

Mark Nolan
Exxon Mobil Corporation
Head Office
12 Riverside Quay
Melbourne Vic 3006

6 October 2006

Neil *****

Dear Mr Nolan,

I have been a consumer of Mobil-branded petrol, but I am disappointed with the attitude that ExxonMobil appears to take on environmental issues and ethical corporate behaviour. I am not anti-big-business, and I appreciate the value of mining and oil to our daily lives, and to Australia – I am an engineer whose work directly benefits the hard-rock mining industry.

Several events of the past few weeks have shaped my view of ExxonMobil. Three of these were:

1. Andrew Denton's¹ interview with Al Gore. During the interview he showed a clip of a US TV advert - one of two created by an organization called the "Competitive Enterprise Institute" (CEI). I was able to watch both adverts ("CO₂, they call it pollution; we call it life") in their entirety through www.youtube.com^{2 3} and am disgusted by their distortion of the science of global warming. The adverts "back" their claims using papers published in the journal Science. But the primary author of one of the papers, and an editor of the journal, say that the papers were misrepresented⁴.

CEI gets significant financial support from ExxonMobil⁵. How does ExxonMobil reconcile its recognition of the risks of global warming⁶, with funding CEI?

And CEI isn't the only deceptive organisation that is being supported. The Royal Society in the UK, a highly respected scientific academy, has asked ExxonMobil to end support for dozens of groups that grossly distort the science of climate change.⁷ They say that ExxonMobil has distributed US\$2.9M to such groups in the last year. Why does ExxonMobil fund the denial of evidence for global warming?

My conclusion is that ExxonMobil believes that it is acceptable to fund disinformation campaigns, whereas such behaviour is unethical and not acceptable to the community or responsible corporations.

2. Your speech at the 2006 Asia Pacific Oil & Gas Conference, declaring that "Peak Oil" is fantasy. You said that we have used only one trillion barrels of oil over the last century, but you did not feel it important to say that the next trillion barrels of oil will be used in the next thirty years. Chevron's advertising⁸, as well as ExxonMobil's own estimates of oil demand⁹ advise this, though it is not explicit in ExxonMobil's document - I needed to do the maths myself to see it. The same selective reporting is present in other ExxonMobil documents.

Furthermore, ASPO¹⁰ says that you misrepresented the arguments of "Peak Oil", to make a "straw man" argument. It is hard to be convinced by a stance that appears to be backed by half-truth and misrepresentation.

My conclusion is that ExxonMobil may be using half-truth and misrepresentation to support the view that oil will always be available cheaply, even though ExxonMobil knows that it will not.

3. The Wall Street Journal^{11 12} linked ExxonMobil to a slimy example of astroturfing¹³ used by DCI¹⁴, a public relations company. "Astroturfing", if you are not familiar with the term, is the technique of deliberately and deceptively creating the impression that there is a grassroots movement holding some viewpoint when there is none. The ultimate goal is to sway public opinion (and political decision making) in favour of the view held by this imaginary grassroots movement.

In this case, a parody of "An Inconvenient Truth" was released under the false pretence that it was produced by a bored 29 year old in his basement, who just happened to feel compelled to mock Al Gore. The reality is that it originated from the offices of DCI.

As ExxonMobil is a client of DCI, my conclusion is that ExxonMobil may believe that astroturfing is acceptable behaviour, whereas such behaviour is unethical and not acceptable to the community or responsible corporations.

These three events motivated this letter, but I am now aware of many other issues^{15 16 17 18}. While "green" NGOs are also sometimes guilty of misrepresenting facts, the sheer volume and verifiability of the majority of the criticism directed towards ExxonMobil has left a very negative impression on me. On this basis, "Don't buy Mobil" is the message I will be giving my friends.

I welcome a response addressing any of the issues I have raised above.

Yours Sincerely,

Neil Francis

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- ¹ “Enough Rope” - ABC TV, 9:30pm, Monday, 11 September 2006
- ² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sGKvDNdJNA&NR> - viewed on 3 October 2006
- ³ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wq_Bj-av3g0&search=Competitive%25 - viewed on 3 October 2006
- ⁴ <http://factcheck.org/article395.html> - viewed on 5 October 2006
- ⁵ <http://www.exxonsecrets.org/html/orgfactsheet.php?id=2>. - viewed on 5 October 2006. This document includes numerous links to reports on the ExxonMobil website that verify ExxonMobil’s financial support of CEI.
- ⁶ http://exxonmobil.com/Corporate/Files/Corporate/tomorrows_energy.pdf - page 10. Viewed on 3 October 2006
- ⁷ <http://environment.guardian.co.uk/climatechange/story/0,,1876538,00.html> - viewed on 5 October 2006. A link to the letter written by the Royal Society is included, which includes a rebuttal of many of the claims made in the ExxonMobil “Tomorrow’s Energy” document, as well as their corporate citizenship document. Both of these are prominent on the Australian, US and UK ExxonMobil websites.
- ⁸ http://www.chevron.com/about/advertising/docs/real_issues_print_02.pdf - viewed on 5 October 2006
- ⁹ http://exxonmobil.com/Corporate/Files/Corporate/tomorrows_energy.pdf page 6, figure 3. Viewed on 5 October 2006
- ¹⁰ <http://www.aspo-australia.org.au/> - viewed on 5 October 2006
- ¹¹ http://politics.netscape.com/viewstory/2006/08/03/parody-of-al-gore-film-tied-to-exxonmobil-lobbying-firm/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.rawstory.com%2Fnews%2F2006%2FParody_of_Al_Gore_Film_tied_0803.html&frame=true - viewed on 5 October 2006
- ¹² <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/story?id=2273111&page=1> – viewed on 10 October 2006. The original Wall Street Journal article is available online, but requires subscription to view it.
- ¹³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astroturfing> - viewed on 5 October 2006
- ¹⁴ <http://www.dci-group.com/> - viewed on 10 October 2006
- ¹⁵ <http://www.coopamerica.org/programs/rs/profile.cfm?id=221> - viewed on 5 October 2006
- ¹⁶ <http://www.dontbuyexxonmobil.org/> - viewed on 5 October 2006
- ¹⁷ <http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/campaigns/global-warming-and-energy/stop-exxonmobil> - viewed on 5 October 2006
- ¹⁸ http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/press_releases/20020601000122.html - viewed on 5 October 2006