

The Royal Meteorological Society

Update on financial links with fossil fuels and arms corporations, August 2021

This document provides an update on information gathered for the report, *Irresponsible Science?: How the fossil fuel and arms industries finance professional engineering and science organisations*¹, published by Scientists for Global Responsibility (SGR) in October 2019. Information sourced from the society's publicly available documents is provided first, followed by commentary by SGR.

This is an update of the update following correspondence from the Royal Meteorological Society, as SGR was originally unable to find the Society's ethical investment policy on its website.

Investment policy (updated)

On page 42 of its standing orders, published in November 2020², the Society says that "Investments may be made in cash deposits, property, gilts and equities in such proportions as to endeavor to maximise the total return to the Society over the longer term, typically a period of the Society's Strategic Plan, in order to deliver the required investment for the Society's development programme and to mitigate the Society's major risks. To this end investments should not be held in companies whose activities are contrary to the aims of the Society or its social, environmental and ethical responsibilities as the Professional Body and Learned Society for meteorology".

In the section titled "Underpinning Activities and Cross-Cutting Priorities" in the Annex to the 2020 accounts³, the Society says that "The ethical policy in place does not allow direct investment in tobacco or fossil fuel providers. Over the last 10 years the Society has sought to divest from equities held in companies whose activities are contrary to the aims of the Society or its social, environmental and ethical responsibilities as the Professional Body and Learned Society for meteorology".

Investments

At 31st December 2020, the Royal Meteorological Society disclosed investments to the total of £1,118,703 in investments, made up as follows:⁴

Government stock and corporate bonds £316,742

UK equities £367,961

Overseas equities/other investments £434,000

The RMS does not provide any further details of where these investments are held.

Transparency

The Society does not disclose where it holds any of its £1,118,703 in investments, giving it zero transparency.

¹ <https://www.sgr.org.uk/publications/irresponsible-science>

² https://www.rmets.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/standing_orders_november_2020.pdf

³ https://www.rmets.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/annual_report_annexes_2020_final_1.pdf

⁴ https://www.rmets.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/audited_accounts_-_2020.pdf

Corporate Memberships

The Society's Corporate Membership is open to "any organisation with an interest in weather and climate and costs £500 per year".⁵ The Society does not appear to have any corporate members who are fossil fuel or arms industry companies.

Other corporate links

The Royal Meteorological Society does not appear to accept fossil fuel or arms industry sponsorship for its awards and prizes.

Education programmes

The Royal Meteorological Society does not appear to have any funding for its education programmes from fossil fuel or arms companies.

Events sponsorship

The Royal Meteorological Society does not appear to have accepted any funding for its forthcoming events from fossil fuel or arms companies. It lists 'delegate receipts and sponsorship' to the tune of £5,445 for events in its 2020 accounts but does not disclose the specific sources.

Environmental policy

The Royal Meteorological Society does not appear to have an environmental policy. Its Strategy for 2021-2023⁶ does, however, mention a commitment to becoming a net zero organisation. There is no other evidence or mention of this commitment on the Society's website.

Other relevant information (updated)

The Royal Meteorological Society is the UK's professional and learned society for weather and climate. On its website, the Society says that it "works to strengthen the science and raise awareness of the importance of weather and climate, support meteorological professionals and inspire enthusiasts".

The Society also says it actively engages with government on areas around weather and climate change, including providing advice and expertise that helps inform policy makers as well as authoring statements and briefing papers, including in July 2019 a paper on "Global Carbon Budgets: Determining limits on fossil fuel emissions".⁷ After restating the IPCC's carbon budgets for warming of 1.5 and 2 °C, the report says "it is crystal clear that the world will need to reduce emissions urgently and become carbon neutral well within this century if we wish to achieve the Paris Agreement target."

In 2020, according to its annual report⁸, the Society sent a letter to government, and the devolved administrations, calling for climate science and climate change to be given greater emphasis in school curricula, to reflect the prominent role that a changing climate will play in the lives of young people now in school.

The Royal Meteorological Society says it is dedicated to providing benefit to the wider public, or sections of it, in achieving its aims. The Society believes that its activities fall into four of the 13 main

⁵ <https://www.rmets.org/corporate-membership>

⁶ <https://www.rmets.org/strategic-plan>

⁷ https://www.rmets.org/sites/default/files/publications/papers/carbon_budgets_ver05.pdf

⁸ https://www.rmets.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/annual_report_summary_2020_final.pdf

charitable purposes that would be regarded as “for public benefit” under the Charity Act 2011: the advancement of health or the saving of lives, the advancement of education, the advancement of environmental protection or improvement, and the advancement of the arts, culture, heritage or science.

In 2020 the Society launched a journal of *Climate Resilience and Sustainability*.

The Society claims to be at the heart of the debate on climate change. According to the Society’s 2020 annual report, “it plays a particularly important role in communicating some of the more complicated scientific and technical issues to the public at large, enabling them to understand and engage with what is one of the most important global issues that we face today”. This role is overseen by the Society’s Science Engagement Committee and the Climate Science Special Interest Group; the latter aims to sustain, encourage and progress activity in climate science and its relevance to society.”

Royal Meteorological Society president Professor Dave Griggs added that the Society delivered climate change communication training to 39 broadcast meteorologists and journalists, helping support more accurate reporting on climate science. “In 2021, we will launch our new three-year strategy with a mission to advance the understanding of weather and climate and its application for the benefit of all,” he said.

The Society’s Strategic Plan 2021-2023⁹ says that “it is important to us that we are respected for our openness, integrity, professional excellence, contribution, independence and passion, and our accountability to our membership”.

One of the Society’s strategic objectives for 2021-2023 is Authoritative Voice – “to be an independent voice of authority, advice and advocacy for the science and the profession through the promotion of weather and climate science information in policy and decision making and its relevance to society”.

One of the strategy’s cross-cutting priorities is Net Zero commitment – “to raise awareness of sustainability and pathways to net zero and to lead by example through our commitment to becoming a net zero organisation”.

Update: In July 2021, the Royal Meteorological Society signed the Charter for Climate Action.¹⁰ Signatories commit to charting the path to sustainability for their members, speaking with a unified voice to government and the public, and empowering their members to drive sustainable growth, including by reducing their emissions in line with 1.5°C of warming.¹¹

SGR comments

SGR acknowledges that the Royal Meteorological Society has a commitment to becoming a net zero organization in its 2021-2023 Strategy although as yet no details of its plans or actions to achieve this goal. SGR has continuing concerns, however, on the following aspects.

Transparency

⁹ <https://www.rmets.org/strategic-plan>

¹⁰ <https://www.edie.net/news/7/New-net-zero-networks-launched-for-lawyers-and-professional-institutions/>

¹¹ https://9tj4025ol53byww26jdkao0x-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2021-07-01-Professionals_Charter_text.pdf

The Society offers zero transparency on its investments even though its Strategic Plan 2021-2023¹² says that “it is important to us that we are respected for our openness, integrity, professional excellence, contribution, independence and passion, and our accountability to our membership”.

Last January, the Charity Commission launched an investigation into factors holding charities back from responsible investments¹³. With regards to transparency, the regulator said that “People place increasing value on transparency, which research shows is a key driver of public trust in charities.”

It would seem appropriate for the Society to provide transparency with regards to its investments in order to enhance and uphold public trust in itself and its mission to advance the understanding of weather and climate.

Others believe that an increased demand for “transparency, accountability and information about the impact of investments on society” arose after the financial crash of 2008.¹⁴

Since the release of the Irresponsible Science report, several of the Society’s peers – academic bodies, learned societies and professional institutions in other subject areas – mentioned in the report have tightened up their policies on fossil fuels and arms. For example, the Geological Society introduced investment policies that exclude arms and the most carbon-emitting fossil fuels – thermal coal and tar sands, whilst the Energy Institute brought in an investment policy that excludes arms and presses for alignment with Paris goals.

It is very disappointing that during this time period the Society has not improved the transparency of its investments or introduced an environmental policy. This seems particularly disappointing given the Royal Meteorological Society’s commitment to promoting understanding of climate change and to providing advice and expertise that helps inform policy makers, as well as its commitment to becoming a net zero organisation.

The British Psychological Society, Royal College of Physicians, British Medical Association, the Royal College of General Practitioners, the Faculty of Public Health, the Royal College of Emergency Medicine and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health have all now fully divested from fossil fuels, are in the process of doing so, or have committed to do so. The British Medical Association took the lead, beginning its journey back in 2014. All these organisations also exclude investment in arms companies.

Financial links to corporations

Fossil fuels

Due to the Society’s lack of transparency, it was not possible to ascertain if it has any investments in fossil fuel companies.

More generally, SGR has concerns about investments in and financial ties to fossil fuel companies by professional science and engineering organisations for these reasons:

¹² <https://www.rmets.org/strategic-plan>

¹³ <https://charitycommission.blog.gov.uk/2020/01/15/how-do-charities-approach-investing-in-line-with-their-purpose-and-values-we-want-to-know-and-we-want-to-help/>

¹⁴ <https://www.cazenovecapital.com/sysglobalassets/wmmediaassets/uk/charities/documents/reports/intentionalinvestingreportpdf.pdf>

- According to the Transition Pathway Initiative¹⁵, the long-term ambitions of many fossil fuel companies do not align with a pathway that would limit global warming to 2°C or below. (Please see the SGR document Data on fossil fuel companies for further details¹⁶.) The goal of the UN's 2015 Paris Agreement is "to limit global warming to well below 2, preferably to 1.5 °C, compared to pre-industrial levels"¹⁷. What's more, many fossil fuel companies have not committed to meeting the rigorous criteria set by the Science Based Targets Initiative¹⁸ for emissions reductions, which numerous other leading corporations have signed up to. Until fossil fuel companies meet the criteria of the Science Based Targets initiative and have set targets to limit their emissions by 2050 in line with a 1.5 or 2°C limit to warming, we are urging thought leaders such as the Royal Meteorological Society to divest from any holdings in these companies and so keep up the pressure on them.
- Professional science and engineering organisations have considerable influence with politicians and the public and it's crucial that they put in place robust science-based targets and plans that are compatible with the goals of the Paris Agreement - and end lobbying behaviour that could undermine it - particularly in the year that the UK is hosting the next round of the COP climate negotiations.
- As the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change¹⁹ puts it, "engaging with companies whose business model relies on fuel extraction is of limited use—only divestment will stop extraction". Worldwide, according to the Alliance, over 1,000 organisations with £7 trillion assets have committed to divesting from fossil fuels and instead investing in climate solutions²⁰. Research indicates that divestment reduces the price of fossil fuel shares. According to a team at the University of Waterloo in Canada²¹, "lower share prices increase the costs of capital for the fossil fuel industry, which in turn decreases their ability to explore new resources and exploit proven resources". The greater the likelihood of these fossil fuel resources staying in the ground, the more likely we are to meet the international climate change targets agreed under the Paris Agreement in order to prevent potentially catastrophic climate change.
- In order to keep to the 'well below 2°C' target, only one-fifth of known fossil fuel reserves can be burned, putting these assets at risk of becoming stranded²². The fraction is even smaller when considering how to meet the 1.5°C target. According to the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change, fossil fuels are an increasingly risky investment and fossil fuel free indexes had equalled or outperformed unsustainable alternatives in the previous 5-10 years. "Divestment announcements by prominent investors signal financial risks to the market, which in turn depress share prices," say the University of Waterloo researchers. "Therefore, divestment announcements can have a measurable impact on the fossil fuel industry." Shell said in 2018 that divestment had become a material risk to its business²³. In 2020 fund manager CCLA, which invests on behalf of charities including Church of England dioceses and

¹⁵<https://www.geolsoc.org.uk/~media/shared/documents/policy/Statements/responsible%20investing%20draft%20graphics%20v35.pdf?la=en>

¹⁶ https://www.sgr.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-06/Data_on_fossil_fuel_companies.pdf

¹⁷ <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>

¹⁸ <https://sciencebasedtargets.org/>

¹⁹ ukhealthalliance.org/divestment

²⁰ <https://www.divestinvest.org/11-trillion-counting-divestinvest/>

²¹ <https://theconversation.com/how-divesting-of-fossil-fuels-could-help-save-the-planet-88147>

²² https://www.banktrack.org/download/unburnable_carbon/unburnablecarbonfullrev2.pdf

²³ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/oct/13/divestment-bank-european-investment-fossil-fuels>

IOP, dropped its investments in oil giants Shell and Total²⁴ for financial reasons. On January 27th 2021, ratings agency S&P warned 13 oil and gas companies, including Royal Dutch Shell and Total, that it is considering downgrading their credit ratings. The agency has increased its risk rating for the oil and gas sector as a whole from “intermediate” to “moderately high” because of the move away from fossil fuels, poor profitability and volatile prices, according to news reports²⁵.

- Many fossil fuel companies are relying on carbon capture technology and nature-based solutions being deployed at a huge scale to offset their planned emissions²⁶. Heavy reliance on the global scale deployment of carbon capture and storage technologies is misplaced given the lack of progress in this area for the last 20 years. According to an international group of 41 scientists and academics²⁷, such technologies are “expensive, energy intensive, risky, and their deployment at scale is unproven. It is irresponsible to base net zero targets on the assumption that uncertain future technologies will compensate for present day emissions”.

For those keen to retain support for the energy sector, there are plenty of companies that are much more progressive than fossil fuel companies in which to invest. For example, Orsted (formerly DONG, Danish Oil and Natural Gas) has shifted from being a fossil fuel dominated company to one heavily focused on renewable energy. Similarly, some large German engineering companies, such as Siemens and E.ON²⁸, have also made major shifts away from fossil-fuel related work.

Arms

As for fossil fuels, due to the Society’s lack of transparency, it was not possible to ascertain if it has any investments in arms companies. Should this be the case, it would raise concerns about the Society’s dedication to the public benefit through “the advancement of health or the saving of lives” and its statement that “it is important to us that we are respected for our openness, integrity, professional excellence, contribution, independence and passion, and our accountability to our membership”. See SGR’s *Data on arms companies* document²⁹ for more information on individual arms companies.

SGR has concerns about investments in and financial ties to arms companies by professional science and engineering organisations for these reasons:

- The arms industry exports weapons that fuel conflict and human right abuses. For example, over the decade to 2017, the UK government licensed exports of arms and other military equipment worth £12 billion to 29 of the 30 nations classed as “Human Rights Priority Countries” by the British Foreign Office.³⁰ These are nations where “the worst, or greatest

²⁴ <https://www.divestinvest.org/church-of-england-fund-drops-remaining-fossil-fuel-investments/>

²⁵ https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/jan/27/rating-agency-sp-warns-13-oil-and-gas-companies-they-risk-downgrades-as-renewables-pick-up-steam?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

²⁶ <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/16072020/oil-gas-climate-pledges-bp-shell-exxon/>

²⁷ <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2020/12/11/10-myths-net-zero-targets-carbon-offsetting-busted/>

²⁸ Siemens has committed to the 1.5°C target under the SBTi and E.ON’s carbon emissions are aligned with the below 2°C pathway according to TPI.

²⁹ https://www.sgr.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-06/Data_on_arms_companies.pdf

³⁰ Action on Armed Violence (2018) “UK arms exports examined.” <https://aoav.org.uk/201/uk-arms-exports-examined/>

number of, human rights violations take place".³¹ Since 2017, the situation has arguably worsened despite successful legal challenges.³²

- Nuclear weapons have become even more controversial in recent years. The UK government's decision in March to increase the size of the nation's nuclear warhead stockpile by 44% - as announced in the integrated review of defence and security - has been widely condemned. The UN Secretary General's office has stated that it is a breach of Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.³³ In addition, nuclear weapons have become illegal under international law, following the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) on 22nd January 2021. Although this law only strictly applies in nations that have ratified the treaty, there are significant ethical and legal implications for organizations with ties to companies involved with these weapons of mass destruction. The treaty prohibits ratifying nations from providing assistance – including financial – for corporations involved in the development, manufacture or deployment of nuclear weapons. This will increasingly restrict investment by international banks and other financial institutions in such corporations, potentially making it harder for them to fund their activities and enhancing the risk of investment on financial grounds alone. Furthermore, a series of recent academic research studies have warned of the devastating climatic effects of even a small nuclear war.³⁴ SGR's own analysis shows that, if the nuclear warheads carried by just one UK Trident submarine were launched, devastating global climate impacts could result.³⁵ The possibility of a nuclear war by accident - due to human or technical error - remains a very real threat.
- The arms industry removes resources – financial, human, scientific and technological – from efforts to improve the human condition through the pursuit of knowledge. In his 'Chance for Peace' speech in April 1953, US President Dwight D. Eisenhower said: "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children." Eisenhower goes on to compare the relative costs of a bomber and a hospital; these comments seem particularly apposite at a time when the UK has dramatically increased its military spending³⁶ whilst offering most NHS staff a 1% pay rise described as "pitiful" and "insulting".³⁷ It's also become apparent that UK hospitals were underprepared for a pandemic due to lack of funding, whereas the UK was the second highest military spender in NATO in 2019, to the tune of some \$59.4 billion³⁸. UK deployment of an aircraft carrier to the South China Sea in 2021 is just one indication that this spending is not for territorial defence alone. The pandemic also heightened awareness that as a nation we are not spending enough to alleviate poverty and health inequality

³¹ Foreign and Commonwealth Office (2016) *Human Rights and Democracy, 2015*.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2015>

³² Court of Appeal finds government broke law over Saudi Arabia arms sales <https://caat.org.uk/news/2019-06-20-2/>

³³ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/boris-johnson-uk-nuclear-weapons-international-law-b1817827.html>

³⁴ <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-00794-y>

³⁵ <https://www.sgr.org.uk/index.php/publications/uk-nuclear-weapons-catastrophe-making>

³⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-to-announce-largest-military-investment-in-30-years#:~:text=The%20Government%20has%20already%20pledged,compared%20to%20last%20year's%20budget.>

³⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-56313199>

³⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-defence-expenditure-2020/finance-and-economics-annual-statistical-bulletin-international-defence-2020>

within our own borders let alone internationally. Every child experiencing poverty and health inequality is a child less likely to pursue meteorology as a career.

- The arms industry perpetuates power imbalances and has the potential to harm democracy. In his farewell address, in 1961, Eisenhower warned against the economic, political and “even spiritual” influence of the immense military establishment and large arms industry that had arisen as a result of the Second World War with grave implications for the structure of society. “In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex,” he said. “The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes.”
- Financial ties to arms companies make it more difficult for professional science and engineering organisations to raise ethical and other concerns, including in educational materials and public discussion, about the use of science and engineering within the arms industry.
- Warships, combat planes, transport planes and tanks are heavy consumers of fossil fuels. The US Department of Defense is the world’s largest institutional consumer of petroleum, with annual greenhouse gas emissions greater than that of whole European nations such as Sweden.³⁹ SGR estimates that the UK military carbon footprint is equivalent to that of 6 million average cars.⁴⁰ National emission targets routinely exclude military carbon emissions, and even data on current emissions is sparse and unreliable for the vast majority of nations.⁴¹
- A large number of companies involved in the international arms trade have been linked to major corruption, fraud and other malpractice scandals. A review by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) found that “studies suggest that corruption in the arms trade contributes roughly 40 per cent to all corruption in global transactions”.⁴² Given that many professional engineering and science organisations include strong wording on corrupt behaviour in their codes of conduct, it appears that such organisations should be extremely careful concerning links of a financial or promotional nature with corporations found guilty of such behaviour, or else risk their reputation and the reputation of the wider science and engineering community.

³⁹ Crawford, N (2019) *Pentagon Fuel Use, Climate Change, and the Costs of War*
<https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/papers/ClimateChangeandCostofWar>

⁴⁰ <https://www.sgr.org.uk/publications/environmental-impacts-uk-military-sector>

⁴¹ <https://www.sgr.org.uk/publications/under-radar-carbon-footprint-europe-s-military-sectors>

⁴² Feinstein, A., Holden, P. and Pace, B. (2011) *Corruption and the arms trade: sins of commission in SIPRI Yearbook 2011*, Oxford, Oxford University Press