

Reflections on Collaborating with the Fossil Fuel Industry

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Preamble

- Collaborating with the fossil fuel industry is currently not subject to much discussion at TNO.
- It would be interesting to know why; the nature of its applied research could be among the explanations.

Criticism

- In my personal view, criticism of the fossil fuel industry is fully justified at present.
- Among the main reasons are its investment decisions, revenues, possible 'greenwashing' (and salaries).

Counter-criticism

- All industries, sectors and – especially – individuals are at the origin of the climate crisis.
- Singling out an industry or sector, or even a specific company, yields an intrinsic bias (or even risk).
- The climate challenge is systemic and cannot be solely attributed to a specific part of society.

Solution

- A solution can only be found by addressing all parts of the system, and from many perspectives & disciplines.
- A key element herein is collaboration between all part(ie)s, like with the Paris Agreement.
- Cutting ties with a certain party obviates an important communication channel that enables criticism.

Industry

- The fossil fuel industry is certainly part of the problem, like all of us are.
- But part of the solution also relies with that same industry, e.g. by its mere production capacity.
- For accelerating the energy transition, clean technology needs to be mass-produced.

Conclusion

- Precluding collaboration with the fossil fuel industry may be unwise and can be counter-productive.
- Allow for collaboration but under at least the standard set of rules for academic integrity and independence.
- Perhaps consider an extended version thereof, however intricate this may be in practice.

Epilogue

- Parallel with the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs (www.pugwash.org).
- Pugwash, through exchanges between scientists, played a pivotal role in easing Cold War tensions.
- Collaborate on peaceful use of nuclear technology, but do not when it comes to nuclear weapons.