What can I say?
Geoscientists as participants in debating our energy needs

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Why does what we say matter?

- Fundamental role of geoscience in addressing the challenges facing humanity in the 21st century
- Applying and communicating our science effectively is becoming more important than ever...
- ...just as the areas where we have most to offer are becoming more politically, socially and ethically contested
Meeting our future energy needs and dealing with the consequences

- Where and how do we get it?
- How do we commoditise and use it?
- What are the consequences for people and the environment?
- All ethical questions
Do I want to get involved?

- Energy issues can be...
  - important
  - contested
  - fraught
  - intimidating
- Sometimes a scary place for geoscientists to go – and one where it is easy to go wrong
So, how should geoscientists behave ethically in these debates?

Simple!

- Talk about your area of expertise (i.e. your scientific specialism) and nothing else
- Adhere to professional and ethical codes of conduct
Motivations (for individuals, organisations):

- Public interest
- Political and ideological conviction
- Self interest
- Indifference
- Fear
A spectrum of possible responses

Say nothing

Speak only about the science

Speak about the science, its implications, boundaries

Explicitly advocate a political stance

Choices – political and social acts with ethical implications
Can we rule out any of these choices?

• Is it always wrong to stay quiet?
• Is it always wrong to be an ‘advocate scientist’? Or is this sometimes permissible or even desirable?
• Is it OK as long as they are transparent about it, and separate science from politics/values? (Is this really possible, in contested socio-technical areas? Actually this matters for other choices too...)
• Does it depend on whether we agree with them?
• Individual vs institutional choices
Some test cases...

- Carbon capture and storage
- Radioactive waste
- Shale gas
So, how should geoscientists *really* behave ethically in these debates?

- Individuals and institutions are different in what they can legitimately (and sensibly) do
- Vested interests
- Modes of establishing impartiality and authority
- How should we weigh the importance of maintaining authority against the importance of using it for the public benefit?
So, how should geoscientists *really* behave ethically in these debates?

- Increasing attention paid to the link between ethics and professional behaviours, codes of conduct which explicitly address ethical issues, TGGGP, etc
- Codes of conduct and guidelines are necessary but not sufficient
- Geoethics at the heart of all geoscience, not as a specialist domain
- Starting (and continuing) an open transparent debate
Thank you!

Questions?

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