

SUMMING UP THE IV INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON OIL AND GAS DEPLETION

**By
C.J.Campbell**

The Association for the Study of Peak Oil and Gas “ASPO” was born in the year 2000, following a lecture at Clausthal University in Germany and discussions with representatives of the Bundesanstalt für Geowissenschaften und Rohstoffe (BGR). That led to a meeting with Dr Wellmer, the Director, who offered full support in an informal manner to overcome the inevitable bureaucratic obstacles. That initiative led to a similar informal relationship with the Norwegian Petroleum Directorate.

In 2001, C.J.Campbell started writing a monthly newsletter on the subject which was distributed to a small group of interested specialists.

The next step came when Professor Kjell Aleklett of Uppsala University organised a workshop to consider the issue of oil and gas depletion, which was duly held in May 2002, attracting about 65 participants and some media interest. Professor Aleklett also established a website (www.peakoil.net) which has had a growing following.

These initiatives stimulated interest by other scientists in universities and government departments, such that ASPO now has representatives in the following countries : Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

A small executive committee was formed following the Uppsala meeting, arranging a programme of annual conferences, which were duly held in Paris in 2003 (hosted by the IFP); in Berlin in 2004 (hosted by the BGR); and now in Lisbon (hosted by the Gulbenkian Foundation). These occasions attracted an increasing number of participants from many countries, as well as much media coverage.

The ASPO Newsletter also found an expanding readership, being now directly distributed to more than 1500, and reproduced on several websites, also in translation.

This background introduces the present conference which has attracted more than 350 participants, ten film crews and much media coverage. Great credit goes to the Gulbenkian Foundation and Partex for sponsoring the event. Mr Gulbenkian himself was not only a legendary oil man but a realist. Accordingly, it is, in a sense, very appropriate that this debate on oil depletion should be held in the shadow of his memorable achievements.

Great credit also goes to Professor Rui Rosa and his colleagues for organising the event. They have brought together a first class group of speakers who have addressed not only the technical and scientific aspects of oil and gas depletion, explaining the geological background and the obvious link between discovery and production, but have moved on to cover the economic, financial, social and political consequences. Of particular importance was the panel of senior politicians who addressed the proposed Depletion Protocol, which offers an intelligent mechanism for managing the transition to declining oil and gas supply.

The audience too has demonstrated a keen and lively interest in the topic as they absorb the different threads of the argument. Almost as important as the formal transactions has been the facility for informal meetings, stimulated by the pleasing atmosphere of Lisbon.

The media, which is well represented, also deserves great credit for taking the message from this forum to the wider public. That is important because politicians depend on a popular mandate for their actions, which will not be granted unless people at large come to understand the reality of their predicament.

In earlier years, the primary concern was to define the various categories of oil and gas and identify the trends of past discovery to demonstrate that they were finite resources formed in the geological past, being therefore subject to depletion. It is accordingly self-evident that oil and gas production in any country, region and eventually the World as a whole must start and end, reaching a peak in between. Public data on these important facts are remarkably unreliable, meaning that much effort has had to be devoted to securing sound information. The resulting evaluation has pointed to a global peak in the early years of this Century. Much interest has been directed to the date of peak, although in fact it is, within limits, of secondary importance compared with the vision of the long decline that follows it.

While self-evident from even a brief review of the fact, the notion of peak and decline, representing a discontinuity of historic proportions, has been difficult for many people to accept, being so far from established mind-sets. However, a new awareness is gradually arising, with major international agencies finding it ever more difficult to evade the issue. Accordingly, the emphasis of ASPO's work begins to shift from the issue of peak itself to consider the consequences of the decline of oil and gas, the premier sources of energy that drove the economic prosperity of the last Century. This in turn calls for a widened pool of expertise to address the social, political, economic and philosophical impact on Mankind.

The momentum for this vital work is building.