

Norway shows how “net zero” rhetoric is utterly meaningless

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Norway’s parliament has just agreed to bring forward the goal of achieving “net zero” greenhouse gas emissions from 2050 to 2030, making it “a very ambitious goal”. This means that in 14 years Norway will not be a net producer of climate-changing emissions. Why has this goal been brought forward? The signing of the Paris Agreement.

This is a bold move given that the country’s emissions actually increased by 1.5% in the last year. This fact exposes the reality behind the “net zero” claims. Norway won’t be making drastic emissions reductions, it’ll buy its way to net zero instead, by purchasing carbon credits that don’t exist yet, but have been guaranteed via the Paris Agreement and the carbon markets it promises.

Carbon credits in the post-Paris Agreement world will likely be based on so-called “negative emissions” schemes. Owners of industrial monoculture tree plantations, such as those already being planted on stolen land in many parts of the world, will be able to sell carbon credits to countries like Norway, so that they can achieve their meaningless goal. Companies burning wood and other biomass for energy and capturing the emissions (a process called bioenergy with carbon capture and storage/BECCS), will also be able to sell carbon credits, despite the fact that emissions from land use changes mean that this process can’t be considered carbon negative. Further still, captured carbon is likely to be used in Enhanced Oil Recovery operations, resulting in yet more emissions. These global offsetting schemes will do far more harm than good.

In addition to buying carbon credits, “officials” have also said that Norway could move towards net zero by switching to electric vehicles, and supplying electricity to oil and gas rigs from the (mostly dam-powered) national grid. Emissions from the transport sector and vast private car ownership, and of course oil and gas exploration, are two of the biggest root causes of climate change. Yet Norway is basing its emissions reduction strategy on more cars, and running electricity cables to oil and gas infrastructure.

Electric vehicles are responsible for vast emissions when you consider the energy and resources that go into creating them – a sensible strategy for tackling transport emissions would surely mean *less* vehicles, full stop. And as one of the world’s largest producers of oil and gas, the thought that Norway could help fight climate change through supplying BP and Statoil with “green” electricity is totally laughable.

The Paris Agreement has enshrined the concepts of “negative emissions” and “net zero emissions” at the forefront of plans to tackle climate change globally. This comes very much at the expense of real efforts to drastically reduce emissions, for example through ending fossil fuel use, stopping deforestation, natural ecosystem regeneration, agro-ecology, and the many other genuine and just responses to climate change that exist.

Norway’s new goal is a good example of how governments will use the Paris Agreement to maintain the *status quo*, guaranteeing a much warmer world in years to come, with all of the impacts of catastrophic climate change that come with it.

