

Thousands of big energy reps at UN climate talks: monitor

June 21 2019, by Patrick Galey



Data given to AFP shows how trade groups representing energy giants have sent delegations sometimes larger than those of entire nations

Lobby groups representing some of the world's biggest polluters have sent thousands of delegates to negotiations aimed at limiting global

warming since UN climate talks began, according to data obtained by AFP.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) brings together nations, [environmental groups](#), scientists and policymakers to work on measures to stave off the worst social, economic and ecological threats posed by runaway temperatures.

Trade associations that represent oil and gas majors are entitled under the convention's own rules to attend annual UNFCCC talks and inter-sessional meetings as observers.

They frequently host networking side events or presentations and have the same status and access permits at negotiations as environmental charities.

But there is currently no protection against potential conflicts of interest between nations which need emissions slashed rapidly in order to survive, and the biggest emitters whose [business plans](#) are still heavily reliant on [fossil fuels](#).

A database compiled and analysed by the Climate Investigations Center (CIC) monitoring group lists every individual, observer and industry association to have attended UN [climate](#) talks since 1995.

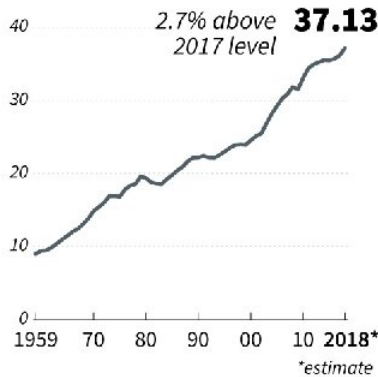
Data given to AFP shows how trade groups representing energy giants have sent delegations sometimes larger than those of entire nations, and how firms responsible for a large share of historic greenhouse gas emissions are regularly in attendance.

It comes as delegates who are gathered in the German city of Bonn for mid-year climate talks on Wednesday begin debating whether the UNFCCC needs specific provisions to prevent industry representatives

influencing government decisions.

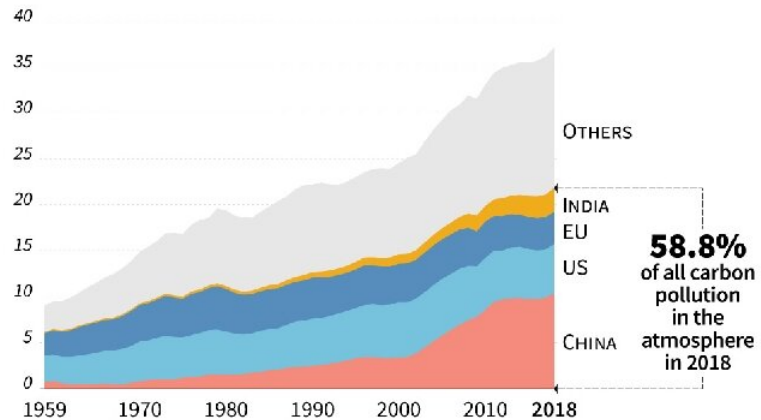
World carbon emissions

In gigatonnes of CO₂ equivalent per year



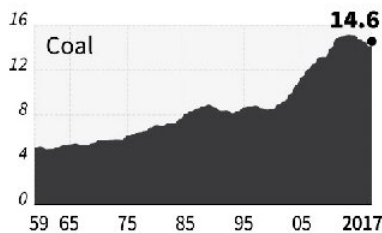
The major carbon polluters

Carbon emissions in gigatonnes of CO₂ equivalent

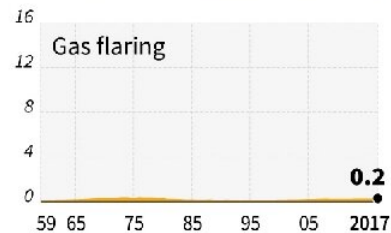
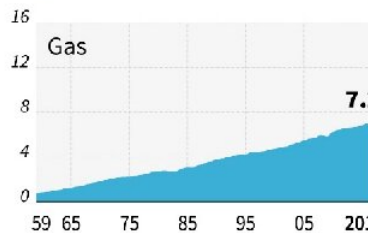


Rising emissions from fossil fuels

Carbon emissions in gigatonnes of CO₂ equivalent



Source: Global Carbon Budget



© AFP

World carbon emissions

Trade associations say it is important to include corporations in the climate debate, since energy and manufacturing firms will be tasked with implementing change in the global economy.

But opponents worry that having big business representatives around—and with little or no oversight for what they do there—can water down desperately needed cuts in polluting fuels.

Nnimmo Bassey, director of the Health of Mother Earth Foundation, which campaigns for greater transparency at climate negotiations, said that industry groups' attendance was "forcing the world away from discussing the urgent need to keep fossil fuels in the ground".

'No conflict'

A number of trade groups—registered as Business and Industry NGOs, or BINGOs—send dozens of delegates every year to UN climate talks, known as COPs.

The International Emissions Trading Group (IETA), which counts among its members energy giants such as BP, Chevron and Shell, has sent 1,817 delegates to COPs and inter-sessional meetings since 2000, according to the attendees list.

IETA CEO Dirk Forrister told AFP his organisation represented a range of firms, including those working to reduce global emissions.

"We have common interests with many participants in getting to net zero emissions in a way that preserves economic growth and livelihoods," he said.



There have been worldwide protests against fossil fuels, one of the principal sources of greenhouse gas emissions

"We are not negotiators—we are observers and supporters of the process. We don't make the decisions in Bonn, so there is no conflict."

The International Petroleum Industry Environmental Conservation Association (IPIECA), members of which include ExxonMobil, Chevron and Shell, has sent 258 employees to UN climate talks in the same [time period](#), the data shows.

IETA and IPIECA represent firms that were formerly part of the Global Climate Coalition (GCC)—a now-defunct lobby group heavily influential in spreading climate change scepticism in the 1990s.

Internal GCC documents, unearthed this year and compiled by the CIC, shows how the group used UN talks to further its members' agenda.

The documents detail how the GCC pushed to influencing policymakers, including in discussions with the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), to tone down the links between man-made emissions and [global warming](#).

One internal memo, from 1996, boasts of how language proposed by the GCC for an IPCC technical paper was "accepted almost in its entirety".

The GCC disbanded in 2002 after growing disputes among its members over how to respond to advances in climate science, but, as the list shows, organisations it represented are still present at UN talks.

"The GCC used its access to monitor the progress of negotiations, apply pressure to various national delegations, and utilise the US and other national delegations when they were friendly," said Kert Davies from the CIC.



Trade associations say it is important to include corporations in the climate debate, since energy and manufacturing firms will be tasked with implementing change in the global economy

"These trade associations funded by the same fossil fuel industry players are still freely able to stalk the halls and influence governments at the talks."

The Edison Electric Institute (EEI), once part of the GCC, has sent 201 delegates since 1995, according to the participant lists.

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development, whose members include BP, ExxonMobil and Shell, sent 1,266 delegates over the same period.

"We believe that today's challenges require innovative ideas that can come from anywhere," a WBCSD spokesman said.

"It's critical for the private sector to be involved in the UNFCCC process for exactly this reason."

All corporations and associations mentioned in this article were contacted by AFP for comment.

'Business part of solution'

The Paris climate deal, struck at UN talks in 2015, aims to limit global temperature rises to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.6 Fahrenheit), committing nations to reduce their emissions to this end.



The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change brings together nations, environmental groups, scientists and policymakers to work on measures to stave

off the worst social, economic and ecological threats posed by runaway temperatures

To do so safely and without relying on untested technologies that suck planet-warming gases out of the atmosphere, the IPCC says the use of fossil fuels needs to decline almost immediately and be a fraction of current consumption by mid-century.

Mithika Mwenda, from the Pan-Africa Climate Justice Alliance, said the presence of oil and gas majors at climate talks inevitably risked policies favourable to rich nations, historically the largest polluters.

"You see them in the halls and you hear them speak through the global North and others," he told AFP.

"In the 1990s they had to do their own bidding, now they have trade associations and global North governments do it for them."

Oil giant Shell has sent 111 people to UN climate talks, according to the database, easily the most of any listed energy company.

The IPCC says for a safe 1.5C world, energy from natural gas must decline by a quarter by 2030 and almost three quarters by mid-century; energy from oil needs to reduce by 37 percent and 87 percent by the same dates.

Shell's chief executive Ben van Beurden told a conference in London last year that the supermajor's core business would "for the foreseeable future (be) very much in oil and gas".

A Shell spokeswoman told AFP: "Shell is already a willing and able

player in providing more and cleaner energy solutions. Business must be part of the climate negotiations -- because it is part of the solution."



The Paris climate deal aims to limit global temperature rises to 1.5 degrees Celsius, committing nations to reduce their emissions to this end

Paris deal 'threatened'

The UNFCCC attendees list shows that Exxon and Chevron have sent 20 and 29 delegates to UN climate talks, respectively.

According to the Carbon Majors Database, which tracks emissions from major listed and state-owned fossil fuel companies, Exxon was

responsible for 2.0 percent of all industrial greenhouse gas emissions from 1988-2015.

Chevron contributed 1.3 percent in the same period, while Shell added 1.7 percent, the emissions tracker says.

"Chevron continues its longstanding commitment to work -- in good faith -- to encourage thoughtful dialogue that produces meaningful solutions to [climate change](#)," a company spokesman told AFP.

Last year in Bonn, the African Group of Nations negotiating bloc submitted an application to have conflict of interest risk recognised within the UN climate process as it does in parallel programmes, such as tobacco regulation.

It said the problem of fossil fuel representation in climate talks was so serious that it "threatens the integrity and legitimacy" of the Paris accord.

Sources close to talks told AFP that the submission was shot down by developed nations, and the discussion scrubbed from official records.

A UN official told AFP in December that the organisation took the issue of conflict of interest "extremely seriously" and said that no group at the talks influences decision making.

© 2019 AFP

Citation: Thousands of big energy reps at UN climate talks: monitor (2019, June 21) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-06-thousands-big-energy-reps-climate.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is

provided for information purposes only.