

Letters from Lyndon DeVantier

Shell in deep water (14 May 2012, Taranaki Daily News)

As multinational oil companies play monopoly with New Zealand's fossil fuel resources, with sights set on drilling the deep, dangerous Southern Basin, it is timely to consider their international record. In extolling the dubious virtues of 'leveraging' international expertise, Mr. Rob Jager, Shell's NZ Chairman, conveniently fails to mention Shell's record elsewhere. According to a comprehensive recent United Nations study in Nigeria, Shell failed to meet minimum Nigerian, or indeed their own, standards, with disastrous consequences for human health and wildlife. Over the past five decades, oil spills have contaminated 1,000 sq km of the Niger delta, and will cost \$1bn and take decades to clean. Impacts include heavy contamination of land and underground water, and drinking water with dangerous concentrations of benzene and other pollutants. Many spill sites remain highly contaminated, and hydrocarbon levels in water are more than 1,000 times the Nigerian drinking standards. If this is some of the expertise Mr Jager intends leveraging, then perhaps NZ would be better off without it, particularly given that a major offshore oil spill here will be just as bad as the Deepwater Horizon, at least according to Mr. John Pfahlert, former head of the Petroleum Exploration and Production Association. No doubt BP and Exxon Mobil were also boastful of their international expertise before the catastrophic Exxon Valdez and Deepwater Horizon spills. And to what end - an increasingly unstable climate and inhospitable planet? Please be careful what you wish for.

Fuelling fire (21 March 2012, TDN)

Todd Energy chief executive Paul Moore's claim that opponents to the massive expansion in fossil fuel production are using myth and misinformation is not supported by the science. Indeed that particular boot is on the other foot. The science clearly shows that escalating use of fossil fuels in the past century has caused the rapid rise in atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations and increase of almost one degree Celsius in Earth's temperature. All major scientific academies and associations globally, including such "radical" groups as the Royal Society and American Academy for the Advancement of Science, recognize this, and have been consistently providing governments, industry and the public with increasingly strident warnings that we must transition off fossil fuels as a matter of the utmost urgency, lest our continuing collective addition to this energy source push our planet over climate tipping points. Put simply, Earth has a fever and is being poisoned, and we're intent on adding more toxic fuel to the fire. This well understood relationship belies the well-funded myth and misinformation campaign emanating from the fossil fuel lobby. Industry dissembling on "jobs and economy" completely ignores the overwhelming future economic and environmental costs of this "business is booming" approach. This is the biggest case of "privatize the profits and socialize the losses" ever perpetrated, and will, if allowed by our apathy and greed, make this a fundamentally different planet to that which nurtured us. It's been a great ride, but it's now well past time for change.

Oil and gas PR in overdrive (13 Feb 2011, TDN)

Recent comments by PEPANZ chief executive David Robinson on economic benefits of the oil and gas industry and safety of fracking need to be seen for what they are: industry PR. While paying lip service to timely scrutiny by the green movement, Mr Robinson avoids the real issues in terms of economics and the environment. These lie firmly in the overwhelming scientific evidence that this industry is literally 'costing the earth' in terms of climate change and local-regional pollution. Numerous peer-reviewed studies show that real economic costs for future generations far outweigh short-term profits by companies and government royalties. Rapidly escalating destabilization of earth's climate will adversely affect every facet of our environment. As to fracking, this has already resulted in massive increases in the frequency of earth tremors elsewhere, with toxic wastes polluting groundwaters, streams, rivers and soils. The real issue is that our global civilization is based on this energy source, and efforts to move to clean renewables are being deliberately blocked by very well-funded disinformation campaigns – yet more industry PR.