

What can I say?

Geoscientists as participants in debating our energy needs

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Why does what we say matter?

- Fundamental role of geoscience in addressing the challenges facing humanity in the 21st century
- Applying and communicating our science effectively is becoming more important than ever...
- ...just as the areas where we have most to offer are becoming more politically, socially and ethically contested

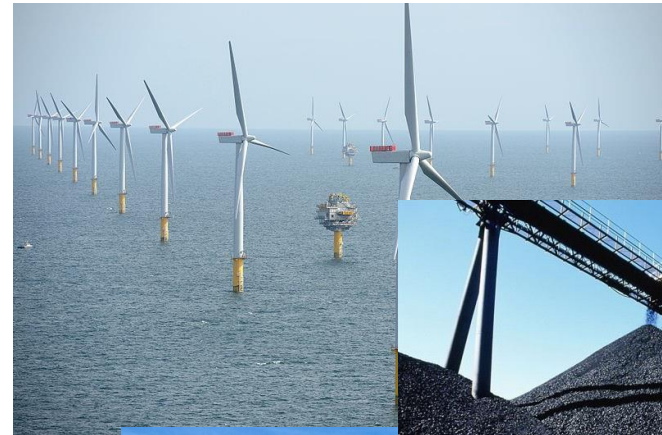


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Meeting our future energy needs and dealing with the consequences

- Where and how do we get it?
- How do we commoditise and use it?
- What are the consequences for people and the environment?
- All ethical questions



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Do I want to get involved?

- Energy issues can be...
 - important
 - contested
 - fraught
 - intimidating
- Sometimes a scary place for geoscientists to go – and one where it is easy to go wrong



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So, how should geoscientists behave ethically in these debates?

Simple!

- Talk about your area of expertise (i.e. your scientific specialism) and nothing else
- Adhere to professional and ethical codes of conduct



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The reality is far more complex...

Motivations (for individuals, organisations):

- Public interest
- Political and ideological conviction
- Self interest
- Indifference
- Fear



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A spectrum of possible responses

Say nothing	Speak only about the science	Speak about the science, its implications, boundaries	Explicitly advocate a political stance
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Choices – political and social acts with ethical implications



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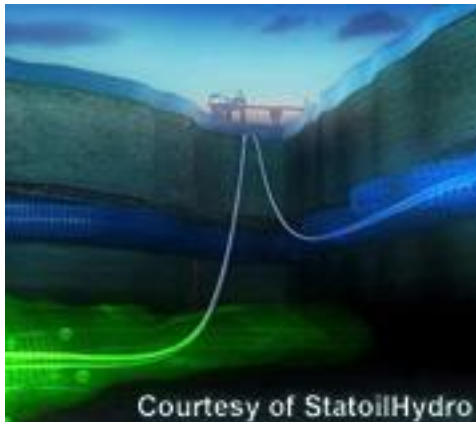
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Can we rule out any of these choices?

- Is it always wrong to stay quiet?
- Is it always wrong to be an ‘advocate scientist’? Or is this sometimes permissible or even desirable?
- Is it OK as long as they are transparent about it, and separate science from politics/values? (Is this really possible, in contested socio-technical areas? Actually this matters for other choices too...)
- Does it depend on whether we agree with them?
- Individual vs institutional choices

Some test cases...

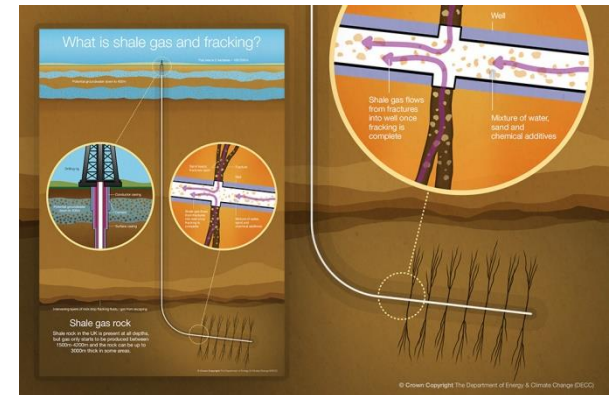
Carbon capture and storage



Radioactive waste



Shale gas



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So, how should geoscientists *really* behave ethically in these debates?

- Individuals and institutions are different in what they can legitimately (and sensibly) do
- Vested interests
- Modes of establishing impartiality and authority
- How should we weigh the importance of maintaining authority against the importance of using it for the public benefit?



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So, how should geoscientists *really* behave ethically in these debates?

- Increasing attention paid to the link between ethics and professional behaviours, codes of conduct which explicitly address ethical issues, TGGGP, etc
- Codes of conduct and guidelines are necessary but not sufficient
- Geoethics at the heart of all geoscience, not as a specialist domain
- Starting (and continuing) an open transparent debate



Thank you!

Questions?

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