

# Cutting Ties

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# Sixth Assessment Report

## Synthesis Report

20 March 2023



“There is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all.”



# UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

“We have a crucial responsibility in accelerating sustainable change in society and we want to be at the forefront as an institution with regard to sustainability.”



CONFIDENTIAL

## THE GREENHOUSE EFFECT

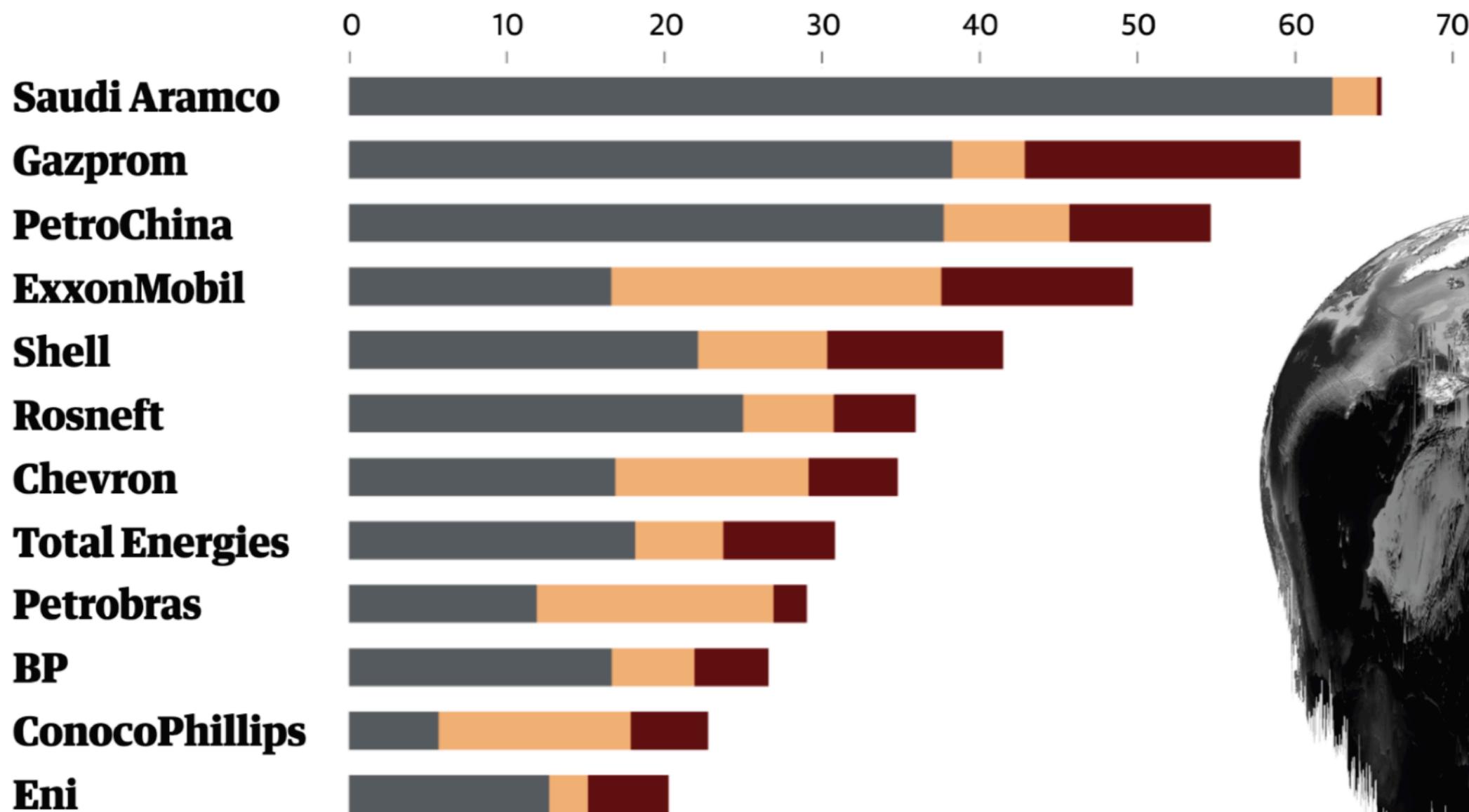
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SHELL INTERNATIONALE PETROLEUM MAATSCHAPPIJ B.V., THE HAGUE

Health, Safety and Environment Division (HSE)

## Capital expenditure per day 2021-2030, \$m

■ Compatible with 1.65C global heating   ■ Incompatible with 1.65C   ■ Incompatible with 2.7C

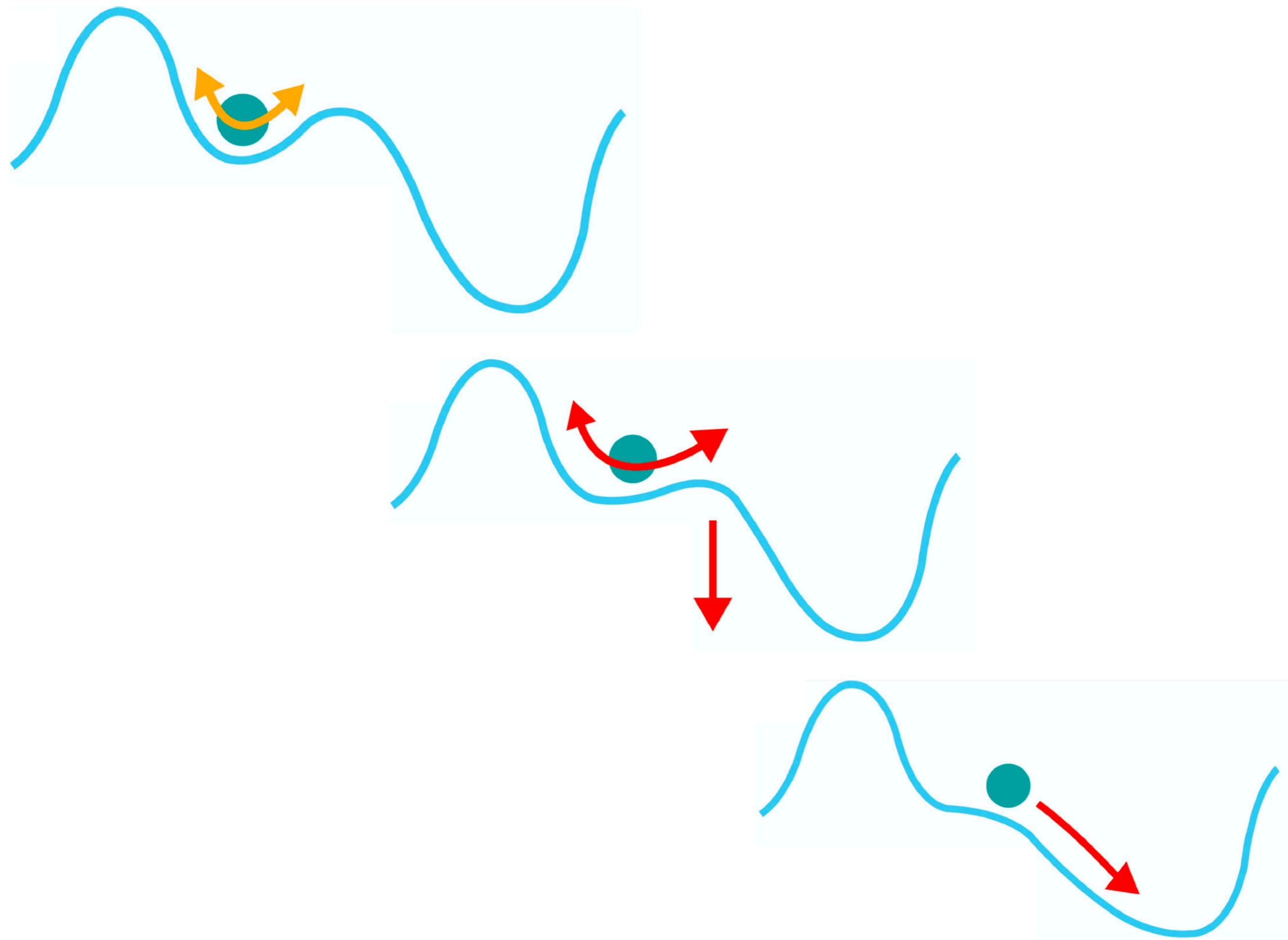


***Please do not give the impression that Shell is willing to reduce carbon dioxide emissions to levels that do not make business sense. ”***

*- Shell PR Guidance slide, 2019 -*







# <https://tinyurl.com/CutFossilTies>

## Main arguments for breaking ties with FFI

(FFI = fossil fuel industry)

### 1. Maintaining ties with the FFI violates research ethics and UvA values.

- Maintaining ties with the FFI violates basic research ethics and our values because the FFI has driven science misinformation for decades, thereby undermining public trust in science.
- Moreover, the FFI has a business model that is intrinsically harmful, leading to ecosystem collapse, and thereby violating human rights.
- Finally, research shows that FFI funding leads to biased research outcomes

### 2. Scientific evidence supports the call for cutting ties with the FFI.

- The IPCC report shows that the FFI has resisted the energy transition for decades, and has no plans to align with it.
- The IPCC report also shows that the FFI has actively undermined the scientific process for decades.

### 3. The arguments for collaborating with the FFI are scientifically unfounded.

- There is no scientific evidence that the FFI is needed for the energy transition.  
The International Energy Agency has developed a detailed path to net zero 2050, which shows that energy needs can be met without further extraction fossil fuels.
- There is also no scientific evidence that the FFI invests significantly in renewable energy. Instead, economic data shows that the FFI continues investing largely in fossil fuel extraction.

### 4. Breaking the ties with the FFI is necessary to protect academic freedom.

- Academic freedom is the right to research free from outside influence.  
Research shows that FFI funding biases research, thereby undermining this freedom.
- Moreover, the FFI has systematically undermined public trust in science for decades, contributing to a climate in which scientists routinely become subject to threats and attacks.
- Accepting money from fossil fuel companies represents an inherent conflict interest, could taint essential research and compromises academic freedom

### 5. The FFI uses collaborations with universities to greenwash their harmful business.

- Collaborations between universities and the FFI legitimize the continuation of the FFI's harmful business.

### 6. The decision to break ties with the FFI must be made now, and cannot be postponed any longer.

- The negative influence of the FFI has been thoroughly researched. There is no missing information that would justify further delay.
- The only remaining question is not whether ties should be broken, but how.

## Responses to arguments in favor of maintaining ties with FFI

### 1. "The FFI is needed for the energy transition."

- This argument is advanced by the FFI itself, but is factually incorrect.
- The FFI is the most important obstacle to the energy transition. The FFI has actively harmed the energy transition for decades, as it conflicts with their business interests, and will continue doing so. After a thorough portfolio review, this is also the conclusion drawn by pension fund ABP.
- The FFI is not aligned with the Paris goals, is investing only a minuscule part of their income in renewables, and has recently even reduced their climate ambitions.

### 2. "We need to cooperate with the FFI to develop carbon capture and storage (CCS)."

- While most mitigation scenarios of the IPCC rely on negative emissions, the IPCC is also clear about the fact that the effectiveness of CCS is unproven at scale, despite decades of research. Due to this major uncertainty, reliance on CCS should be as limited as possible.
- FFI is delaying research on CCS by not fully releasing all the relevant data it holds to researchers. This data should not be held hostage by industry with a documented history of sabotaging energy transition and scientific process.
- Congressional investigations have revealed that the FFI is using CCS as a way to justify delaying the phase-out of fossil fuels, thereby slowing down the energy transition.

### 3. "Fossil fuels are still necessary for the foreseeable future."

- The claim that fossil fuels are still necessary for the foreseeable future has no bearing on the fact that the FFI is an obstacle to the energy transition and harms both science and scientists, and is therefore no partner to the VU.
- Moreover, research shows that fossil fuels must and can be phased out rapidly. The net-zero pathway of the International Energy Agency shows that energy needs can be met by renewable sources.

### 4. "Investments by the FFI are needed to finance the energy transition."

- The claim that FFI investments are needed to finance the energy transition is both incorrect and misleading.
- Moreover, research shows that the green transition will likely result in net savings of many trillions of dollars, even without accounting for climate damages or co-benefits of climate policy.
- Furthermore, the FFI invests only a minuscule part of its profit in renewables, and pays out most of it to shareholders.

### 5. "By cooperating with the FFI, we help them to transform."

- The expectation that the UvA could help the FFI to transform into sustainable corporations presupposes that the FFI wants to transform, which is not supported by evidence.
- The FFI is making record profits with fossil fuels, and has recently scaled down their already insufficient climate plans. This indicates that the FFI has no interest in being transformed.
- Moreover, it is naive to assume that scientists will influence the FFI, and not the other way around. The FFI has actively undermined climate science for decades, and engaged in extensive greenwashing.

### 6. "A decision to break ties with the fossil industry violates academic freedom."

- The claim that a decision to break ties with the fossil industry violates academic freedom is incorrect.
- The decision does not restrict academic freedom in any way. Academic freedom describes the freedom to research and teach without external interference. Academic freedom does not justify unethical research practices. The FFI has a proven track record of intentionally and systematically harming science and human rights, and is therefore not a suitable partner for the university.
- In fact, breaking ties with the FFI is necessary to guarantee academic freedom. Research shows that FFI funding biases research.

### 7. "A university decision to break ties with the fossil industry is 'cancel culture.'"

- "Cancel culture" is a polemical, loaded term, and should be avoided in this discussion, which should be based on careful scientific and ethical considerations alone.
- The UvA has the right and obligation to decide against collaborations with an industry that has a proven track record of intentionally and systematically harming science and human rights.

### 8. "If we ban cooperations with the FFI, we also need to break ties with many other industries."

- This argument is an example of "whataboutism", which is a problematic rhetorical tool. The logical extension of this argument would be that universities cannot make any assessment of research funds they receive, which is clearly undesirable.
- In no instance is the historical and public record of corporate wrongdoing and harm as clear as in the case of the FFI, with the exception of tobacco. Research shows that the FFI has a business strategy that poses an existential threat to humanity. The IPCC report clearly documents that the FFI has actively worked against the energy transition for decades, and intentionally undermined climate science. Refusing to collaborate with this particular industry is therefore warranted, while this is less obviously the case for other industries.

### 9. "Every researcher should be free to make up their own mind about collaborating with the FFI."

- Academic freedom does not include a right of engaging in unethical research partnerships.
- The FFI has a scientifically documented track record of harming science, and scientists. The FFI's long-running campaign of climate change denialism has contributed to a toxic atmosphere of public distrust in science.
- Collaborations with the FFI are liable to legitimate the FFI's long-running practice of undermining the scientific process, as well as their human rights violations. Consequently they are unethical.