

Leak reveals ‘touchy’ issues for UAE’s presidency of UN climate summit

Exclusive: Long list of ‘sensitive’ topics for petrostate include oil and gas production, emissions and Yemen war crimes

Damian Carrington *Environment editor*

@dpcarrington

Tue 1 Aug 2023 10.20 BST



- Sultan Al Jaber, the chief executive of Adnoc, the UAE’s Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, and president of this year’s COP28 climate summit. Photograph: François Walschaerts/AFP/Getty

A comprehensive list of “touchy and sensitive issues” for the **United Arab Emirates**, which is running the next UN climate summit, has been revealed in a document leaked to the Guardian.

The document sets out the government-approved “strategic messages” to be used in response to media requests about the issues, which range from the UAE’s increasing production of oil and gas to people trafficking.

The document begins with three pages of “Cop28 UAE key messages” and “narrative points”. These contain no references to fossil fuels, oil or gas but do mention renewable energy and hydrogen.

Global experts are clear that cutting fossil fuel burning is the largest and most urgently needed action to curb heating. They are also clear that **new fossil fuel**

developments are **incompatible with net zero** emissions by 2050, and that most of existing reserves must **stay in the ground** to avoid the worst impacts of the climate crisis.

The Guardian revealed in April that the **UAE had the third biggest net-zero-busting plans** for oil and gas expansion in the world. The leaked document, which highlights “increase in production capacity v climate ambition” as an issue, is understood to have been created after this date.

The key Cop28 messages include: “We need to reduce emissions in the systems we depend on today.” A former UN climate chief in May denounced as **“dangerous”** a focus only on emissions, rather than the burning of fossil fuels.

Other sensitive climate-related issues listed are that the president of Cop28, Sultan Al Jaber, is also the chief executive of the UAE national oil company, Adnoc, a dual role that has been heavily criticised. The document also lists Adnoc’s failure to disclose its emissions or publish a sustainability report since 2016. “Adnoc is currently conducting necessary studies,” the document says.

Its defence of Al Jaber states: “Dr Sultan’s full circle career [in energy, climate and diplomacy] gives him the expertise needed to constructively engage, disrupt, and unite the very sectors needed to achieve meaningful action.”

The only mention of fossil fuels in the lengthy document is in a section titled “UAE as a hydrocarbon economy (fossil fuel lobbying)”. The response listed is that “the UAE is helping to build the energy system of tomorrow while reducing the carbon intensity of oil and gas”.

The carbon intensity of oil or gas is the CO₂ emitted per unit in producing the fuel and does not include the far greater emissions released when the fuel is burned.

“Climate ambition” is listed as an issue and the document notes that the UAE increased the ambition of its pledges recently. However, the pledge would still allow **UAE’s carbon emissions to increase** up to 2030 and the independent Climate Action Tracker consortium rates the **UAE’s plans as “insufficient”**.

The UAE’s emissions per person, among the **highest in the world**, are also listed as an issue. “We recognise that we have significant room for improvement, which is why our leadership has set us on a path to net zero by 2050,” the document says.

Pascoe Sabido, at Corporate Europe Observatory and the co-coordinator of the **Kick Big Polluters Out** coalition of more than 450 organisations, said: “These pages of tediously crafted talking points rip the green facade off of this fossil fuel presidency. Anyone who reads this should have alarm bells ringing.

“The UN climate talks have become an oil and gas industry trade show, not the flagship for climate action. An entire industry has successfully co-opted the process and is leading us in a death spiral to climate catastrophe. How far are we prepared to go to make sure that doesn’t happen?”

The document also lists responses to a long series of sensitive issues unrelated to climate and energy including: money laundering, **war crimes in Yemen**, political prisoners, surveillance and spying, LGBTQIA+ community, freedom of expression, women’s rights and people trafficking. Homosexual sex is illegal in the UAE and journalists have to be registered with the state.

Nicholas McGeehan, at the human rights group **FairSquare**, said: “It’s a remarkably detailed document but the problem for the UAE on the human rights front is that they can’t actually produce any compelling response to the very large and highly credible body of evidence against them.

“The key takeaway from this document is that the UAE cannot be taken at its word. Human rights activists have known this for a very long time, and it is critical that climate activists recognise the UAE’s duplicity.”

The purpose of the document, it says, is “to build an understanding of the most important issues raised by the international media against the UAE ... The ultimate aim is to improve the reputational image of the UAE.”

The document says: “It is mandatory that all government entities adhere to informing and getting the final approval from the National Media Office before any actual response [to the media].”

The Cop28 office, National Media Office and Adnoc all failed to respond to requests for comment.

Al Jaber **told the Guardian** in an interview in July: “Phasing down fossil fuels is inevitable and it is essential – it’s going to happen. What I’m trying to say is you can’t unplug the world from the current energy system before you build the new energy system. Transitions don’t happen overnight, transition takes time.”

He did not specify a timescale for the phasing down of fossil fuels.

The Guardian revealed in June that **Adnoc had been able to read emails** to and from the Cop28 climate summit office and was consulted on how to respond to a media inquiry.

Also revealed was an **army of fake social media accounts** promoting and defending the UAE's hosting of Cop28.

In May, Al Jaber was accused of attempting to **"greenwash" his image** after members of his team edited Wikipedia pages.

‘Absolute scandal’: UAE state oil firm able to read Cop28 climate summit emails

Exclusive: UN conference president Sultan Al Jaber is also head of oil firm, which was consulted on how to respond to a media inquiry

Damian Carrington *Environment editor*

[@dpcarrington](#)

Wed 7 Jun 2023 13.00 BST



Sultan Al Jaber, the chief executive of the UAE's Abu Dhabi National Oil Company and president of this year's Cop28 UN climate summit. Photograph: Karim Sahib/AFP/Getty

The United Arab Emirates' state oil company has been able to read emails to and from the Cop28 climate summit office and was consulted on how to respond to a media inquiry, the Guardian can reveal.

The UAE is hosting the UN climate summit in November and the president of **Cop28** is Sultan Al Jaber, who is also chief executive of the Abu Dhabi

National Oil Company (Adnoc). The revelations have been called “explosive” and a “scandal” by lawmakers.

The Cop28 office had claimed its email system was “standalone” and “separate” from that of Adnoc. But expert technical analysis showed the office shared email servers with Adnoc. After the Guardian’s inquiries, the Cop28 office switched to a different server on Monday.

Al Jaber’s dual role has attracted strong criticism, including from the former UN climate chief Christiana Figueres, who **called his approach “dangerous”**.

Replies to a Guardian email to the Cop28 office requesting reaction to these comments, which did not mention Adnoc, contained the text “Adnoc classification: internal”.

The French MEP Manon Aubry, said: “This is an absolute scandal. An oil and gas company has found its way to the core of the organisation in charge of coordinating the phasing out of oil and gas. It is like having a tobacco multinational overseeing the internal work of the World Health Organization.”

Aubry, who co-led a recent **letter to the UN from 133 US and EU politicians** calling for the removal of Al Jaber, said: “The Cop28 office has lost all credibility. If we care more about preventing a climate disaster than protecting the profits and influence of fossil fuel companies, we need to react now.”

Pascoe Sabido, at Corporate Europe Observatory and co-coordinator of the **Kick Big Polluters Out** coalition of more than 450 organisations, said the revelations were outrageous and that Al Jaber’s appointment had been “a huge blow to the credibility” of the UN’s climate body, the UNFCCC.

“It’s completely inappropriate that an oil corporation was consulted and it exposes just how influential it has been in shaping what gets presented to the outside world,” Sabido said. “Until world governments accept that fossil fuels need to be left in the ground and their lobbyists are no longer allowed to write the rules of climate action, this will keep happening.”

A senior international climate policy expert, who requested anonymity, said: “The UAE have been advised by many actors since it became clear they would host Cop28 that they should separate out the presidency from Adnoc. They also

were advised that Sultan Al Jaber should step down from his roles at Adnoc, even if temporarily. Despite a six-month listening tour, they do not seem to have picked up on this advice.”

The Guardian revealed in April that the UAE had the **third biggest net zero-busting plans** for oil and gas expansion in the world. The **International Energy Agency**, the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change** and a **large consensus of scientists** are clear that new oil and gasfields are incompatible with the 1.5C target of the Paris agreement.

In addition to being the head of Adnoc, **Al Jaber chairs Masdar**, a renewable energy company, and was the UAE climate envoy from 2010 to 2016 – he was reappointed to the post in 2020. He received support from senior figures shortly after his appointment as Cop28 president in January, including from the **US climate envoy John Kerry** and EU climate chief **Frans Timmermans**.

The Guardian discovered the links between the UAE’s Cop28 office and Adnoc after requesting a response to Figueres’s criticisms in mid-May. When asked why the email replies contained the text “Adnoc classification: internal”, the Cop28 office said it had “sought input from several subject matter experts regarding emissions, including Adnoc” and that the internal classification mark had become part of the email chain as a result.

The Guardian also asked if the Cop28 office shared an IT system with Adnoc. **Politico reported** in January that the UNFCCC had sent a “series of questions inquiring whether the presidency will be independent of the oil company ... including whether there is a firewall between the two institutions; whether Adnoc has access to Cop28 meetings and strategic documents; if [Cop28] staff are relying on the oil giant’s IT systems”.

The Cop28 office replied to the Guardian on 23 May, with a spokesperson stating: “Cop28 can confirm that Cop28 content (including emails) are held in separate servers, housed in the Cop28 offices, on a standalone, firewall-protected network, supported by a separate Cop28 IT team.”

However, expert technical analysis for the Guardian of the headers of emails from the Cop28 office and from an earlier email chain between the Guardian and the oil company revealed that Adnoc servers were involved in both sending and receiving emails from the Cop28 office.

“The [Cop28] server handed everything off to the oil company’s server to send the email out,” said Dr Richard Clayton, at the Computer Laboratory at the University of Cambridge, UK, and an expert in traceability. “The oil company was able to look at all of the email which they were sending out.”

Prof Alan Woodward, a computer security expert at the University of Surrey, UK, added: “Both the [Cop28] and Adnoc emails use the same primary email external service. Their MX record – where their email is sent to – was the same Proofpoint server.”

In response to the finding that Adnoc servers were involved in Cop28 office communications, the Cop28 spokesperson said on 2 June: “For the past few months, Cop28 has been using a dedicated Microsoft 365 tenant and email service. We have been migrating our data from the previous host to our own setup and we expect that this process will be complete by 5 June.”

The MEP Bas Eickhout, the vice-chair of the EU parliament’s environment committee, said the Guardian’s findings were “explosive”.

He added: “The [UAE presidency of Cop28] is a merger of the economic interests of a fossil country with a fundamental transition agenda that should be away from this fossil industry – that will not go well, and [these revelations] already show that it’s not going well.”

Al Jaber should be replaced as Cop28 president, Eickhout said. But with time running short before the November summit, he said the UNFCCC secretariat “should now take more control of the entire process” and better reflect the statements made by the UN secretary general António Guterres, who has warned that the climate crisis has put the world on a “**highway to hell**”. The UNFCCC did not respond to a request for comment.

Al Jaber has previously defended his appointment, and told the Guardian in April that his business ties would prove an asset in ensuring the private sector took the necessary action on the climate crisis.

The US senator Sheldon Whitehouse, who also co-led the letter calling for the removal of Al Jaber, said: “The [Guardian] reports seem to confirm what many of us have been saying. Sultan Al Jaber will be hard-pressed to separate his role as CEO of Adnoc from his role as the head of the world’s largest diplomatic gathering on climate change. Our window to avert climate disaster is narrowing, and there’s too much at stake for the planet to get this wrong.”