

Petroleum research still relevant and ethical

July 1 2014, by Sindre Mekjan

Norway's National Committee for Research Ethics in Science and Technology (NENT) has conducted a review of ethical issues related to petroleum research. The committee concludes that it is ethically justifiable and warranted to carry out petroleum research as long as it does not impede restructuring efforts targeted towards renewable forms of energy.

"The committee's conclusion is very much in line with our priorities," says Arvid Hallén, Director General of the Research Council of Norway.

"Petroleum is Norway's most important industry," continues Mr Hallén. "Oil and not least natural gas will be vital for the world's [energy](#) supply for many years to come, even in a scenario in which global temperature rises a full two degrees Celsius. At the same time we know that [greenhouse gas emissions](#) from fossil fuels pose a threat to the Earth's climate. This is why it is so crucial to engage in broad, open debate about how we can ensure a long-term restructuring towards [renewable sources](#) of energy."

Aligned with Research Council focus on renewables

"The NENT committee's conclusion and recommendations harmonise closely with the Research Council's increased focus on [renewable sources of energy](#) and climate mitigation in recent years. The Research Council currently allocates more than twice as much funding to [renewable energy](#) and climate-related research than to petroleum research. This does not mean, however, that we intend to stop supporting

research on how to further develop the [petroleum industry](#) within an environmentally sustainable framework."

In its report the NENT committee states: "The world today is largely dependent on petroleum as an energy source, and it is reasonable to assume that abruptly ceasing to utilise this source would have major and immediate negative consequences for economies and societies. The environmental impact would likely be severe as well, since alternative sources that are more environmentally sound – or that can meet the global demand for energy – have not yet been adequately developed. Petroleum-related research therefore has a role to play in the process of restructuring."

Not to supersede renewable energy research

The report goes on to say that it would be ethically irresponsible "if the framework conditions and activities of petroleum research were to hinder the processes of restructuring" that are necessary for achieving UN climate targets.

"This is a key point," stresses Mr Hallén. "Petroleum research must not supersede research focused on renewable energy, and we are very aware of this. The NENT committee statement is important because it confirms that research is needed on renewable sources of energy and petroleum alike to develop environment-friendly energy within an environmentally justifiable framework."

Much of what is categorised as petroleum research involves expertise and technology that has transfer value to other sectors. This applies to basic research in the natural sciences as well as to technology development. Good examples include offshore wind turbines and tidal power turbines, both of which utilise technology developed for the petroleum sector.

The Research Council's petroleum research programmes will continue to emphasise research aimed at reducing the environmental and climate impacts of [petroleum](#) recovery activities.

Provided by The Research Council of Norway

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