

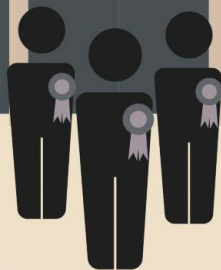


# Polluted Politics:

## The fossil fuel lobby at Holyrood



Scottish Government



**A Report by Friends of the Earth Scotland**



**Friends of  
the Earth  
Scotland**

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**Friends of the Earth Scotland** exists to win campaigns for transformative solutions to the root causes of environmental problems.

We campaign for an end to the climate crisis, for the flourishing of the Scottish environment, and for a democratic Scotland which cherishes and protects the natural world of which we are part.

We work for an economy oriented towards the needs of communities, ecosystems, and the planet.

We support people in Scotland to take individual and collective action for environmental and social justice locally, nationally, and globally.

Working with partners in Scotland and across the globe, we integrate research, political advocacy, strategic communications, mobilisation, and movement-building into focused and ambitious campaigns.

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# Executive summary

**Fossil fuels are driving multiple unfolding crises including harmful levels of air pollution on Scotland's streets, a cost-of-living crisis resulting from the UK's dependence on gas, and global climate change which is wiping out whole ecosystems and displacing hundreds of millions of people.**

The Scottish Government is planning to decarbonise Scotland's economy and the United Nations Secretary-General has insisted that climate action must address fossil fuels, describing them as the "poisoned root of the climate crisis".

Scotland's progress in implementing the economic changes necessary to decarbonise has been too slow and, where they have been constructed, renewable energy systems are bringing few jobs.

Fossil fuel companies benefit from this lack of progress and remain a hugely powerful obstacle to change. In 2022 North Sea oil companies BP, Shell and Equinor made \$143 billion in profit. Every major oil company remains fully committed to exploring for new sources of fossil fuel.

**Fossil fuel companies are aggressive in protecting their interests and promoting their brand.**

They have donated millions to UK political parties, entertained MPs at hospitality events, help run Parliamentary bodies, send hundreds of representatives to the UN climate talks, sponsor major sporting events, while investing token amounts in novel technologies and renewable energy to try and 'greenwash' their image.

Evidence suggests that fossil fuel lobbying is negatively impacting UK policymaking, such as the watering down of the recent oil and gas 'windfall tax'.

Our research into the Scottish Parliament Lobbying Register and ministerial diaries found 790 meetings between the fossil fuel industry and members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) between 2018 and 2023.

**During an average working week at the Scottish Parliament fossil fuel companies were meeting over six MSPs, well above one every working day.**

309 incidents were with MSPs who have served as Scottish Government ministers, 481 were with backbench and opposition MSPs.

Michael Matheson MSP, cabinet secretary since 2014, including for Net Zero, Energy and Transport from 2018–23 received 78 engagements, almost 10% of all recorded lobbying while Gillian Martin MSP, Minister for Energy and Environment, has met the fossil fuel industry once a fortnight since being appointed in March 2023. Conservative MSP Liam Kerr was the most lobbied opposition or backbench MSP followed by Alexander Burnett MSP, Conservative, and Lewis MacDonald MSP, Labour.

Fossil fuel companies BP, Shell, SSE and Centrica had the most meetings, successfully pursuing MSPs nearly 400 times. Lobby group Offshore Energies UK, known as Oil & Gas UK until 2022, had 103 meetings.

The two busiest months for recorded lobbying were November 2021, coinciding with the UN COP26 summit taking place in Glasgow, and May 2023, shortly after Humza Yousaf became First Minister.

Political party conferences were a common venue for fossil fuel lobbying. Scotland's political parties advertise access to "high profile MSPs" in exchange for stall and fringe fees.



Other examples of meetings include Scottish Government ministers meeting fossil fuel companies inside UN climate talks, a Scottish Government banquet at Edinburgh Castle attended by BP and Shell, teams of fossil fuel representatives lobbying MSPs at several annual Holyrood Magazine garden parties, and multiple meetings intended to influence MSPs about approval of the massive Rosebank oilfield.

The scale of lobbying is likely to be much larger than what was found due to loopholes in the law, including that phone calls and online calls with no video do not need to be recorded.

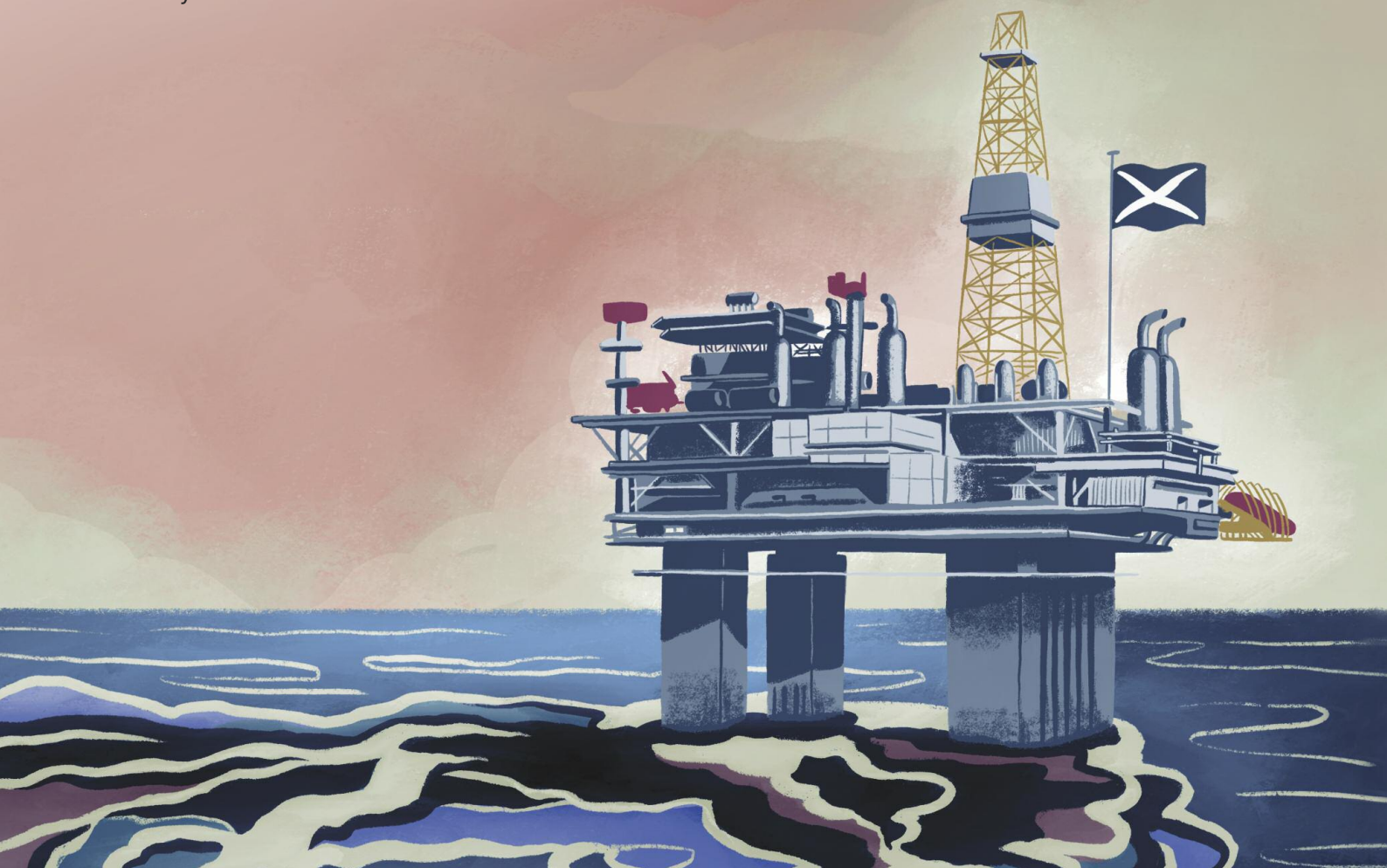
## Policy making could be improved by keeping fossil fuel companies at bay.

At COP26 the UK Government resisted pressure from oil companies by refusing to offer them conference sponsorship opportunities, and new rules have since made oil lobbyists at the UN more visible. The Welsh Parliament's fossil free policy seeks to end conflicts of interest by divesting parliamentarians' pensions from fossil fuels by 2025.

Based on UN guidelines, the UK Government has rules designed to exclude tobacco companies from influencing health policy: government representatives cannot attend tobacco industry events, meetings minutes must be published, and tobacco companies are barred from funding public programmes. The Scottish Government should adopt a similar approach to protect climate policy-making from the powerful and pernicious influence of fossil fuel lobbying.

The Scottish Government, MSPs and Scottish MPs should also support measures to end fossil fuel funding of UK political parties, exclude the fossil fuel industry from UN climate negotiations, and advance non-proliferation of fossil fuels globally.

## A just transition to a safe climate future can only be achieved if we end the pollution of our politics by fossil fuel companies.



# 1 Introduction





Friends of the Earth Scotland has been campaigning for a just transition to a renewable powered and zero-fossil-fuel Scotland for several decades, as part of a growing global movement for urgent action on the climate crisis.

The need for action has never been clearer, and yet progress remains inadequate and painfully slow. It can seem as if every time a democratic movement calls for climate action, it is forcibly opposed by a powerful lobbying operation run by the fossil fuel industry.

To understand the scale of the fossil fuel lobby in Scotland, how it is able to wield power, and establish ways to protect our politics from its pernicious influence, we set about this investigation, one of the largest reviews of corporate lobbying ever undertaken in Scotland.

In this report we discuss the role of fossil fuels in the climate crisis, how fossil fuel companies are defending their interests across the UK, and the method and results of our new investigation into Scotland's fossil fuel lobbying. We also chart some examples of specific fossil fuel lobbying incidents and propose ways in which we could protect policy making from these harmful interests.

## **Fossil fuels: 'the poisoned root of the climate crisis'**

Our continuing use of fossil fuels is causing chaos and misery in Scotland and across the world.

## **The burning of fossil fuels is the primary driver of the unfolding global climate crisis.**

Billions of people live in areas that are "highly vulnerable" to the climate crisis, mass extinction of species are already under way, and in recent years as many as 43 million children have been displaced by wildfires and flooding.<sup>1</sup> To limit further damage to our climate and to keep global heating within the internationally agreed limit of 1.5°C, the UK must end fossil fuel production by 2031 and make a rapid transition to using renewable energy to power our homes, buildings and transport.

Fossil fuels are directly harming public health through their contribution to air pollution. Scotland is suffering over 2,500 premature deaths every year due to air pollution.<sup>2</sup> Switching from fossil fuelled vehicles to public transport and electric vehicles would make our streets safer and healthier.

In 2022–23 the soaring cost of gas pushed many into fuel poverty in a cost of living crisis that led to thousands of premature deaths<sup>3</sup> and a deep economic downturn. Our homes and businesses are overwhelmingly reliant on fossil gas for heating, making them vulnerable to shocks to the global gas market, as happened when Russia invaded Ukraine. Heating our buildings with renewable energy would largely eliminate this problem.

The Scottish Government has instigated policies which it says will decarbonise the economy<sup>4</sup> and when First Minister Humza Yousaf addressed the energy industry in May 2023 he took time to underscore the urgency of this change, saying "we are committed to that just transition, not just as a Government policy, but frankly as a moral imperative."<sup>5</sup>

The task of transitioning Scotland away from fossil fuels is part of a global effort. In the lead up to COP28 UN Secretary-General António Guterres stressed that fossil fuel companies are "incompatible with human survival"<sup>6</sup> and that "present trends are racing our planet down a dead-end 3°C temperature rise. This is a failure of leadership, a betrayal of the vulnerable, and a massive, missed opportunity. Renewables have never been cheaper or more accessible. We know it is still possible to make the 1.5°C degree limit a reality. It requires tearing out the poisoned root of the climate crisis: fossil fuels."<sup>7</sup>

## **Slow progress towards a just transition**

Progress in reducing climate emissions has never met the scale of ambition required to limit warming to 1.5°C degrees. Scotland's transition is neither fair or fast, with affected workers and their communities left out of key decision-making processes and not benefiting from the transition to renewables.

Since the Scottish Parliament adopted legal targets for reducing climate emissions in 2009, they have been missed on 8 out of 12 occasions<sup>8</sup> and several of the years where targets *were* met coincided with the fall in energy use associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. Revised climate targets adopted in 2019 were not sufficiently ambitious and policies to cut fossil fuel use in heating and transport are behind schedule or missing. Furthermore, where changes are taking place, they are not bringing jobs to Scotland: turnover in the offshore wind industry increased by 332% between 2020 and 2021, but employment in the field only rose by 41% in the same period.<sup>9</sup> A host of barriers are blocking oil and gas workers from transitioning into other employment, such as high retraining costs and insecure contracts, which are key factors that have slowed industrial change.<sup>10</sup>

If the transition succeeds, the fossil fuel industry stands to lose its grip on our economy. As such, every watered-down policy and delayed decision is good news for fossil fuel companies.

Fossil fuel companies are still obscenely wealthy. In 2022, BP made profits of \$28 billion,<sup>11</sup> Shell \$40 billion<sup>12</sup> and Equinor a historic \$75 billion.<sup>13</sup> The world's largest oil and gas company, Saudi Aramco, has a higher GDP than the nations of Italy, Brazil, Canada or Russia.<sup>14</sup> The industry is represented in numerous industry bodies and policy forums, spends billions on research, employs thousands of lobbyists and advertises across social media, on tv, radio and on our streets, even sponsoring major sporting events. We cannot expect this industry to “go quietly”.

**With wealth, power, and control of our energy economy, the fossil fuel industry represents *the* major obstacle in the path to a fossil free future.**

## **Fossil fuel companies are still fossil fuel companies**

Fossil fuel companies have recently begun referring to themselves as “energy companies” and talking about how they will achieve a just transition.<sup>15</sup> Offshore lobby group Oil & Gas UK has taken the new name ‘Offshore Energy UK’, Aberdeen’s Oil & Gas Technology Centre is now the ‘Net Zero Technology Centre’, former French state oil company Total has rebranded as ‘TotalEnergies’ and Norwegian national oil company StatOil has become ‘Equinor’.

However, this rebranding does not reflect any meaningful change within the fossil fuel industry.

In 2022, an independent assessment found that as oil majors were scoring record profits they remained fully committed to exploring for new sources of fossil fuels.<sup>16</sup>

In recent months, North Sea oil companies have doubled down on their commitment to new fossil fuels: BP announced it will reduce its own climate targets, Shell has cut hundreds of jobs in renewable energy<sup>17</sup> and Equinor has received approval from the UK Government for the vast new Rosebank oil field.<sup>18</sup>

In 2023, Petroineos announced it will close Scotland’s oil refinery at Grangemouth with hundreds of jobs threatened. However, there is no just transition plan for the site. Oil and gas will simply be imported with other fossil fuel operations at the site remaining including producing feedstocks for single-use plastics, and a new plant to manufacture hydrogen from fossil gas.<sup>19</sup>

Oil and gas companies are not embarking on a just transition, they are simply changing their marketing to give the impression they are reacting to public concern about the climate crisis.





Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon with Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber, head of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company. A BBC investigation found Al Jaber was using his position as President of COP28 to lobby for oil and gas interests.

(Photo: UN)

## Fossil fuels on the defence

Fossil fuel companies are desperate to use their power to maintain political support, enabling them to defend their position in the centre of our energy system. Prior to undertaking this study, we observed that the fossil fuel industry is affecting this defence in several ways:

- 1 Fossil fuel companies and backers have made significant donations to UK political parties. A DeSmog investigation found that climate sceptics and fossil fuel companies donated £3.5 million to the Conservative Party in 2022<sup>20</sup> whilst the Guardian uncovered £18,400 of donations to Labour.<sup>21</sup> Some donations were received by individual campaigns, such as Douglas Ross, leader of the Scottish Conservatives, receiving a £20,000 campaign donation from the owner of a chain of petrol stations.
- 2 Oil and gas companies have funded events at UK political party conferences, with BP, INEOS, Drax, Centrica, RWE and others paying for exhibition spaces at the Conservative Party conference,<sup>22</sup> oil lobby group Offshore Energies UK hosting events at Labour<sup>23</sup> and SNP party conferences,<sup>24</sup> and fossil gas power company SSE holding events at Labour<sup>25</sup> and SNP conference<sup>26</sup> in Autumn 2023.
- 3 In the summer of 2023, over 100 Westminster MPs were found to have attended hundreds of corporate hospitality events from a range of businesses. Some of these were hosted by fossil fuel companies, such as BP spending at least £3,000 to host both an unnamed UK Government minister<sup>27</sup> and SNP Westminster leader Stephen Flynn MP at Wimbledon.<sup>28</sup>
- 4 Oil industry lobbyists and companies with strong fossil fuel ties are helping run UK Parliament bodies.<sup>29</sup> For example, a Guardian investigation found that two separate All-Party Parliamentary Groups have received support from the UK Petroleum Industry Association and Oil & Gas UK.
- 5 Over 2,400 fossil fuel lobbyists attended the 2023 United Nations climate talks COP28,<sup>30</sup> in the United Arab Emirates, an increase from 636 fossil fuel lobbyists identified at COP27<sup>31</sup> and 503 identified at COP26 in Glasgow.<sup>32</sup> Significantly more fossil lobbyists granted access to COP28 than almost every country delegation. The current President of the UN climate negotiations, Sultan Al Jaber, is head of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company and, according to a BBC investigation, has been using his position as Chair to lobby for oil interests.<sup>33</sup>

- 6 Oil and gas companies present a positive image of themselves to the general public by sponsorship of sporting events and teams, with examples including Rugby World Cup (TotalEnergies), British Cycling (Shell), Scottish Rugby and the British Olympic Association (British Gas) and Formula One (INEOS). INEOS is also buying a stake in Manchester United, the world's second most valuable football club.<sup>34</sup> A 2021 report found over 250 examples of fossil fuels sponsoring sport globally.<sup>35</sup>
- 7 UK oil companies have taken small stakes in renewable energy, a step that commentators have described as greenwash, primarily intended to provide political cover for their ongoing extraction of fossil fuels.<sup>36</sup> For example, bidding for offshore wind developments enabled BP to join trade group Scottish Renewables, in turn giving the oil company access to new lobbying spaces.
- 8 Oil and gas companies have also taken small stakes in relatively novel technologies that both extend the life of oil and gas and help them remain relevant in discussions about the future of the energy sector. For example, Shell is a leading partner in the Acorn carbon capture and storage project in Scotland and INEOS and BP are developing separate plans to manufacture hydrogen using fossil gas.<sup>37</sup>

## How fossil fuel lobbying influences climate policy

A 2023 investigation by Fossil Free Politics shows how lobbying critically undermined the UK Government windfall tax on oil and gas profits.

Members of oil lobby group Offshore Energies UK (formerly Oil & Gas UK) met with ministers at least 210 times in the 12 months following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, more than once every working day. Oil companies were invited to swanky Westminster receptions as well as regular meetings with officials at a Treasury-run body called the Fiscal Forum.

After an intense period of lobbying, changes were made to the Energy (Oil and Gas) Profits Levy Act to reduce oil company's tax liabilities. The study shows how the changes will cost the UK Government billions of pounds of lost tax.<sup>38</sup>



RWE attended Conservative Party Conference in 2023. RWE operate the Hambach lignite coal mine, Germany's largest opencast pit and a major source of climate emissions. The site has repeatedly been disrupted by climate activists. (Photo: Ende Gelände, used with permission.)



## 2 Our Method





## Where does the data come from?

To help understand how an onslaught of fossil fuel lobbying might be bearing down on the Scottish Parliament and Government we have conducted one of the most detailed reviews of corporate lobbying ever undertaken in this country.

The investigation uses two main sources: the Scottish Parliament Lobbying Register<sup>39</sup> and the Scottish Government's monthly "Ministerial engagements, travel and gifts" report, better known as the ministerial diaries.<sup>40</sup> Where data appeared to be missing from these, we have relied on additional sources from our own monitoring and the press.

Data from the Lobbying Register is reviewed comprehensively from the register's inception in March 2018 until May 2023, the most recent legal deadline for submissions when the analysis was conducted. Although they were not yet required to do so, a number of companies and organisations had submitted lobbying data for summer 2023 when we reviewed the data, and we have included these entries, which run up to September 2023.

"Ministerial engagements, travel and gifts" reports are analysed from the previous Scottish Parliament election, May 2021 to September 2023. Sufficient resource to scrutinise earlier reports was not available for this study.

Some engagements appear on both the Lobbying Register and the ministerial diaries whilst others appear on only one or the other. Companies are required to submit engagements to the Lobbying Register where they have requested the meeting. However, events organised by ministers and MSPs do not have to be recorded on the Lobbying Register. As the Lobbying Register is more detailed, this means we know more about meetings requested by lobbyists than meetings requested by MSPs and ministers.

Some companies logged meetings with multiple MSPs, for example at a 'mass lobby' style event, as multiple engagements whilst others listed such occurrences as one meeting with multiple attendees. To provide consistency, we have counted every MSP engagement as a separate meeting.

## Which companies and organisations did we investigate?

There are a range of definitions of the fossil fuel industry available in the public domain. In this report we chose to take a relatively broad approach and use the term to refer to:

- Companies which find, extract and refine coal, oil or gas
- Companies which own or operate dedicated oil and gas supply infrastructure
- Companies and organisations which provide specialist services to the coal, oil and gas industries, such as research, servicing oil pipelines, providing deep-sea oil exploration equipment
- Organisations such as trade bodies which predominantly lobby on behalf of the above
- Electricity generating companies which own or operate fossil fuel plants
- Carbon capture and storage companies and organisations

We also used the Oil & Gas Exit List<sup>41</sup> and Coal Exit List<sup>42</sup> databases, both published by German environmental organisation Urgewald, to assist in determining whether a company was a fossil fuel company or not.

We have not included domestic energy suppliers, companies and trade bodies promoting green hydrogen or hydrogen generally, fossil fuel financiers, and government bodies with significant fossil fuel interests. Whilst we continue to monitor the behaviour of such organisations, we didn't find it helpful to include them as being part of the fossil fuel industry in this instance.

A full list of companies and organisations included can be found in the appendices.

## What kind of lobbying is not included in this study?

Phone calls and voice-only online meetings (i.e. those where the video is switched off) are not required to be submitted to the Lobbying Register. We have included them where we found them in the ministerial diaries, but this is an imperfect approach.

A 2021 investigation by the Ferret found that hundreds of phone and voice-only meetings were missing from the Lobbying Register due to this loophole.<sup>43</sup> The 'missing' meetings were found by reviewing the ministerial diaries, however, no equivalent record exists for non-ministers and so it is likely that there are many hundreds of meetings beyond still to be uncovered. We attempted to acquire information about 'missing' meetings with fossil fuel companies by making Freedom of Information requests but are yet to receive a useful response.

Meetings and phone calls are not the only way lobbying can take place. The UK Covid-19 Inquiry has revealed how WhatsApp has been used by industry representatives to lobby Government officials, including ministers.<sup>44</sup> Lobbying may also take the form of official submissions to enquiries, viewable on the Scottish Parliament website, as well as letters and emails. These are not usually published but may be subject to publication if a request is made under the Freedom of Information Act.





# 3 Our Findings



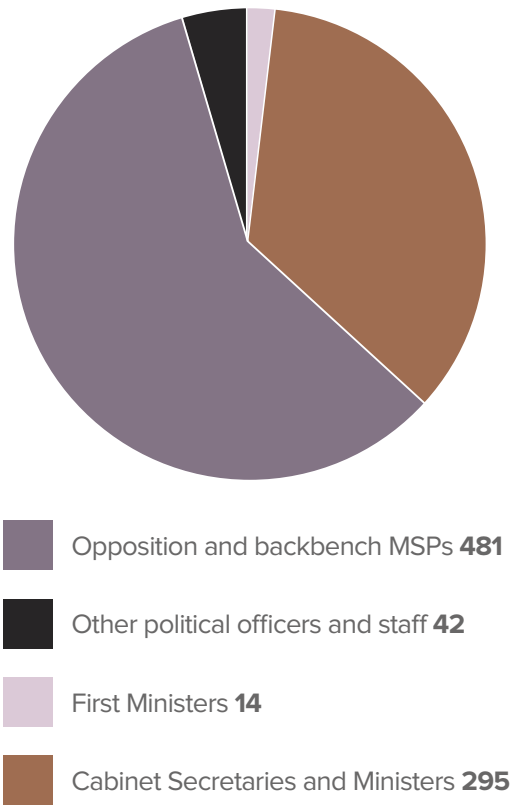


### Which MSPs were targeted the most?

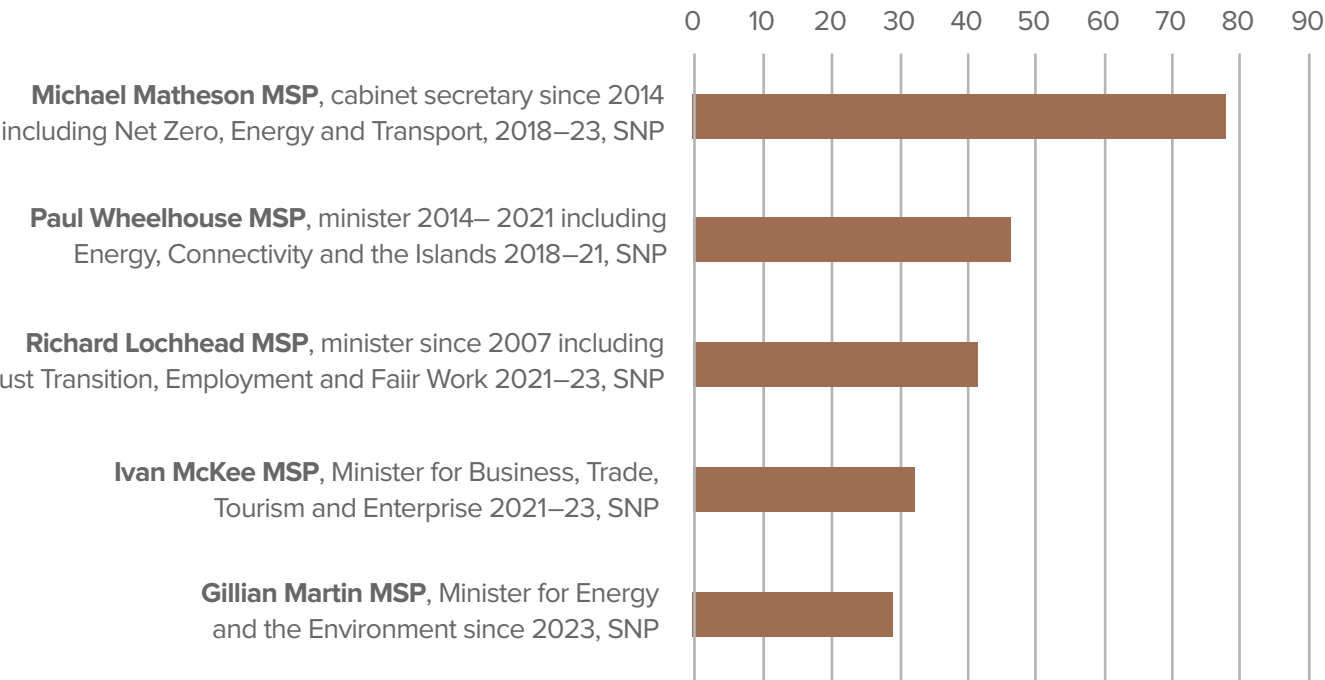
We identified 832 fossil fuel industry lobbying engagements in the records, 790 of which were with MSPs. Of these, 309 were with Scottish Government ministers and 481 were with opposition and backbench MSPs.

Scottish Government energy ministers were the focus of fossil fuel industry lobbying. Michael Matheson MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (2018–2021) and Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (2021–2023) hosted 78 engagements over the period, almost 10% of all recorded meetings between Scottish parliamentarians and the industry. Gillian Martin MSP has received 29 fossil fuel meetings since 2018, 12 of which took place after she was appointed Minister for Energy and the Environment in March 2023. This amounts to about one meeting every fortnight. First Ministers were present at 14 meetings: 12 with Nicola Sturgeon (First Minister from 2014 – March 2023) and 2 with Humza Yousaf (March 2023 – present).

Number of times the fossil industry lobbied different roles since 2018

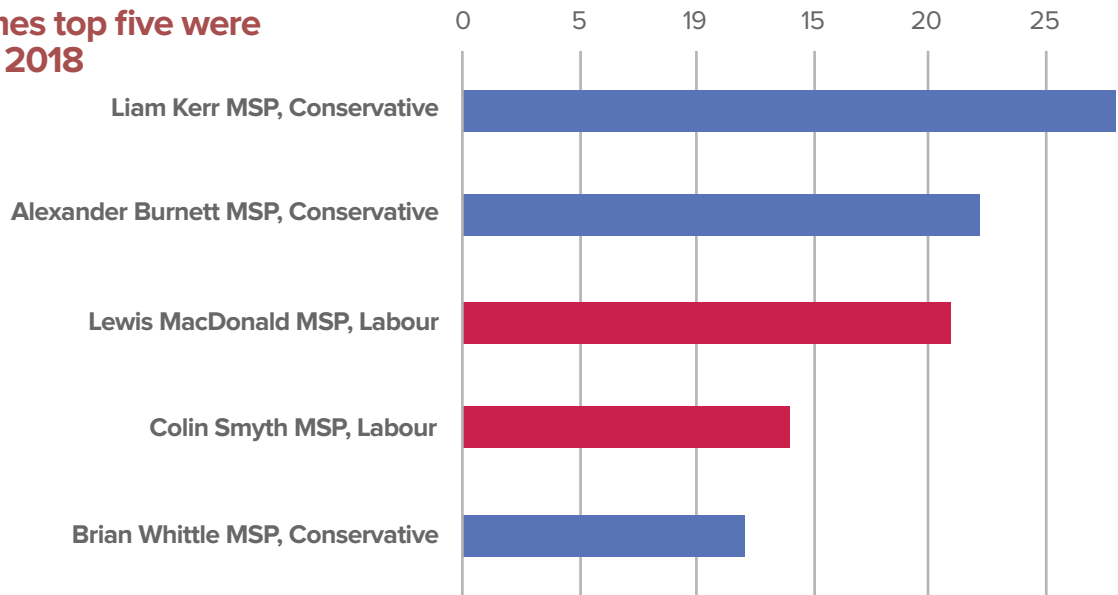


### MSPs who have served as ministers since 2018: number of times top five were lobbied



Over half of the recorded meetings were with SNP representatives and nearly a fifth of meetings (150) took place with Conservatives, with the other parties making up the remainder. Liam Kerr MSP, Conservative spokesperson for energy since 2019, met with fossil fuel lobbyists more times than any other opposition or backbench MSP. Conservative MSP Alexander Burnett was second and Labour MSP Lewis MacDonald third.

### Opposition and backbench MSPs: number of times top five were lobbied since 2018



42 meetings where no MSP was present were also found, of which 37 were meetings between fossil fuel interests and Scottish Government Special Advisors.

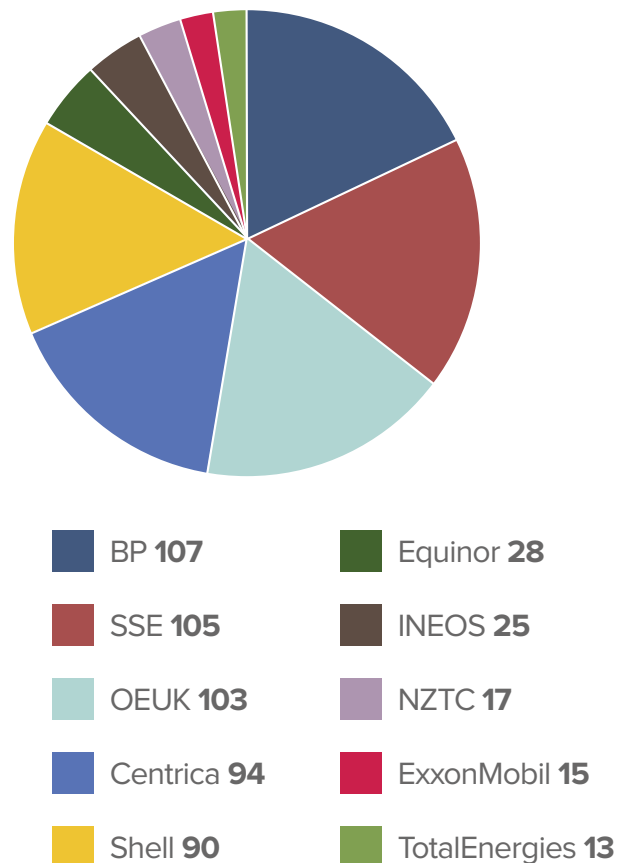
The final five engagements were with Westminster MPs and MSPs' political staff. Since it is not required to register such meetings, these totals will inevitably be a gross underestimate.<sup>45</sup>

### Who in the fossil fuel industry is doing the lobbying?

Four major companies and industry bodies dominate the record: oil companies BP and Shell and utility companies SSE and Centrica. Between them these companies successfully pursued MSPs nearly 400 times. Their influence was extended still further by the 103 meetings held between MSPs and Oil & Gas UK, an oil and gas lobby group which rebranded as Offshore Energies UK during the period analysed.

Also in the top ten lobbying companies and organisations were oil companies Equinor, ExxonMobil and Total, the Net Zero Technology Centre (formerly the Oil & Gas Technology Centre), and Grangemouth refinery owner INEOS.

### Most active lobbyists in the fossil fuel industry



## When and how often is lobbying occurring?

Some trends can be identified about when lobbying has taken place since 2018:

- The Covid-19 pandemic had a dampening effect on the amount of registered lobbying with no engagements recorded in April 2020, and 2020 being the quietest year in the record. However, it is possible that that lobbying in this period simply shifted into less regulated spaces such as phone calls, WhatsApp messages and online meetings where the camera is turned off, which do not need to be recorded on the Lobbying Register.<sup>46</sup>
- The two busiest months for recorded lobbying were November 2021, coinciding with the UN COP26 summit taking place in Glasgow, and May 2023, shortly after Humza Yousaf became First Minister.
- 2022, the most recent complete year in the study, was the busiest year for recorded fossil fuel lobbying suggesting that the quantity of meetings may be intensifying. 104 meetings are recorded in 2019, 63 in 2020, 170 in 2021, the dataset for 2023 is incomplete.
- In most years spring and autumn were the most popular times for recorded lobbying, with January and July the quietest.

To find out how much lobbying takes place in the average week, we assessed the frequency of meetings using the period where the data is most comprehensive: the 24 month period following the last Scottish Parliament election in May 2021 (see ‘Where does the data come from?’).

In this time, 7 May 2021 – 7 May 2023, 474 engagements took place of which 454 were with MSPs. This means that during an average working week at the Scottish Parliament fossil fuel companies were meeting over six MSPs each week, more than one every working day.<sup>47</sup>

## Where did the meetings take place?

293 of the 832 meetings recorded took place in person at the Scottish Parliament with a further 185 recorded as a “video conference”. These two types of meeting make up over 50% of the record.

Other locations for meetings are varied. Over 100 took place at locations in Aberdeen including

company headquarters such as BP (5), Shell (13) and TotalEnergies (6), the Net Zero Technology Centre (5), formerly the Oil & Gas Technology Centre, and Offshore Energies UK (10), the lobbying group known as Oil and Gas UK until 2022.

The top venue in the Aberdeen area for lobbying was The Events Complex Aberdeen (TECA). The venue has played host to the SNP’s autumn conference in recent years with 25 meetings recorded during various SNP conferences. This total is likely to be a major underestimate since fossil fuel companies had several displays and stalls at SNP conferences in this period and it is common practice for MSPs to visit stallholders (see side box and case study ‘Doors wide open at SNP Conference’, below).

Elsewhere, a number of MSPs and Government representatives visited oil and gas installations and power plants, for example, 11 MSPs were taken on a tour of INEOS Grangemouth and seven took a tour of the St. Fergus Gas Terminal.

Fossil fuel companies were also well represented at political and industry events such as the Holyrood Magazine garden party, energy sector conferences, and the UN talks in Glasgow, COP26. Examples of some meetings are set out on following pages.

### Scotland’s party conferences: open for business

All of Scotland’s major political parties have advertised conference sponsorship, fringe bookings or stalls as opportunities to meet senior party officials or elected officials, at a cost of several thousand pounds each. For example, the SNP offered sponsors “assistance to secure a high-profile SNP speaker”, organisations booking a stall at Scottish Labour Party Conference were offered “MP and MSP visits” and those paying for a fringe at Scottish Green Party Conference were promised an invite to an “exclusive reception” with party officials and MSPs.<sup>48</sup> As stated elsewhere in this report, oil and gas companies have been among the corporate lobbyists attending UK and Scottish party conferences in recent years.



## What were the meetings about?

Meetings recorded in the ministerial diaries only state a theme for the meeting with no details recorded. As such, we often know much less about the content of meetings organised by the Scottish Government than we do about those requested by lobbyists themselves.

Entries in the lobbying register are written by the organisation or company doing the lobbying. These details are not verified by the person lobbied and so they are not equivalent to meeting minutes. Nonetheless, they do give us some indication of how the public narrative that companies wanted to put forward has changed over the period of 2018–2023.

Earlier entries focus on company's "core" activities of oil and gas and fossil power generation, including the development of new fields and infrastructure. Although this continues, over time it is embellished with references to "net zero". Where specified this includes proposals to develop hydrogen power, carbon capture and storage facilities and the electrification of offshore drilling platforms. In some cases, renewable energy and electric vehicles are referenced as well as investment and jobs in the UK and Scotland. Some companies record that they claimed they were or are becoming "energy companies" rather than oil and gas firms.

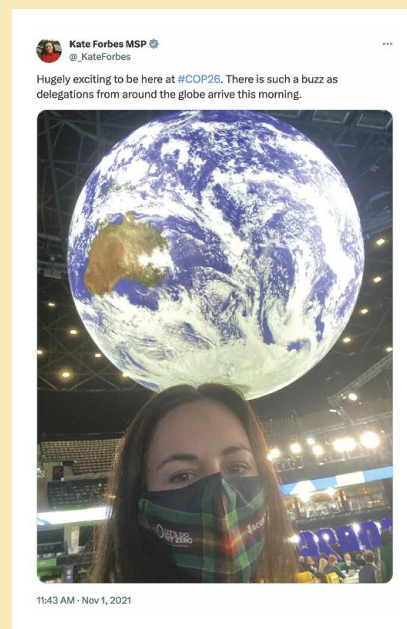
## Examples of Meetings

A list of examples of lobbyist meetings follows. A comprehensive list of meetings may also be found at [https://bit.ly/polluted\\_politics\\_data](https://bit.ly/polluted_politics_data)

### Fossil fuels and the Scottish Government at the UN climate talks

01/11/2021 and 03/11/2022

Fossil fuel companies gained access to Scottish Government representatives at the United Nations climate summits in Glasgow and Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt. In 2022 lobbyists Alistair Phillips-Davies and Glenn Barber representing SSE met with Scottish Government Special Advisor Liz Lloyd at COP27, Sharm El-Sheikh. Earlier that year, SSE had submitted a planning application to the Scottish Government for a new gas power station at Peterhead. In 2021 Equinor lobbyist David Cairns met with Kate Forbes MSP (then Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy) inside COP26, Glasgow, where they discussed oil and gas and "future opportunities for engagement with MSPs in the Scottish Parliament." Equinor are also involved in proposals for new gas power at Peterhead and recently received approval to develop the massive Rosebank oil field.



*Tweet from Kate Forbes MSP, then Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy. She met with oil company Equinor on the same day at COP26 to discuss oil and gas and introducing the company to other MSPs. (Photo: Twitter/X)*

## A banquet at Edinburgh Castle

10/11/2021

While the COP26 summit was taking place in Glasgow, the Scottish Government held a banquet for representatives of the hydrogen industry in Edinburgh Castle. Oil industry representatives David Bunch of Shell, Louise Plutt of BP and David Bryson of Uniper attended and met with MSPs including then First Minister Nicola Sturgeon and Minister for Trade, Investment and Innovation Ivan McKee MSP. The event was not reported on until six months later. A press report based on an FOI request suggests that the Scottish Government spent £11,000 on the event at Edinburgh Castle.<sup>49</sup>

## BP telling stories

17/11/22

BP lobbyists Karri Tough and Chris Whitehead lobbied several MSPs at a Scottish Renewables event at the Scottish Storytelling Centre on Edinburgh's Royal Mile. The event, entitled "Meet the Experts", took place while the COP27 summit in Egypt was ongoing. BP were invited after being admitted to Scottish Renewables following bidding for offshore wind assets. At the event, BP spoke about "matters relating to our North Sea oil and gas business" with Audrey Nicoll MSP (SNP), John Mason MSP (SNP), Liam McArthur MSP (Liberal Democrat) and Michelle Thomson MSP (SNP). The company has been accused of using renewable investments as a smokescreen: a 2023 study found that 97% of BP's investments went into fossil fuel development.<sup>51</sup>

## Doors wide open at the SNP conference

13/10/2019, 13/09/2021 and 08/10/2022

The SNP conference has become a regular venue for fossil fuel lobbying, with companies invited to hold stalls and fringe events and to meet ministers. In 2019, BP held a fringe event with a panel including Stewart Stevenson MSP, Drew Hendry MP and Holyrood Magazine. BP held further fringe events in 2021 and 2022, on both occasions with Michael Matheson, who was the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport at the time. At the former event he was again joined by Holyrood Magazine and at the latter by oil lobby group OEUK. BP held a stall in 2022 and since MSPs generally tour the stalls it is likely that BP met with many of the MSPs present, although this is not reported.

## Burns Supper with the Lord Mayor of London

28/01/2019

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon attended a Burns Supper at Mansion House, London, in January 2019. BP lobbyist Ariel Flores gained access to the dinner and met with the First Minister where they discussed “digital innovation in the oil and gas industry” and “the importance of a skilled workforce to the oil and gas industry.” UK-based BP is the world’s eighth largest oil and gas company<sup>51</sup> and currently produce 1.37 million barrels of oil per day.<sup>52</sup>



*Former First Minister Nicola Sturgeon at the Lord Mayor of London's Burns Supper, January 2019. BP representative Ariel Flores lobbied Sturgeon about the future of oil and gas at the event. (Photo: Lord Mayor of London)*

## Shell HQ and the climate vote

13/09/2019

In the week before the Scottish Parliament’s final vote on the Climate Change Bill to improve Scotland’s climate targets, Shell hosted a round-table for MSPs at its headquarters in Aberdeen. MSPs were told about “Shell’s UK Upstream business and the North Sea energy industry” with a team of eight Shell lobbyists working on seven MSPs from four parties: Conservative MSPs Alexander Burnett and Peter Chapman, SNP MSPs Gillian Martin, Maureen Watt and Stewart Stevenson, Labour MSP Lewis Macdonald, and Liam McArthur MSP from the Liberal Democrats. One of the Shell lobbyists, David Shaw, had just finished a two-year stint as a political adviser to the Labour Party, leaving that post at the time of Jeremy Corbyn’s election as party leader.



## The Florence Opera House

28/01/2019 and 03/02/2020

Paul Wheelhouse MSP, then Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands, made two trips to Florence on behalf of the Scottish Government, meeting with oil lobbyists on both occasions. He was attending the AGM of oil services company Baker Hughes which took place at the Florence Opera House. At the meeting in 2019, the Minister was lobbied by Shell representatives Harry Brekelmans and Guido Kuiper, and in 2020 by Gordon Birrel of BP, when they discussed “the importance of oil and gas in the future.”

## An annual fixture: the Holyrood Magazine garden party

20/06/2019, 16/09/2021 and 28/09/22

Fossil fuel lobbyists have used an invitation to the Holyrood Magazine garden party to lobby MSPs and representatives of the Scottish Government. The annual event, at the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh, saw a team of three Drax lobbyists speak to then Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work Derek Mackay MSP, Special Advisor Kate Higgins and Labour’s Neil Findlay MSP in 2019. Drax operates the UK’s largest source of climate emissions, the Drax power station in Yorkshire.<sup>53</sup> In 2021, four BP lobbyists addressed SNP’s Ben Macpherson MSP and Special Advisor Ross Ingebrigtsen and in 2022 the same company lobbied Conservative’s Murdo Fraser MSP and Labour’s Richard Leonard MSP with topics including oil and gas.



*The Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, location of the Holyrood Magazine garden party where BP and Drax have lobbied MSPs. (Photo: Ric Lander)*



## **The Rosebank meetings**

16/02/2022 to 28/10/2022

Oil company Equinor went on a lobbying spree of 18 meetings in 2022, during the period Equinor were preparing an application to develop the massive Rosebank oilfield in the North Sea. Company lobbyist David Cairns alone had 15 meetings with MSPs in eight months, including Scottish Government ministers Michael Matheson MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport, Angus Robertson MSP, Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture and Ivan McKee MSP, Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise. Among a string of meetings with backbench MSPs he met both Fergus Ewing MSP and Michael Marra MSP twice in the period. Other Equinor lobbyists met the Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work, Richard Lochhead MSP, and First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, who was lobbied on two separate occasions that summer. Equinor received approval to develop the Rosebank field from the UK Government in September 2023.

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## **New sponsors at Murrayfield**

13/07/2023

Scottish Gas lobbyists met with Mairi McAllan MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition, at a ceremony marking the gas company's sponsorship of Scotland's national rugby stadium, Murrayfield. Lobbyists Chris O'Shea and Andrew Middleton represented Scottish Gas' parent company Centrica, a major gas supplier and owner of North Sea oil company Spirit Energy. A number of arts organisations have recently rejected fossil fuel sponsorship on climate grounds, which may be encouraging oil and gas companies to sign new deals with sports organisations. A recent report found over 250 examples of fossil fuels sponsoring sport globally.<sup>54</sup>



## 4 Moving Forward



## Keeping corporations under control

The same fossil fuel companies that have brought on climate breakdown cannot be trusted to implement a just transition. When our political leaders spend their time with the fossil fuel lobby, that's time they're not dedicating to listening to communities and workers who will be affected by the energy transition.

**Fossil fuel companies are attempting to slow or reverse action to protect our climate: they must not be allowed to do so, and we need robust rules to protect our politics.**

Fortunately, we do have some examples of best practice that show how political processes can put people before corporations.

At the United Nations climate conference COP26 in Glasgow, the UK Government were under considerable pressure to allow fossil fuel companies to sponsor the summit and be offered speaking engagements. However, Government documents which came to light stated that fossil fuel companies “do not fit our success criteria” and that it was “unclear” whether oil companies’ climate commitments “stack up”.<sup>55</sup> Glasgow City Council also adopted a policy to bar fossil fuel companies from renting their venues during the talks.<sup>56</sup> Excluding fossil fuels in this way has helped establish the idea that global climate negotiations should avoid being influenced by major climate polluters. Then, in 2023 the UN agreed to require anyone registering for the summit to declare their affiliation to fossil fuel companies, a move which is hoped to increase transparency.<sup>57</sup>

The Welsh Parliament has an official ‘fossil free’ policy for its pension fund investments, following a change announced in 2020. The fund plans to have completed divested from coal, oil and gas by 2025.<sup>58</sup> It is hoped that the policy will reinforce the Welsh Government’s commitment to switching to renewable sources of energy and ensure that members are no longer working against their own financial interests when pursuing climate goals.

## Big tobacco and health policy

Following decades of deceptive lobbying by the tobacco industry, the World Health Organisation’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control includes strong principles designed to limit interactions between lawmakers and the tobacco industry.<sup>59</sup>

UK Government guidelines intended to support the UN treaty explain that there is a need to protect “public health policies”... “from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry” due to the “fundamental and irreconcilable conflict between the tobacco industry’s interests and public health policy interests.” For this reason “Government officials should exercise caution during interactions with the tobacco industry.”

The guidelines require that:<sup>60</sup>

- The UK government will not accept, support or endorse partnerships... or agreements... with the tobacco industry or any entity or person working to further its interests. Voluntary or non-binding funding to support the work of departments or other public authorities should not be accepted...
- UK government officials should not attend conferences or events which are organised by the tobacco industry.
- When undertaking a consultation on tobacco policy, respondents should be asked to declare any direct or indirect links to, or funding received from, the tobacco industry.
- To ensure transparency in interactions with the tobacco industry, all UK government departments or bodies should publish [all] correspondence... and minutes of any meetings.
- Occasional interactions with the tobacco industry will be required to effectively regulate the tobacco industry ...these should be conducted with maximum transparency ...[and] occur only when strictly necessary, to enable effective regulation of the tobacco industry and tobacco products, and to protect and improve public health.



The guidelines are explicitly designed to protect public officials from being pressured by tobacco industry lobbying. Tobacco companies are even excluded from funding or supporting health or youth initiatives, suggesting that the authors understood how such schemes might be used as cover for relationship building.

The guidance goes on to give some example scenarios to help officials.

### Extract from UK Government official guidance on Tobacco lobbying:

## Do not engage

#### Example 1

An official is invited to speak at an event on corporate social responsibility and accepts the invitation. Shortly before the event is due to take place, it becomes clear that another speaker on the same panel has links to the tobacco industry.

**Action to take:** the official should decline the invitation to speak, stating this is due to obligations under article 5.3.

#### Example 2

Tobacco industry representatives have requested a meeting to discuss funding they want to provide for stop smoking services.

**Action to take:** this meeting should be declined, stating that under article 5.3 tobacco funding will not be accepted.

#### Example 3

Tobacco industry representatives request an endorsement of research findings that they have conducted.

**Action to take:** the request should be declined, stating that under article 5.3 no statement will be provided.

## Cleaning up our politics

To reduce the ability of the fossil fuel industry to unduly influence the political process in Scotland we advocate that new lobbying rules ensure that:

- 1 Fossil fuel lobbyists have no opportunities to directly influence climate policy: public officials or law makers should only meet with them on their own invitation as is necessary to implement a worker-led just transition, decommissioning, regulation or safety improvements, or in an emergency.**
- 2 All meetings and exchanges between public officials or law makers and the fossil fuel industry are made transparent by publishing minutes or video recordings within two weeks of the engagement taking place.**
- 3 Fossil fuel industry representatives do not take part in trade delegations or advisory bodies and commissions, especially those tasked with implementing climate policy.**
- 4 MSPs, Government, public bodies and political parties, including political party conferences, are prohibited from taking financial support, gifts and sponsorship from the fossil fuel industry.**

To ensure MSPs' own credibility on climate action we recommend that:

- 1 MSPs do not attend fossil fuel industry events and avoid speaking at events where fossil fuel companies are prominent speakers or sponsors.**
- 2 MSPs never accept second jobs with fossil fuel companies and pledge not to work for or advise them after serving.**
- 3 MSPs ensure that the Scottish Parliament Pension Fund ends its investments in fossil fuels and reinvests in ethical alternatives.**

Scottish public bodies and lawmakers can also support UK and international efforts to free our politics from fossil fuels:

- 1 UK MPs to sign the 'No Fossil Funding' pledge,<sup>61</sup> rejecting any financial or other benefits from the fossil fuel industry, and raise the issue of undue fossil fuel influence in Westminster.**
- 2 Scottish representatives to support efforts in the United Nations to make the Conference of the Parties (COP) process free from fossil fuel industry influence.**
- 3 Support efforts to commit nations to a global 'Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty', including Scottish politicians and cities pledging formal support, as the City of Edinburgh, MSPs and MPs have done.<sup>62</sup>**

## Further reading

Find out more about the campaign at the UK Parliament via Fossil Free Parliament: [www.fossilfreeparliament.uk](http://www.fossilfreeparliament.uk).

Friends of the Earth Scotland is a signatory to the European 'People Over Polluters' declaration<sup>63</sup> and the ongoing 'Fossil Free Politics' campaign. You can read more about the European campaign at: [www.fossilfreepolitics.org](http://www.fossilfreepolitics.org).

# End Notes

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