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Fossils can still deliver! The surprising public support for fossil fuels development

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The rhetoric around human-induced climate change almost always centers on the need to move away from use of fossil fuels, and often at the core of this argument is the claim that people are clamoring for such a move. Over the past 12 months Australian shale oil proponent, Queensland Energy Resources, has commissioned several surveys to gauge public opinion on issues surrounding climate change, the development of fossil fuels and support for alternative fuels including shale-derived fuel. The results are both surprising and illustrative. The surveys demonstrate that people's opinions change with their exposure to facts, and that a general predisposition of people to be optimistic about 'green' claims is tempered significantly when confronted with choices about continued fuel availability, and these choices need not even be stark in nature. It turns out that people are as concerned about future fuel security as they are about addressing climate change. The Australian public, including the Gladstone community that has the country's most recent experience with production of shale oil, is much more supportive in principle of fossil fuel production and development than many have imagined. This is good news for shale oil proponents but bad news for the activist groups.