Factsheet The resourceful oil lobby

How do you successfully influence politics and society? The oil lobby shows how it's done. A lesson in three parts – welcome to KLIMA° vor acht!

The pretext: in spring 2026, the German state supported citizens with a fuel rebate. According to the Federal Cartel Office, only about 80 percent of it reached drivers – the rest stayed with the corporations.[1] Experience with the 2022 fuel rebate had shown that the pass-through keeps shrinking over time.[2] So how do you get such measures used again and again – and your own interests taken into account by policymakers?

Point one: meetings. Lots of them. Lobbying is not a bad thing per se – it becomes a problem when deep-pocketed interest groups get far more face time. The oil industry spends millions on lobbying every year; the expenditures recorded in the lobby register alone run into the millions, and major corporations report well over one million euros per year.[3] Small associations can hardly keep up. Perhaps that is why, in her first year in office, Federal Economics Minister Katherina Reiche did not meet a single representative of conservation groups.[4] That there is any transparency at all about these ministerial meetings is down to the Freedom of Information Act – whose use is currently being made harder by authorities threatening fees.[5]

Point two: marketing. Paint yourself green! A perfect example is the corporate image of BP: in the early 2000s, British Petroleum rebranded as "Beyond Petroleum" and got a cheerful green-and-yellow sun as its logo.[6] In 2020, BP announced with great fanfare that it would cut oil and gas production 40 percent by 2030. Four years later, the target was scrapped entirely.[7]

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1 Bundeskartellamt (2026): Quarterly report of the fuel-market transparency body – pass-through of the energy-tax cut ("fuel rebate" 2026): about 80 percent (diesel 82.6%, petrol E5 77.8%). https://www.bundeskartellamt.de/SharedDocs/Meldung/DE/Pressemitteilungen/2026/07_10_2026_Quartalsbericht_MTSK.html

2 RWI – Leibniz-Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung (2023): Pass-through of the 2022 fuel rebate declined markedly over time. https://www.rwi-essen.de/presse/wissenschaftskommunikation/pressemitteilungen/detail/rwi-weitergabe-des-tankrabatts-im-jahr-2022-nahm-ueber-die-zeit-stark-ab-und-fiel-je-nach-region-sehr-unterschiedlich-aus

3 Lobbyregister des Deutschen Bundestages; Auswertung abgeordnetenwatch.de: Oil industry spends eight million euros on lobbying (incl. BP: more than 1.8 million euros for 2021). https://www.abgeordnetenwatch.de/recherchen/lobbyismus/mineraloelwirtschaft-gibt-acht-millionen-fuer-lobbyarbeit-aus

4 ZEIT ONLINE (2026): Economics Minister Reiche has yet to meet any conservation groups; see also LobbyControl: "lobby minister Reiche". https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2026-04/bundeswirtschaftsministerin-katherina-reiche-naturschutzverbaende-gxe

5 abgeordnetenwatch.de (2026): Economics ministry wants thousands of euros for lobbying records – freedom-of-information request for appointment calendars. https://www.abgeordnetenwatch.de/recherchen/informationsfreiheit/katherina-reiche-wirtschaftsministerium-will-tausende-euro-fuer-lobby-unterlagen

6 The Guardian (2000): BP rebrands on a global scale – "beyond petroleum" instead of British Petroleum, new Helios logo. https://www.theguardian.com/business/2000/jul/25/bp

7 Reuters (2024): BP abandons goal to cut oil output, resets strategy; Carbon Brief (2025): BP abandons target to cut oil production. https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/bp-drops-oil-output-target-strategy-reset-sources-say-2024-10-07

Point three: shape public perception. Oil companies are investing in climate-neutral e-fuels – even though producing them for the same distance takes about five to six times as much electricity as a battery-electric car.[8] The companies' goal: to present them as climate-friendly in the public eye anyway. No effort is spared. In 2021, trade association UNITI booked demonstrators through a job portal for its "E-Fuels for Future" campaign – holding "E-Fuels for Future" placards in front of the Bundestag.[9]

Now it is our turn: become a lobby for facts and put what you have learned into practice. Visit your members of parliament, write to them, feed them facts and existing solutions. Act sustainably – without clumsy greenwashing. And keep the issue visible.

[8] VCD (2022): Fact check e-fuels – on the same energy, a battery-electric car travels roughly five to six times as far; ICCT (2022): e-fuels won't save the internal combustion engine. https://www.vcd.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Hintergrundpapier_E-Fuels.pdf

[9] LobbyControl (2021): "E-Fuels for Future" – how the petrol lobby staged itself as part of the climate movement (demonstrators hired via job portal); UNITI (2021): press release. https://www.lobbycontrol.de/lobbyismus-und-klima/e-fuels-for-future-wie-die-benzinlobby-sich-als-teil-der-klimabewegung-inszeniert-93011