

Real Zero Europe

STATEMENT

28 November 2022

To avoid the worst effects of climate chaos, we must radically transform, equitably and justly, the way we produce our food, manage our ecosystems, and power our economies. We must urgently deploy real and proven, socially just and people-led solutions and dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions at source, down to Real Zero.

Because emissions are cumulative, every ton of current emissions contributes to the growing climate chaos that we see all around the world: heat waves, glaciers collapsing, intensified cyclones, crop losses, wildfires, and massive flooding, among other devastating impacts.

Yet fossil-drenched and fossil-entrenched government and corporate interests keep subsidizing, producing, and burning fossil fuels. Their latest greenwashing fantasy is that 'nature-based solutions' and future technologies of 'carbon dioxide removal' (CDR) will suck vast amounts of ongoing carbon pollution back out of the atmosphere *some day*. Their strategy assumes an overshoot of 1.5 °C, with just a *possibility* of returning to safe temperature levels, putting all of the planet at risk from the serious consequences of overshoot that the IPCC has warned about in its latest report.

In this strategy, every ton of promised future CDR represents emissions that are bringing us more climate chaos today.

The plan that the European Commission (EC) put forward in December 2021 in their [Communication on Sustainable Carbon Cycles](#) contributes to this strategy. In the communication, the EC proposes a regulatory process at the EU-level to certify carbon removals and create a credit that then could be traded in carbon offset markets. **Future CDR and carbon-offset markets are smokescreens for current inaction.**

In the plan, the EC promotes two types of CDR. The first is the *temporary* storage of carbon in fields and forests—called 'carbon farming'—as a means to address ongoing emissions, including the *permanent* emissions of fossil fuels. But temporary 'nature-based' sequestration is not interchangeable with and cannot compensate for fossil emissions that stay in the atmosphere and contribute to warming for hundreds to thousands of years.

The Commission is also promoting technological approaches, including direct air carbon capture and storage (DACCS) and bioenergy carbon capture and storage (BECCS). These technologies are not currently viable at scale AND have potentially enormous social, environmental, and economic risks and costs from their very high energy and resource consumption as well as from the transport and storage of carbon dioxide.

Both carbon farming and BECCS, should it ever become feasible at scale, also pose huge risks for land-speculation and land-grabbing from small-scale farmers and peasants, threatening food sovereignty in the EU and around the world.

The European Commission's direction of travel completely ignores the past and current failures of carbon offset markets to deliver either emissions reductions or the finance needed for a real and just transition away from fossil-based economies. A carbon removals-offset market benefits polluters most of all. It relies on a dangerous and false justification for continuing emissions: that someone, somewhere, might at sometime in the future remove a ton of carbon from the atmosphere. It is a sure way to torch the planet.

Future CDR cannot serve as a substitute for deep emissions reductions now. To stay below 1.5 °C of warming, requires real, just, and immediate reductions. A strategy to overshoot 1.5°C and bet on temporary removals and currently non-existent technologies to return someday to safe global temperatures *is a strategy of climate disaster.*

Europe has a huge historical responsibility to support a just transition for the Global South, and to rapidly bring emissions down to Real Zero at home. We know what Real Zero looks like: a just and equitably managed phase-out of fossil fuels; an energy transformation to real, fair, democratic, and sustainable renewable energy; support for small-scale farmers and a just transition of food and agricultural systems towards [agroecology](#) for food sovereignty; close-to-nature forestry practices; and the redirection of public subsidies, away from fossils, to support these measures.

Getting to Real Zero and staying below 1.5 °C of warming requires rejecting any European Commission proposal for certifying carbon removal offsets in a failed carbon market. It requires halting emissions and restoring ecosystems now.