BP has lobbied extensively to roll back US environmental regulations. Photo by Ian Waldie/Getty Images

BP lobbied Trump to weaken climate safeguards on new oil and gas projects

Together with the American Petroleum Institute, BP pressed for the climate impacts of major projects to largely be excluded from environmental assessments.

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BP lobbied the Trump administration to weaken a landmark environmental law so that it would be harder to block major new oil and gas projects on climate change grounds, Unearthed can reveal.

Earlier this month President Trump announced sweeping changes to the 50-year old National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which he blames for holding back major infrastructure projects such as roads and new oil pipelines.
In recent years initiatives including the Keystone XL oil pipeline and government auctions of oil and gas leases have been delayed by federal judges on the grounds that their climate impacts have not been adequately assessed under NEPA.

Documents seen by Unearthed now reveal that BP, together with its powerful trade association, the American Petroleum Institute (API), lobbied the White House to reform NEPA so that the climate impacts of major fossil fuel projects largely fall outside its scope.

It shows what a lie the industry's public claims are that they care about climate

In an August 2018 letter to the White House, BP welcomed Trump’s plans to overhaul the regulations and endorsed a controversial set of proposals put forward in a separate letter by the API.

The API's letter demanded fundamental changes to NEPA, including a request to exclude the wider climate impacts of oil and gas projects from being assessed as part of the process of approving major infrastructure.

Many of these changes have been adopted by the White House, in a proposed new set of regulations that seek to exclude so-called ‘downstream’ emissions – such as the emissions from cars burning fuel from a new oil and gas lease – from the environmental assessment process.

Responding to the news, US Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) told Unearthed: “It's clear the fossil fuel industry calls the shots for Donald Trump. Whether it's swapping out the Clean Power Plan for a do-nothing rule, freezing fuel economy standards for cars, or gutting methane pollution limits, the Trump administration proposes rollbacks and fossil fuel handouts ripped straight from industry talking points.”

"Now we learn that Big Oil asked the administration to exclude the consideration of climate and other cumulative effects in environmental reviews. That’s shameful, but it’s no surprise. And it shows what a lie the industry’s public claims are that they care about climate; that they’re ‘on it,’” the Senator continued.

Climate impacts

A spokesman for BP told Unearthed: “BP strongly supports NEPA and has been working with the environmental and business community to ensure its continued effectiveness.”

"Neither BP nor API advocated to exclude all indirect [greenhouse gas] impacts from NEPA analysis. In fact, BP believes the NEPA analysis should include all direct and many indirect impacts,” he continued.