

Correspondence

Oil licences undermine Norway's ocean leadership

As two of the 250 scientists who supported 14 heads of state in crafting the agreement for 100% sustainable ocean management by 2025 that was announced in December (see E. Solberg *Nature* 588, 9; 2020), we are deeply concerned. Just weeks later, Norway – co-leader of the initiative – announced 61 new licences for oil and gas exploration, and it plans to permit sea-bed mining as early as 2023. Such 'business as usual' is antithetical to the commitments Prime Minister Erna Solberg communicated in this journal.

A summary of the scientific input to the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy (HLP) emphasized that "continued or increased offshore oil and gas exploration is conceptually difficult to align with the definition of a sustainable ocean economy" (see go.nature.com/3u4gwc6). We would like our work to inform, rather than 'science-wash', political agendas.

When HLP countries presented their commitments, *Nature* emphasized the need to develop accountability measures (see *Nature* 588, 7–8; 2020). No one expected that such mechanisms would be needed within weeks. The HLP is an important step towards safeguarding the ocean through science-based policy. It must not be allowed to falter.

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OECD on climate finance: donors, please step up

At the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), I oversee assessments of progress towards the goal for developed countries to mobilize US\$100 billion a year for climate action in developing countries. Your editorial calls for further third-party accounting advice in response to critiques (see *Nature* 589, 7; 2021).

The OECD analysis aims to inform the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) processes, not to pre-empt political decisions. It uses the best available data, as reported to the UNFCCC and the OECD according to established standards (see, for example, go.nature.com/2kdekwu).

Key messages emerge from our reports. Donor countries need to step up efforts on climate finance and address imbalances. Too little money is provided for adaptation efforts – which aim to minimize the effects of climate change – and for the poorest and most vulnerable countries. And a large and increasing proportion of climate finance is provided as loans rather than grants.

The OECD is committed to further enhancing transparency of and trust in climate finance data. We encourage providers to improve their reporting and disclosure of climate finance, particularly relating to the share of individual projects flagged as climate-relevant. This will address potential concerns of over-reporting and facilitate third-party review.

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Ayrton's *Nature* obit: a monument to sexism in science

The pioneering scientist Hertha Ayrton (1854–1923, born Phoebe Sarah Marks) made contributions to electric arc lighting, sediment transport and much more (see also *Nature* 511, 25–27; 2014). She was the first woman elected to membership of the Institute of Electrical Engineers and the first proposed for fellowship of the Royal Society, having won its Hadley Medal (it was 102 years before that went to another woman). Being married, she was denied entry. Ayrton held 26 patents and was a passionate activist for women's rights. As such, her obituary (H. Armstrong *Nature* 112, 800–801; 1923) is a stain on *Nature's* record. Its brazen sexism serves only as a monument to how long and hard women have had to fight for an equal place at the scientific table; and it is anti-Semitic.

This mean anti-eulogy is by someone who knew little of Ayrton or her work. The chemist Henry Armstrong airs doubts about whether women could be scientists and casts aspersions on Ayrton's originality and intelligence. By striking contrast, other obituaries, such as that in *The Guardian* (see go.nature.com/2zxb3co), celebrated her remarkable scientific achievement. After a letter of complaint (H. H. Mills *Nature* 112, 865; 1923), Armstrong, with breathtaking arrogance, chided his critic for "lacking in sense of humour" and requested one correction – to a typographical error.

In my view, the obituary should be retracted. But then, how much else of this vintage should be?

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Physics in Africa: invest to reform and transform

Launched last November, the African Strategy for Fundamental and Applied Physics (ASFAP; <https://africanphysicsstrategy.org>) aims to reform and transform physics in Africa – from education to research and applications. I and my fellow co-founders argue that physics is essential to the continent taking its place as a co-leader in the global scientific system, with all the socio-economic benefits that brings.

This year and next, ASFAP is convening a series of community meetings. We will seek broad input from: international advisers; disciplinary committees (representing astrophysics, materials science and so on); young scientists; female physicists; and ethics specialists. These consultations will inform a report setting out a detailed 10-year strategy for structures and funding for physics in Africa. The report will be submitted to the African Academy of Sciences and other stakeholders in late 2022.

We hope that this plan will attract investment from institutions, governments, philanthropic organizations and industry.

Africa's investment in research has been woefully inadequate. Inclusive growth and sustainable development cannot proceed without scientific knowledge.

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