



**FOSSIL FREE
PARLIAMENT**

Fossil Fuel Lobbying Limits Climate Action

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- UK government ministers met with oil and gas lobbyists 343 times in 2023 - an average of 1.4 times per working day.¹ 10 of the UK's most prominent climate and social justice organisations met with ministers only 33 times in this same period.²
- Fossil fuel donations are pervasive across the political spectrum:
 - Labour MPs have received at least £45,000 from oil and gas lobbyists since July 2024³
 - Between the 2019 & 2024 General Elections, the Conservative party received at least £8.4 million from fossil fuel, polluter and climate denier interests⁴
 - Reform received 92% of its funding from fossil fuel interests in the same period
- The government's package of energy policies goes some way to progressing climate action, but past evidence shows this will continue to be undermined while oil and gas lobbyists have easy access to policy making.
- To protect energy and climate policy from the fossil fuel lobby, we need a framework and regulation that restricts government engagement with the industry.
- The Fossil Free Parliament campaign is calling for all MPs and Peers to reject fossil fuel industry donations, and work to restrict the fossil fuel industry's political access.

What's the problem?

Since scientists first began to warn of the rapidly shrinking window of opportunity to avert a climate emergency, fossil fuel companies and their lobbyists have denied the science and sabotaged climate policy.⁵ This has enabled them to continue to make billions in profits from fossil fuel production while heating the planet. Not one of the world's largest oil and gas companies are shifting their business models to align with the Paris Agreement.⁶ Allowing these companies to fund political parties, lobby government officials and even staff government departments means climate policy is captured by those that profit from its disruption and delay.

- 1 ['The UK government met with oil lobbyists every day last year'](#), Global Witness, 28 June 2024
- 2 Based on analysis of the [Open Access UK](#) database of ministerial meetings. The 10 organisations are: Greenpeace; Friends of the Earth; WWF UK; Global Witness; Shelter; Age UK; Child Poverty Action Group; National Energy Action; Fuel Poverty Action; and End Fuel Poverty Coalition.
- 3 R. Lott-Lavigna ['New Labour MPs take over £45,000 from oil and has lobbyists'](#), Global Witness, 21 August 2024
- 4 S. Bright, ['Tories Have Received £8.4 Million from Fossil Fuel Interests, Polluters and Climate Deniers Since 2019 Election'](#), DeSmog, 23 May 2024
- 5 ['Big Oil's Big History of Blocking Climate Action'](#), InfluenceMap, 26 October 2021
- 6 M. O'Connor, ['Paris Maligned II: Climate alignment assessments reveal oil and gas company transition risk exposure'](#), Carbon Tracker, 20 March 2024

How does fossil fuel lobbying happen and what impact does it have? A few key case studies

Fossil fuel donations



Unscientific climate and energy policy

A correlation between fossil fuel-linked donations and fossil fuel-friendly policies was a distinctive feature of the last government. In the year leading up to the publication of the North Sea transition deal in 2021, companies and individuals with North Sea oil and gas interests donated £420 000 to the Conservative party. When the deal was published, it was accompanied by the announcement of a new round of licensing for oil and gas wells. This was despite the assertion made shortly after by the International Energy Agency - in research commissioned by the Government as the hosts of COP26 - that there could be no new development of fossil fuels if the world is to contain global heating to 1.5°C.⁷

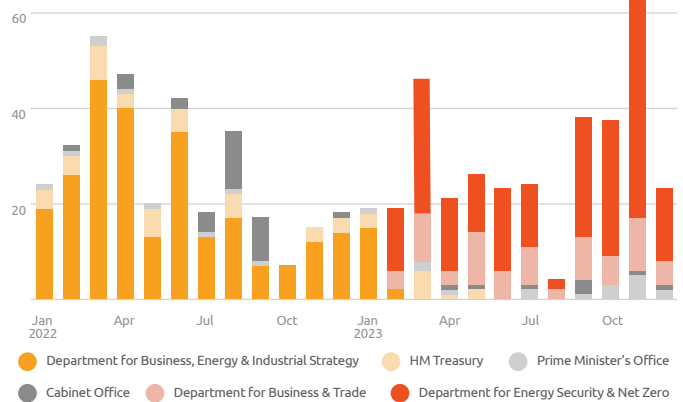
Between the 2019 and 2024 General Elections, the Conservatives received £8.4 million in donations from fossil fuel, polluter and climate denialist interests. In that time, they revoked a number of the UK's key climate commitments and issued hundreds of new oil and gas licences, mandating annual new licencing rounds via the Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill. The government argued that these decisions were made in favour of the public purse, but the Climate Change Committee, in its most recent assessment of Parliament's progress towards its climate goals, stated that "there was no evidence backing the claim that dialling back ambition would reduce costs to citizens".⁸

Easy access to government ministers



Erosion of good climate and energy policy

Government ministers met with oil and gas lobbyists 673 times across 2022 and 2023, equivalent to 1.3 times every working day.



Distribution of oil and gas lobbyist meetings with ministers across government departments, 2022-2023
Analysis conducted by Global Witness, 2024⁹

In 2023, oil and gas lobbyists were able to meet with government ministers 343 times - an average of 1.4 times per working day.¹⁰ 10 of the UK's most prominent climate and social justice organisations were only able to meet with ministers 33 times in this same period.¹¹ This superior access to government ministers allows the industry to influence any policy that may impact its business model.

When the prospect of a "windfall tax" on oil and gas profits after Russia invaded Ukraine was introduced in May 2022, the leading industry lobby group Offshore Energies UK (OEUK), and its operator members - such as Shell, BP and Equinor - leveraged their ability to easily access policy makers to make the tax as industry-friendly as possible. In June, when the government held its official consultation on the windfall tax, OEUK and its operator members had 28 meetings with Ministers - more than once every working day. When the tax policy was finalised in July, it contained loopholes and provisions that reflected requests made by OEUK in those meetings and associated letters - such as the protection of Petroleum Revenue Tax refunds relating to decommissioning, which effectively results in HMRC giving public money to oil and gas companies thanks to a tax break that means oil rig decommissioning expenditure reduces companies' taxable profits. These loopholes, alongside a dip in oil and gas prices, meant that the windfall tax raised only half its original target - £2.6 billion instead of £5 billion.¹²

7 F. Harvey, 'Oil and gas donors gave over £400k to Tories before North Sea decision', Guardian, 24 June 2021

8 '2024 Progress Report to Parliament', Climate Change Committee, 18 July 2024

9 Global Witness analysis of Open Access UK data 2024, Global Witness, 28 June 2024

10 'The UK government met with oil lobbyists every day last year', Global Witness, 28 June 2024

11 Same analysis as referenced in footnote 2.

12 'UNCOVERED: How opaque groups and privileged access enabled the fossil fuel industry to derail the windfall tax', Fossil Free Parliament, 24 October 2023

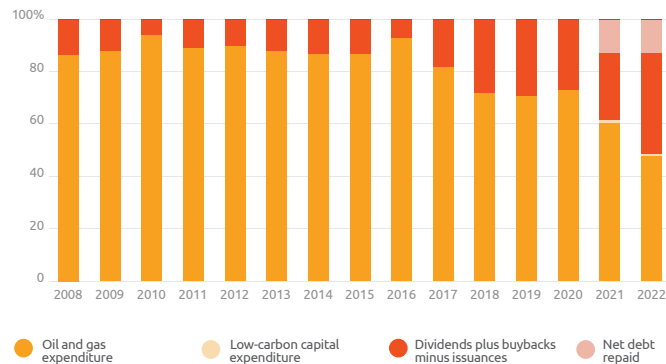
Fossil fuel-sponsored political events



Misleading policy makers

The fossil fuel industry regularly seeks out opportunities to sponsor or host events that will allow them access to policy makers. For example, in May 2024, Norwegian oil giant Equinor partnered with Politico to present a climate and energy summit, which included policy maker speakers and targeted a policy maker audience.¹³ By taking a leading role in the summit, Equinor was able to strengthen its brand association with the energy transition. As 99.85% of the energy that Equinor produced in 2023 came from fossil fuels, the association is illusory. So illusory, in fact, that in 2023 the Advertising Standards Agency (ASA) banned the company from repeating such environmental claims as they were: “likely to mislead the contribution that lower-carbon initiatives played as a part of the overall balance of the company’s activities”.¹⁴ It is worth noting that, in their complaint to the ruling, Equinor emphasised that the adverts targeted decision makers, including politicians, and not the general public.

Instead of investing in low carbon technologies, the oil and gas industry is continuing to invest in more oil and gas and in record shareholder payouts and dividend buybacks.



Distribution of cash spending by the oil and gas industry 2008-2022, International Energy Agency¹⁵

At the summit, Equinor also spoke on a panel about carbon capture and storage (CCS), a technology favoured by the fossil fuel industry as it could allow for fossil fuel extraction to continue at pace for decades to come. They are not alone in targeting political parties to eulogise the benefits of CCS; the Carbon Capture and Storage Association - a CCS lobby group whose membership includes BP, Shell, Equinor, Eni, Harbour Energy and other fossil fuel giants - was able to hold 13 events across the Conservative and Labour party conferences in 2023.¹⁶ Most CCS projects are in development in order to enable the production of more fossil fuels, not less; nearly 75% of CO2 captured annually is re-injected into oil fields to get more oil out of the ground, in a process called ‘Enhanced Oil Recovery’. Meanwhile, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has identified CCS as one of the least effective, and most expensive, methods available to reduce emissions.¹⁷

Staffing government departments and recruiting former ministers



Blurring the lines between government policy and industry plans

Since the Conservatives came to power in 2010, 127 former oil and gas industry employees have taken on senior positions within government, and at least two dozen former government staff went on to work for oil and gas companies.¹⁸ The revolving door spins fastest at the Foreign Office (FCDO), where at least 15 former oil industry employees, including one minister and three ambassadors, have found employment since 2011 and from where seven foreign office ministers and high commissioners have subsequently found lucrative positions in the oil and gas industry. Employees like Kate Smith, a former ambassador to Greece, who was seconded from the FCDO to Shell to advise on international government relations, before joining Shell as their head of UK government relations, and then rejoining the foreign office. Similarly, oil industry executive experience appears to be a compelling selling point for non-executive directors of government departmental boards - with 31 such examples since 2011. Perhaps most egregiously, five oil and gas executives have even held positions at the NSTA, the arms length body responsible for awarding licences to the oil industry. Such overlap between the industry and government bodies with responsibility for oversight of that industry should be deeply concerning - policy capture is simply incompatible with necessary climate policy.

13 ‘Energy & Climate UK 2024’, agenda of summit held by Politico, 16 May 2024
 14 K. Bryan, ‘UK advertising watchdog bans Equinor from repeating green claims’, Financial Times, 22 December 2023
 15 IEA 2023, Distribution of cash spending by the oil and gas industry, 2008-2022, Licence: CC BY 4.0
 16 Fossil Free Parliament’s own analysis of the Labour and Conservative conference fringe programmes 2023
 17 J. Skea, P. R. Shukla et al. ‘Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change Summary for Policymakers’, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2022, p. 38
 18 P. Matijevec, ‘Revealed: The revolving door between fossil fuel industry and the UK government’, The Ferret, 31 March 2024



What's the solution?

Parliament must restrict the ability of the fossil fuel industry to influence government policy. This means: no more fossil fuel donations to policy makers; no more policy maker engagement with industry-organised or affiliated events; no more lobbying meetings; and much stricter regulation of the revolving door between policy making and the industry.

The guidance for government engagement with the tobacco industry is a helpful model for how engagement with the fossil fuel industry could also be restricted. In summary of the government's approach, the guidance says:

There is a fundamental and irreconcilable conflict between the tobacco industry's interests and public health policy interests. Government officials should exercise caution during interactions with the tobacco industry, in all cases.

This exercise of caution includes rejecting any financial contributions from the tobacco industry, not attending tobacco industry events, and avoiding meeting with the industry - unless, on rare occasions, a meeting is deemed necessary, in which case strict precautions must be taken to protect the meeting from influence in favour of the industry's interests.¹⁹

A fundamental and irreconcilable conflict also exists between the fossil fuel industry's interests and climate and energy policy interests. Therefore, similar measures must be adopted to restrict the fossil fuel industry's influence over policy making as soon as possible.

¹⁹ 'Guidance for government engagement with the tobacco industry', Department of Health and Social Care, UK Government, updated 19 June 2023

Pledge to build a Fossil Free Parliament

To take a first step towards restricting the damaging impact of the fossil fuel industry's interests on policy making, the Fossil Free Parliament campaign is asking all MPs and Peers to sign a pledge:

- ✗ To work to cut fossil fuel influence out of our politics
- ✗ To personally reject all offers of donations, gifts and other benefits from the fossil fuel industry and its affiliated

If you are an MP, Peer or a member of their staff, you can read and sign the pledge here:



www.fossilfreeparliament.uk/pledge_write_mp

Otherwise, please write to your MP here:



www.fossilfreeparliament.uk/pledge

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