Amid Lobbying, the Credibility of the UN's Carbon Market Framework Is At Risk

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While technologies that capture emissions from industrial sources, known as carbon capture and storage (CCS), have built policy momentum over the last decade, the idea of removing atmospheric carbon has only recently entered the mainstream climate conversation. This rising policy interest in carbon dioxide removal (CDR) comes partly from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which declared that climate targets cannot be met without efforts to remove CO_2, and partly from lobbying by high-emitting sectors that use CDR and CCS to promote pathways to climate mitigation that are adjacent to fossil fuel operations.

As with some of the other widely publicized, but later withdrawn corporate climate promises—such as algae biofuel investments or Scope 1 & 2 emissions targets—corporate optimism for CCS often fails to materialize as concrete action. Many CCS advocates, such as ExxonMobil, BP, and Drax, have recently withdrawn CCS projects, questioned the technology's efficacy, or opposed regulations that require its implementation. ExxonMobil told the US government in May 2024 that long-term CO_2 storage is "simply unproven." In July 2026, it initiated a legal challenge against an EU obligation requiring oil and gas producers to contribute to carbon storage. Earlier this year, media reported that Drax and Microsoft—both promoters of CDR—are backtracking on their plans. With BP reportedly planning to sell its shares in its flagship CCS project in the UK, the list keeps growing.

InfluenceMap's analysis has documented a pattern of companies touting climate mitigation technologies, then backtracking on real projects and lobbying to weaken science-based rules for their implementation. This trend has reached the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, where industry lobbying has sought to dismiss UNFCCC concerns and weaken implementation standards for "engineered CDR"—mainly direct air capture with CCS (DACCS) and bioenergy with carbon capture (BECCS)—under the Paris Agreement's Crediting Mechanism (Article 6.4).

When the UNFCCC began developing rules for CDR credits in its carbon market framework, it concluded that engineered CDR is "technologically and economically unproven, especially at scale," echoing the IPCC guidance. Yet in February 2023, it released updated guidance that treated these technologies favorably, despite its initial decision to exclude them.

The International Emissions Trading Association (IETA), which has engaged with the UNFCCC on this topic since 2022, played a key role in the influencing campaign that preceded this decision. IETA, whose mission is to advocate for "smart, well-designed and effective carbon markets," has extensive corporate membership, including fossil fuel companies ExxonMobil, BP, Chevron, Shell, TotalEnergies, and Aramco. Other groups that pushed for engineered CDR include the IEA Greenhouse Gas Program (IEAGHG), Global CCS Institute (GCSI), and Carbon Capture and Storage Association (CCSA)—all boasting significant fossil fuel membership. Companies such as Microsoft, Drax, and Oxy also made similar arguments.

Industry actors appear to be pushing for a more lenient policy framework for carbon credits—with the UN's stamp of approval. This creates the risk that companies use credits to meet internal emissions reduction targets without meaningfully addressing their high-emitting activities.

Many respondents pushing for laxer CDR standards oppose science-based climate action in other policy areas. One respondent to the UN process, the American Petroleum Institute (API), cited the IPCC's 2023 report to promote CDR. But API is at the forefront of the battle against climate policy action in the US, opposing virtually all critical climate policies.

Similarly, for years, the oil company Oxy claimed that DACCS can enable a "net-zero barrel of oil"—its term for oil recovered when CO_2 captured through DACCS is injected into an oil reservoir. Earlier this year, US Energy Secretary Chris Wright appeared to affirm Oxy CEO Vicki Hollub's claim that "you can get more oil out of the ground when you're putting CO_2 in." According to Hollub, DACCS justifies producing oil until the "day when we run out of oil and gas" and gives the industry "a license to continue to operate for the 60, 70, 80 years." The IPCC does not support these claims; instead, it recommends urgently and substantially reducing global fossil fuel use to limit warming.

This is not the first time CCS advocates have tried to influence the UN. At COP30 in Brazil, 531 carbon capture lobbyists gained access to the conference. But among UN policy forums, the PACM framework may be an especially favorable target for industry, given its focus on market-based measures and technologies adjacent to the fossil fuel value chain rather than regulatory intervention and mandates for climate action.

As global warming approaches critical thresholds, the UNFCCC has a huge responsibility to ensure that international mitigation approaches are strong and credible. Weakened standards could reduce pressure to cut emissions at source and lock in high-emitting infrastructure for decades. In light of the upcoming Supervisory Body meetings in Bonn this week, where PACM standards for CDR are likely being discussed, UNFCCC should ensure that any approach to climate action is grounded in climate science and, especially where technology is concerned, accurately reflects the risks and uncertainties.