This study examines the politics of petroleum exploration in the province of Limón, Costa Rica as a self-contained entity as well as a case study demonstrating larger relationships between economy, environment and energy in modern society. Information was obtained and conclusions drawn through use of multi-disciplinary literature review and analysis in addition to approximately forty interviews conducted with key individuals involved in the issue along the Caribbean coast and in the San Jose area. The research focuses on the decision-making processes of entities within the Costa Rican national government-executively, legislatively and judicially-that have led to the current state of this issue in addition to analyzing the values, perceptions and strategies of actors actively supporting or opposing the exploration project on a local level. More conceptually, this study places the case within the context of tensions between the ideals of sustainable development and the environmental, economic and socio-cultural realities of contemporary global energy policy.