the climate process</b>                        |           |
| <b>Section 2:</b>  | <b>10</b> |
| <b>COPs and carbon robbers</b>   |           |
| <b>Section 3:</b>  | <b>20</b> |
| <b>Advertising for COP26</b>   |           |
| <b>Section 4:</b>  | <b>28</b> |
| <b>Recommendations</b>   |           |
| <b>Appendix</b>  | <b>30</b> |

## Summary



This briefing research looks at the sponsorship and marketing activities undertaken by major polluting companies at international climate negotiations. More specifically, it details how each of the recent UN COP events and negotiating processes was subject to influence peddling by major, commercial high-carbon polluters. COP26 in 2021 is no exception to the rule. In spite of its UK organisers announcing that it will not accept sponsorship from companies without clear short-term plans for net-zero decarbonisation, it includes several highly polluting sponsors, such as Jaguar Land Rover, SSE and Natwest among others.

From blocking effective climate action to confusing the public around their real activities through greenwash stunts and enabling the fossil fuel industries, the presence of major polluters inside the climate negotiation arena is deeply problematic.

This report looks at the past, present and future of sponsorship and advertising at international events like COP26, and why they have proved so tempting to major carbon polluters.



Jaguar Land Rover, the company that filled UK streets with highly polluting SUVs, became an official COP26 partner on 16 September 2021. Pictured with Alok Sharma MP, COP President.

In order to change this for the future, and to restrict access and influence from big polluters, we propose three main recommendations for COP organisers to adopt:

- Reject any sponsorship deal by high-carbon companies, sectors and trade associations.
- Prohibit advertising and marketing activities by high carbon companies within the conference centre.
- Create a conflict of interest policy that locks polluters out.

## Introduction

# The honey pot: why polluters keep turning up in climate negotiations – and why it matters



Major polluters Air France, gas and electricity company Engie and carmakers BMW and Renault were among the sponsors of COP21 in Paris in 2015, when countries agreed to limit global temperature rises to “well below 2C” by the end of the century, with the added ambition of making 1.5C the maximum permitted upper limit.

Only as recently as 2018, Poland’s leading coal company Jastrzębska Spółka Węglowa (JSW) sponsored COP 24 in Katowice, at the heart of the country’s coal-producing region. The Polish pavilion memorably advertised coal-shaped bars of soap.

In 2019, corporate accountability groups accused Spain of allowing its biggest polluters to use the climate summit in Madrid to “wrap themselves in the green branding of the COP”.

COP26 in Glasgow announced that it will not accept sponsorship from companies without clear short-term plans to go towards net-zero emissions. Even allowing for issues to do with framing of ‘net zero’ and how it typically relies on unproven carbon removal technologies, and flawed and misleading so-called carbon ‘offset’ schemes, advertising may turn out to be another matter.

This report looks at the past, present and future of sponsorship and advertising of major international events like this one, and why they have proved so tempting to major carbon polluters.

## Section 1:

# Background: from cleaning stadiums to cleaning conferences – influence peddling by polluters in the climate process



Sport, like everything else, once had to clean itself of tobacco sponsorship. The recent Badvertising campaign report [Sweat Not Oil](#), which looked at ubiquitous sponsorship of sports by major polluters, concluded with a call to screen corporate sponsors and turn down any from companies promoting high carbon lifestyles, products and services – and especially those in the automotive, airlines and fossil fuel industries.

The report also urged governments to set clear annual targets and steps on how to achieve them – and that presidents and CEOs must take personal responsibility for their delivery, and to make sure that the targets are reviewed by an entirely independent body. After 2030, it called for any global sports events or tours that are not zero carbon to be postponed until they are, and for sports federations that are not zero carbon to be refused participation in major global events, such as the Olympics until they have put their ‘climate houses’ in order. There is no doubt that global sport must also urgently cut its reliance on air travel.

With this as a solution to stop sport being used by major polluters to slip into people’s minds, how much more important is to make sure that this is also the case with the events that decide global climate policy and response to carbon emissions.

With COP26, the so-called Conference of the Parties, in the UK, it is doubly important to avoid problematic and major polluters from contaminating the climate decision making process. That is the subject of this report.

## Advertising and sponsorship

The advertising industry has been waking up to the scale of climate destabilisation by setting up different climate initiatives. In the UK, for example, [Purpose Disruptors](#), a network of advertising professionals, are calling for a reset of

their industry in order to tackle the high carbon consumerism fuelled by advertising campaigns.

And, the next UN climate 110 conference - the COP26 set in Glasgow in November 2021 - has prompted the UK Advertising Association to release a five-step plan on how the sector can meet net zero emissions called **Ad Net Zero**. These, though, are mostly broad, general pledges that companies in the industry can sign onto, which say nothing about the sector's underlying responsibility in fuelling materialism and over-consumption, and creating a platform for high-carbon companies.

One recent exception is the **Clean Creatives** initiative that calls on agencies to refuse work on marketing campaigns for major polluters, and to drop specifically fossil fuel companies as clients. At the time of writing 400 individual workers in the sector had signed the pledge, and 132 agencies.

The Badvertising campaign aims to stop adverts fuelling the climate emergency, which also includes the promotion of high carbon products, services and lifestyles, such as ads for the automotive and aviation industries, in other words, petrol and diesel powered cars, and flights.

It never made sense to include major polluters as sponsors or advertisers at COP events which ought to be inimical to everything they stand for, nor for them to be included in any major events that aspires to be sustainable and aligned with internationally agreed climate targets.

## Section 2:

# COPs and carbon robbers



The organisers of this year's COP negotiations in Glasgow have announced that they will accept no high carbon sponsors. According to the UK government, they will only accept sponsors that:

1. Can lend their resources, commitment and expertise to making COP26 a success and help to deliver international action on climate change.
2. Are making real contributions to the fight against climate change, and are aligned with the aims of COP26.
3. Have strong climate credentials. We are looking for businesses which have set ambitious net zero commitments by 2050 or earlier, with a credible short term action plan to achieve them.<sup>1</sup>

This is an important step forward, and at least a tacit endorsement that sponsorship can be problematic and that it matters to have sponsors who are, at least, aligned with the purpose of what they are sponsoring. But for some reason, it has not managed to prevent them from including the SUV-manufacturer, Jaguar Land Rover.

In September, the UK government announced that - among the sponsors - Jaguar Land Rover would be providing transport from the electric vehicles on the conference site.<sup>2</sup> Jaguar Land Rover is part of the Indian conglomerate Tata Motors, but under different owners, they were key developers of the UK Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV) phenomenon - and they are still aggressively marketing this highly polluting form of traffic.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ukcop26.org/uk-presidency/partnerships-and-support/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.energylivenews.com/2021/09/17/jaguar-land-rover-to-make-cop26-leaders-trips-greener/>

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Land Rover sponsored COP26 in Glasgow. Its advert appealing to driving without restrictions led to multiple complaints to the UK advertising regulator, the ASA in 2021.

## Other sponsors and 'partners'

But there are reasons to be concerned about other sponsors too.

First, because it very often proves to be the case that only companies with a questionable record on climate change are motivated to enhance and project their environmental

credentials in this way – certainly using the model of event sponsorship laid down by the very first profitable Olympic games, Los Angeles in 1984, which established sponsorship on this scale as a practical, but equally problematic, funding model.

This point can be illustrated by some of the sponsors signed-up by COP26 in Glasgow. One of these is the Boston Consulting Group, or BCG, one of the big three management consultancies in the world, and currently trying to position itself as a global thought leader on sustainability. But BCG is a **major supplier of consultancy services to the oil and gas industry**. And, whilst it says that one of its services is to help the industry ‘contribute to a path to decarbonisation’, such industry initiatives are repeatedly exposed as greenwash.

One of BCG’s services is to the so-called ‘upstream oil and gas industry’ in which it promises to unlock ‘new opportunities for oil and gas companies around the world.’ For the uninitiated, the ‘upstream’ industry is to do with exploration for new fossil fuel sources and production. It has now become a touchstone of climate policy that only a small proportion of already known fossil fuel sources can be safely used, hence new exploration and production is incompatible with climate targets.

A global campaign is now calling for a **Fossil Fuel Non Proliferation Treaty** to end new exploration and production. BCG also promises to work with oil and gas companies “to stay competitive by helping them improve operational efficiency, (and) reduce costs.” It boasts of its database of ‘unconventional assets’ meaning highly polluting shale oil and gas, and specifically of helping **one Indian corporate** client to “aggressively expand into the faster-growing petrochemicals market.”

Another COP26 sponsor is food company Reckitt Benckiser, formerly Reckitt & Colman. As manufacturers of brands from Dettol to Durex, the Scotsman asked the question: **‘Who is Reckitt?: The COP26 ‘greenwash’ firm behind everyday household products’**, pointing to its use of 134,414 tonnes of palm oil or palm oil products in 2019, for which it relies “on a slew of mills based predominantly in Indonesia and Malaysia.” Palm oil production is associated with widespread problems including deforestation which is a major contributor to global heating.

Other sponsors now include supermarket Sainsbury’s, gadget manufacturers Hitachi, and three UK power companies, SSE, Scottish Power and the National Grid. Hitachi’s purpose is to sell energy-hungry hi-tech gadgets to as many people as

possible. Subsidiary Hitachi Metals has not even set any greenhouse gas emission reduction targets.<sup>3</sup> SSE and Scottish Power don't appear on any lists of the greenest energy providers (and SSE has sold up to Ovo).<sup>4</sup> SSE also ranked among Scotland's top polluters with its gas station at Peterhead, Aberdeenshire emitting 1.6m tonnes of carbon dioxide in 2019.<sup>5</sup>



Supermarket Sainsbury's sponsored COP26 in Glasgow, including the climate conference logo on its adverts for a beef meal. Adding a few beans doesn't change that beef is one of the highest carbon, most polluting foodstuffs.

Sainsbury's came last in a 2018 survey of supermarket plastic policies and was found to have made the least progress on plastics reduction since January 2018.<sup>6</sup> While Sainsbury's may perform relatively well compared to other major supermarkets - in comparison to more localised and

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.transitionpathwayinitiative.org/companies/hitachi-metals>

<sup>4</sup> <https://greenecofriend.co.uk/eco-friendly-energy-suppliers/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://theferret.scot/ineos-sse-exxon-carbon-polluter/> and <https://www.energyvoice.com/renewables-energy-transition/279238/sse-climate-cop26-peterhead/>

<sup>6</sup> Greenpeace, 2019. New campaign challenges supermarket giant to clean up its act on tackling plastic waste. <https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/news/greenpeace-calls-sainsburys-worst-class-plastics/>

independent retail and supply chains such supermarkets lock-in a model which is energy inefficient, encouraging car-based shopping, centralised and vulnerable to disruption, and poor in terms of spreading local economic benefits. In one advert displaying its credentials as a sponsor of COP26, Sainsbury's promoted a beef dish, and beef is one of the most polluting, high carbon of foodstuffs.

Finally, they have signed-up the bankers, NatWest, which – NatWest says – “builds on our commitments to make our operations carbon net zero by the end of 2020 and to at least halve the climate impact of our financing activity by 2030. We are committed to achieve alignment with the 2015 Paris Agreement, and intend to do what is necessary to achieve this through innovation, collaboration and partnerships.”

The problem is that, while NatWest's commitment may be real, they are still being listed by Banking on Climate Chaos as one of the top 50 polluting banks in the world – with investments in coal around the world.<sup>7</sup> They are also just a subsidiary company of one of the biggest retail banks in the world, Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) and when it came to ranking banks about their commitment to climate, Share Action put RBS, with its significant investments in polluters, at number 15 out of 20 where its approach to the climate challenge represented only a 'business as usual' no-change approach, not one of responding to the crisis (Dec 2019).

“Worryingly,” wrote Share Action researchers, “our research found that only two of the thirty six companies reviewed clearly demonstrated effective plans to reduce their carbon impacts in time, with 94 per cent of retail banks failing to convince on climate strategy.”<sup>8</sup>

The 36 banks and building societies in Share Action's analysis were rated either as best, middle or worst for their carbon management and reporting. Most were still “struggling to get to grips with the immensity of the task, though their reporting was full of fine words such as ‘we are committed to supporting a successful transition to a low carbon, climate resilient economy’ (**Bank of Ireland**), or we are working with other banks to ‘integrate climate considerations into lending decisions’ (Citibank).

NatWest's commitments on measurement was one of the most ambitious, stating that it aimed “to quantify our climate impact and set sector-specific targets by 2022”. Yet owners

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<sup>7</sup> <https://reclaimfinance.org/site/en/2021/04/28/natwest-clarity-on-oil-gas-and-coal-policies-required-ahead-of-cop26>

<sup>8</sup> <https://shareaction.org/research-resources/banking-on-a-low-carbon-future-ii/>

RBS provided \$1.1 billion to the fossil fuel industry from 2015-17, which makes it one of the world's largest financiers of fossil fuels, exemplifying the short-termism of the capital markets which prioritises profit maximisation over other concerns.

Infrastructure like this is normally planned to be operating for at least 40 years, ten years beyond the UK government's own target of getting to net zero carbon emissions by 2050. In other words, any apparent commitment by NatWest's is compromised and countermanded by simply being a brand name used by one of the biggest fossil fuel funders of them all.



NatWest, a sponsor of COP26 in Glasgow, is part of a banking group that heavily finances fossil fuels. (Source: Brandalism).

## Polluters at previous COPs

We are also concerned by how ubiquitous some of the major polluters have been at previous COP meetings.

Carmakers BMW were prominent among the sponsors at COP19. In Warsaw in 2013, plus carmakers Opel, airline Emirates, crude oil purveyors Lotos and gas and coal supplier PGE. It is hardly surprising that the event is little remembered for its progress.

Poland is the most coal-dependent and carbon-friendly country in Europe, ninety percent of the country's electricity

comes from coal power plants. The government has consistently slowed down and opposed agreements on reduced emissions. Giving this government the hosting of a climate conference was like letting the goat become a gardener.

Expectations for the conference were low, but the Polish government did everything in its power to lower them further and minimise the chances of progress. For the first time ever, the entire conference was sponsored by the business community and among these "partners" were many infamous companies who have consistently opposed European and global climate goals, including ArcelorMittal, Alstom, BMW, Emirates Airlines and General Motors. Each one had a high profile at the conference with their own so-called side events, conference websites and droves of give-aways.

Of course, the European and global coal lobby are strong players in the promised land of coal power. In parallel with the climate conference, the Polish government organised a global coal conference with the provocative name "International Coal and Climate Summit". Co-organisers were the organisation that really annoyed the climate activists: the World Coal Association.

Coal came to dominate the entire UN conference, from the sweet coal smoke that swept across the capital to seminars and presentations of 'Clean Coal' as it was called, roughly the perfect dictionary illustration of an oxymoron. The Polish government was perhaps pleased with the outcome when Japan, Canada and Australia announced that they were backing away from their previous commitments to reduce emissions. In a demonstration of strength, Polish prime minister Donald Tusk also showed what he really thought of the event by firing his own environment minister, who was also the president of the meeting, in the middle of an ongoing conference.<sup>9</sup>

Which was why so many of the green and indigenous people's NGOs walked out. Winnie Byanyima, director of Oxfam International, said: "We are walking out of these talks because governments need to know that enough is enough. People around the globe have a right to know about the

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<sup>9</sup> See also:

<https://corporateeurope.org/en/blog/auction-our-climate-highest-bidder>

<https://corporateeurope.org/en/blog/cop19-guide-corporate-lobbying>

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/nov/08/polands-coal-climate-summit-outrageous-irrelevant>

desperate state of these negotiations. The stakes are too high to allow governments to make a mockery of these talks."<sup>10</sup>

By Lima in 2014, only BMW was left among the sponsors. It was there again for COP21 in Paris in 2015 – a crucial year – when most of the sponsors were involved in, and would profit from, agreement not division.

Yet at the time, it was clear that other sponsors had been included, when about a fifth of the £120m cost of the conference came from firms such as EDF, Engie (formerly known as GDF Suez), Air France, Renault-Nissan, the outdoor advertising giant JCDecaux and BNP Paribas. Oxfam France denounced this as greenwash and hypocrisy, saying that the summit would now “be financed by French champions of pollution”.

“The fact of the matter is that we do indeed need some financing from the private sector to face the expenses of the Paris conference,” an official close to the discussions told the *Guardian*. “If we were to only ask support from the most consistent clean technology companies, many of whom are relatively small, we would not achieve that.”<sup>11</sup>

“The world is imperfect and we are trying with a great sense of urgency to move in a better direction. We think we should work with those who may be part of the problem for the time being but who are on the right track, and seriously interested in improving the situation. It is not a perfect choice. It is a pragmatic choice, but we had to do it.”

One sponsor, General Motors, had also funded the climate-sceptic Heartland Institute (until 2012).<sup>12</sup> The logo of Poland’s second-largest Petroleum corporation, Grupa Lotos, adorned the 11,000 tote bags handed out to delegates at the Warsaw conference.

Yet the organisers in Paris had already turned down a number of polluters on the grounds that – as this year’s organisers say – they were “not compatible with the spirit of COP.”

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<sup>10</sup> <https://rightsandresources.org/blog/the-guardian-green-groups-walk-out-of-un-climate-talks/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/may/29/paris-climate-summit-sponsors-include-fossil-fuel-firms-and-big-carbon-emitters>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2012/mar/30/climate-change-general-motors-heartland-institute>



SpooF poster targeting Air France's sponsorship of the COP21 climate talks in Paris, 2015. Design by Matt Bonner.

The green groups argued that Air France had opposed emissions cuts in aviation. Engie was responsible for coal-fired emissions equivalent to nearly half of France's annual carbon output. And BNP Paribas was identified as one of the top 10 global coal lending banks between 2005-2013.

"While the French government had said that they would look for businesses with flawless reputations, many of them are involved in projects harmful to people, their quality of life and

work,” said Malika Peyraut of Friends of the Earth.<sup>13</sup> “Putting the most important climate conference of the decade under the patronage of climate-incompatible businesses does not bode well.”

In 2018, the same issues were emerging again because COP 24 was to be held in the heart of the Polish mining sector in Katowice in Upper Silesia. Resolve magazine was full of advertorials about how many Poles coal-mining still employs – 100,000. It was clear that with sponsors like they had in 2014, little progress would be made.

Polish Environment minister Henryk Kowalczyk told reporters in Warsaw that the state-owned JWS company along with coal-based energy companies PGE and Tauron were chosen as partners for the global talks aimed at cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

Poland's PZU insurance giant, its PKO BP bank and the PGNiG natural gas company were also sponsors. All six companies are state-owned.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://corporateeurope.org/en/pressreleases/2015/05/cop21-sponsors-are-not-so-climate-friendly?page=0,2>

## Section 3:

# Advertising for COP26



For COP26 the UK government promised that sponsors would be “leaders in their industry, driving positive change and innovation towards a lower carbon world.”

Yet emails released to campaign group **Culture Unstained** following Freedom of Information requests revealed **a backchannel between oil companies and officials** that compromise the UK’s attempts to show climate leadership.<sup>14</sup>

They reveal how Equinor, Shell and BP have been in close talks with UK government officials for many months, discussing sponsorship and other forms of partnership around the summit. They show how:

- Norwegian oil giant Equinor has had in-depth meetings with the COP Unit and was brazenly pushing for a sponsorship deal in emails to civil servants last October: “If I was to ask you – ballpark – how much money you would like from us, for what, and with what visibility for us, what would you say?”
- During a two-week period in March, BP discussed its involvement in COP26 at four separate meetings across government, including over lunch with Minister for Business Kwasi Kwarteng, where notes recorded how: “[BP] really want to be involved [in COP26] and [is] keen to work with the government. [BP is] currently meeting with several different people from all across government.”
- Shell has been seeking to ‘partner’ with the government on COP since July 2019 and raised COP26 over dinner with the UK Ambassador in The Hague. Campaigners have been calling on the President of COP26, Alok Sharma, to explicitly rule out any partnerships with fossil fuel companies.

To counter such moves, a coalition of climate organisations (including Culture Unstained, 350.org, Glasgow Calls Out Polluters, Polluters Out, Friends of the Earth Scotland and Corporate Europe Observatory) launched a petition calling on Alok Sharma and the COP Unit to: (a) Publicly rule out fossil

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<sup>14</sup> <https://cultureunstained.org/2020/10/01/oil-companies-secret-push-to-co-opt-cop26-revealed/>

fuel companies as sponsors because they are responsible for high levels of greenhouse gas emissions and are continuing to invest in fossil fuel extraction. (b) Make sure that no big polluters – or companies facilitating other forms of environmental destruction – are included as sponsors of the COP.

Evidence of lobbying and government relationships that undermine the COP extend further. In 2020, representatives from ExxonMobil, Shell, Chevron, Equinor and BP met the then UK trade minister for a private dinner in Texas where natural gas was championed as a “vital part of the solution” to tackling climate change, according to a freedom of information request obtained by Greenpeace UK’s investigations unit Unearthed.<sup>15</sup>

In fact, climate scientists have warned that the rising production of natural gas is becoming one of the biggest drivers of climate change, instead of being a solution.

A Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office spokesperson told Channel 4 News that the meeting was a “routine engagement with the energy industry” focused on transitioning to cleaner energy, adding that they were “not lobbied”.

BP, Shell, Equinor and Chevron all defended their actions and said they are committed to a cleaner energy future and reducing carbon emissions. ExxonMobil added that oil and gas will “continue to play a critical role in meeting the world’s demand for energy”.

Then, in July 2021, undercover footage taken of a senior ExxonMobil lobbyist claimed the company believes natural gas is “not just a bridge fuel” and it can play a “key role” in the drive for a “clean electricity standard”. ExxonMobil’s chief executive apologised for the lobbyist’s statements, but said that he was not involved in developing the company’s policy positions on the issues.

## What is going on?

A majority of the world’s governments have signed up to the Paris climate accord where they committed to try to limit temperature to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels. A report in May 2021 by the International Energy Agency, which works with countries to shape energy policies, says that – to reach that target – no new oil and gas fields should be

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.channel4.com/news/revealed-fossil-fuel-companies-lobby-uk-government-for-gas-compromise-ahead-of-cop26>

approved for development beyond those already committed to by 2021.<sup>16</sup> Others, of course, point out that only a small fraction of existing known reserves can be safely used.

Climate scientists say the rising production of natural gas is emerging as one of the biggest drivers of climate change, and that plans for industry expansion could hobble efforts to stabilise the Earth's climate.

Britain's Consul-General in Houston, Richard Hyde, also attended the meeting and he wrote a memo for the British government. He said that the oil companies "want to work with the UK, including during our leadership of COP 26".<sup>17</sup>

But the companies "need support from governments like ours so they can be seen as a vital part of the solution to future energy provision", the notes say. He added: "There needs to be a greater recognition of the role of gas in transition... It is cleaner than coal and is fundamental to the Texas economy." Moving the US and the developing world from coal to gas was a "necessary compromise," he wrote.

Unusually, what is visible here is the smooth development of a lobbying effort by the fossil fuel industry to derail the efforts of COP26. This lobbying normally takes place unseen, and – most recently – because of the privileged position these companies pay for as a result of sponsoring the COP conferences.

That is the purpose of this section – to try to make these influences more visible.

## Lobbying against the climate

The whole process of negotiating any kind of solution to global warming – starting with the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 – has involved fossil fuel companies lobbying heavily at various levels to secure their interests.

To achieve this, they began by forming a number of umbrella groups, like the Global Climate Coalition (GCC) and the Climate Council which presented their interests as those of business in general. In fact, the core membership of these groups, particularly the GCC and those like it, were coal and oil companies, particularly from the USA – though chemical companies and car manufacturers were also well represented.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/2bf04fff-5b2f-4d96-a4ea-ff55e029f18e>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.channel4.com/news/revealed-fossil-fuel-companies-lobby-uk-government-for-gas-compromise-ahead-of-cop26>

The GCC, which described itself as ‘the leading business voice on climate change’, included among its members a number of familiar names like the American Petroleum Institute, Du Pont, Dow, Ford, General Motors, Texaco, Chevron, Exxon Mobil and Shell.<sup>18</sup> Tactics had been tested as American tobacco companies fought against legislation to prevent them from advertising.<sup>19</sup> They included:

- Emphasising remaining scientific uncertainties concerning global warming, in order to suggest that the scientific evidence is inadequate as a basis for limitations on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.
- Engaging in highly misleading campaigns in the mass media, suggesting that there is no evidence for global warming.
- Arguing that the costs of emissions to industrialised economies of limiting emissions will be very high, and will significantly reduce GDP.
- Threatening nations to prevent the adoption of policies to limit emissions.

That is why heavy industry and oil interests in the Netherlands threatened to relocate and transfer new investments abroad if the Dutch government introduced a unilateral energy levy in 1992. The Dutch government subsequently postponed a decision on the levy until the completion of an EU-wide proposal. This was effectively terminated at birth by industry protests.<sup>20</sup>

## The new push behind global-heating gas

Several cities in America have tried to scale back their use of gas, leading to a backlash from energy companies. The California city of Santa Barbara is attempting to transition to renewables and is voting on a gas ban on new build properties. Residents have since been bombarded with unsolicited emails and texts from a group linked to Southern California Gas (SoCal).

Dr Leah Stokes, of the University of California, Santa Barbara, investigated the lobbying tactics used by SoCal. “The first text

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<sup>18</sup> A Climate for Business: Global Warming, the State and Capital, Peter Newell and Matthew Paterson, *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Winter, 1998), pp. 679-703

<sup>19</sup> See for example, Boyle *et al* (2020), xxx

<sup>20</sup> Newell and Paterson (1998). *Op cit*.

message said that the city of Santa Barbara is trying to take gas out of your homes and it's going to destabilise the grid and write to them right now to stop them. And I thought: that's very strange.<sup>21</sup>

"The second text was signed Californian Balanced Energy Solutions and I knew exactly who that was. That's the front group for SolCal gas. They are representing our interests, while they spread lies."

Meagan Harmon, who is a member of the Santa Barbara City Council, said that after the texts were sent out, the council was inundated with complaints and objections.

In Texas, the city of Austin tried to phase out the use of natural gas on new builds as well, but the representatives from the energy industry have since made a bid to water down the proposals. Shane Johnson, a clean energy distributed organiser at Sierra Club in Austin, said the representatives "went to the state government level" and they asked them to "ban cities from banning natural gas hook-ups".<sup>22</sup>

Greenpeace contacted the firms that attended the lobbying dinner. Shell, BP, Equinor and Chevron all defended their lobbying – and said they were committed to a cleaner energy future and to reducing carbon emissions. All said they "support the Paris Agreement".

ExxonMobil said that oil and gas will "continue to play a critical role in meeting the world's demand for energy", noting that "many national and state governments have included a shift to natural gas in their carbon-reduction programs, recognising the contribution that natural gas can make."

A Foreign Office spokesperson said: "To achieve net zero we need to speak to a variety of partners across different sectors, including those in the energy industry. This was a routine engagement with the energy industry focused on the importance of the transition to a clean energy future. We discussed their investments in renewable energies and their decarbonisation plans, and we were not lobbied."<sup>23</sup>

In the early 1990s, a number of energy companies warned European governments that they would not develop strategies to meet voluntary energy efficiency targets if the

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.channel4.com/news/revealed-fossil-fuel-companies-lobby-uk-government-for-gas-compromise-ahead-of-cop26>

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> <https://unearthed.greenpeace.org/2021/07/07/oil-gas-transition-climate-cop-lobby/>

carbon tax was implemented unilaterally – which meant, in effect, withdrawing their cooperation from efforts to meet European targets.<sup>24</sup>

Deliberate non-cooperation when policies are being implemented is another channel of resistance available to industry. Trade associations of appliance-makers obstructed European Union efforts to impose mandatory standards for energy efficiency on their products, by refusing to supply data and co-operate in an energy efficiency study on which to base policy, hampering the efforts of the EU to meet its obligations under the Climate Convention.<sup>25</sup>

In 1994, the National Association of Manufacturers and the US Chamber of Commerce, in conjunction with the electric power industry, threatened the funding for the US National Climate Change Action Plan in Congress, after Clinton supported negotiating legal commitments at Berlin, the first meeting of COP to reduce greenhouse gas emissions beyond 2000.<sup>26</sup>

Agreements made at the international level can be watered down or prevented from being implemented by veto power at the national or regional level.

Governments routinely consult and take account of the interests of energy lobbies when proposals are being formulated. This means that some of the organisations involved in lobbying on global warming, such as UNICE (Union of Industrial and Employers' Associations) in Europe, are "invariably consulted by the Commission almost as a matter of right".<sup>27</sup>

The access to policy makers which energy interests are permitted is a function of their economic role, revolving doors between industry and government and the resources they invest in lobbying.

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<sup>24</sup> ENDS Report (1992a) 'Carbon friendly industrialists', 207 (April).

<sup>25</sup> Acid News (1994) 'Efficacy standards halted by controversy', 5 December.

<sup>26</sup> See Newell and Paterson (1998) *Op cit*.

<sup>27</sup> Collie, L. (1993) 'Business lobbying in the European Community: the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe', in S. Mazzei and J. Richardson (eds) *Lobbying in the EC*, London: Oxford University Press, 225.

## Fighting a carbon tax in Europe

The proposals of the European Union for a community-wide carbon tax in 1991 provide the clearest example of the direct effects of corporate lobbying in vetoing the emergence of a policy designed to limit greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>28</sup>

The prospect of the tax “spurred the massed ranks of Europe’s industrialists to mount what is probably their most powerful offensive against a European proposal”.<sup>29</sup>

Carlo Ripa di Meana, then Environment Commissioner, described the lobbying as a “violent assault”. Certainly, the arguments put forward by industry featured highly in policy makers’ minds in their decisions. Philip Dykins, of the UK Department of the Environment’s Global Atmosphere Division, said: “We’re very concerned about the possible impacts of a carbon tax on industry ... it’s a competitive disadvantage for industry, that’s a big consideration.”<sup>30</sup>

European commissioners were told that in order for Europe to meet its goal of stabilising emissions at 1990 levels by the end of the decade, a \$18 a barrel tax would be necessary, but they concluded that the tax was “not politically realistic”.<sup>31</sup>

The carbon tax proposal became conditional on similar actions being adopted by industrial competitors such as the United States and Japan. Energy-intensive industries were also exempted from the tax. Major caveats which appeared in the proposal suggested a desire on the part of governments to “limit damage to oil companies which argue the tax would handicap them in international markets”.<sup>32</sup>

The Commission delayed the tax proposals in response to the concern of the oil industry, as expressed through Europia (the European Petroleum Industry Association), which demanded that officials prove that the tax would be the most economically efficient way of meeting the stabilisation target.<sup>33</sup>

The idea of a draft directive on the tax was abandoned. It ended up just as a recommendation for legislation with each EU member deciding individually

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<sup>28</sup> Newell and Paterson (1998).

<sup>29</sup> *The Economist* (1992) ‘Europe’s industries play dirty’, 9 May.

<sup>30</sup> Newell and Paterson (1998).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Gribben, R. (1992), *Daily Telegraph*, May 27.

<sup>33</sup> *Environment Business* (1992), July 31. Quoted in Peter Newell (2006), *Climate for Change: Non-State Actors and the Global Politics*, Cambridge; CUP.

Whether to implement the proposal. Lobbyists had been able to erode the consensus among states within the community in favour of a binding directive, mainly because of heavy pressure from industry groups.<sup>34</sup>

Every year, the world's five largest publicly owned oil and gas companies spend approximately \$200 million on lobbying designed to control, delay or block binding climate policies. They are generally reluctant to disclose such lobbying expenditure, of course. Yet BP has the highest annual expenditure on climate lobbying at \$53 million, according to research by InfluenceMap, followed by Shell with \$49 million and ExxonMobil with \$41 million.<sup>35</sup>

In the USA in the ten years from 2006-16, their fossil fuel and utilities industries raised and spent more than \$900m lobbying against climate policies, while environmental groups spent just over \$48m during the same period.<sup>36</sup>

This money helps foster cozy relationships between industry and government: a Canadian study found that fossil fuel lobbyists were in contact with government officials the equivalent of six times every working day from 2011-18.<sup>37</sup>

At COP25, over 40 Gulf state delegates were current or former employees of fossil fuel companies.<sup>38</sup>

So there is the problem, via advertising and sponsorship, lobbyists manage to steal a march on the coming negotiations. Is there anything that can be done?

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<sup>34</sup> *The Guardian* (1992), Feb 18. and ENDS Report (1992), no 208, May. Quoted in Newell and Paterson (1998).

<sup>35</sup> <https://influencemap.org/report/How-Big-Oil-Continues-to-Oppose-the-Paris-Agreement-38212275958aa21196dae3b76220bdc>

<sup>36</sup> Brulle, R. J. (2018). The climate lobby: A sectoral analysis of lobbying spending on climate change in the USA, 2000 to 2016. *Climatic Change*, 149(3-4), 289-303. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-018-2241-z>

<sup>37</sup> <https://ipolitics.ca/2019/11/05/new-ccpa-report-claims-fossil-fuel-industry-lobbyists-made-11000-contacts-from-2011-18/>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.desmog.com/2019/12/13/cop25-over-40-gulf-state-delegates-are-current-or-former-employees-fossil-fuel-companies/>

## Section 4:

# Recommendations



Part of the problem is that COPs have become like trade fairs, set up in such a way that they create lobbying opportunities for well-funded major energy companies who can afford large scale presences and displays, often more so than whole nations from the Global South. At the height of the pandemic, a Swedish civil society initiative proposed ways to increase digitisation at COP. Several factors, said the Swedish government, make it difficult to get regular climate negotiations. They include security issues, time differences and broadband availability, especially in developing countries. Change and innovation is now much needed.<sup>39</sup>

### Recommendations:

To make sure that sponsorships and advertising never undermine the purpose of the COPs, and to prevent corporate capture and greenwash attempts by big polluters within and outside COP events, conference hosts need to carefully regulate sponsorship and advertising activities taking place within a reasonable perimeter of the conference.

Like the regulations applied to tobacco companies by the World Health Organisation, hosts of COP events should apply the same principles to high-carbon companies and sectors including airlines, car manufacturers and fossil fuel industries.

<sup>40</sup> More specifically, hosts need to:

1. Turn down any sponsorship deal by high-carbon companies, sectors and trade associations.<sup>41</sup>
2. Regulate advertising and marketing activities by high-carbon companies within the conference centre. In addition, hosts should take steps to work with local authorities to prevent these same companies from advertising their products and services within a reasonable proximity of the conference centre.

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<sup>39</sup> <https://www.climateaction.org/climate-leader-interviews/isabella-loevin-on-what-needs-to-be-achieved-in-the-next-12-months-in-the-r>

<sup>40</sup> We define fossil fuel companies as firms and associated sub brands or lobbying organisations that extract, refine, produce, supply, distribute, or sell any fossil fuels.

<sup>41</sup> Glasgow Calls Polluters Out, 2020. Open Letter to the UK Government: Kick Polluters Out of COP26 <https://www.gcop.scot/open-letter/>

Building upon these demands, we support recommendations from **Glasgow Calls Out Polluters** to:

3. 'Lock polluters out' by adopting a conflict of interest policy that blocks high-carbon companies from access to accreditations, expert and advisory bodies and UNFCCC posts, and ends sponsorship deals.

Instead greater participation should be prioritised for those communities in the Global South most affected by climate breakdown. Measures could include equity based quotas for physical delegation sizes complemented with online participation and financial support for attendance.

# Appendix



## The Badvertising campaign

'Badvertising' started as a new campaign to stop adverts fuelling the climate emergency, including ads for cars, airline flights and fossil fuels. It was launched in 2020 to huge media attention as a joint venture between the New Weather thinktank and the campaigners at the climate charity, Possible. It also worked closely with the Rapid Transition Alliance.

The campaign has built successful connections with international anti-advertising networks. They set up several calls with the **Subvertisers International** network to share updates and plan joint interventions. Other actions included setting up a Badvertising group in Sweden. There are good links with Amsterdam's ban on fossil fuels and aviation advertising, with the French network **Résistance À l'Agression Publicitaire**, the Dutch anti-advertising group **Reclame Fossielvrij** and the Belgian environmental NGO **IEW** – and with the German NGO **Deutsche Umwelthilfe** who said they would lead a campaign against SUV advertising (though they are actually running it about SUV cars).