

Cop28 landmark deal agreed to ‘transition away’ from fossil fuels

Summit president hails ‘historic package to accelerate climate action’ but critics decry ‘litany of loopholes’ in final text

Adam Morton, Patrick Greenfield, Fiona Harvey and Nina Lakhani in Dubai, and Damian Carrington

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Nearly 200 countries at the [Cop28](#) climate summit have agreed to a deal that for the first time calls on all nations to transition away from fossil fuels to avert the worst effects of climate change.

After two weeks of at times fractious negotiations in the United Arab Emirates, the agreement was quickly gavelled through by the Cop28 president, Sultan Al Jaber, on Wednesday morning. He received an ovation from delegates and a hug from the UN climate chief, Simon Stiell.

Despite the urging of more than 130 countries and scientists and civil society groups, the agreement did not include an explicit commitment to phase out or even phase down fossil fuels.

Instead, it reached a compromise that called on countries to contribute to global efforts to transition “away from fossil fuels in energy systems in a just, orderly and equitable manner, accelerating action in this critical decade, so as to achieve net zero by 2050 in keeping with the science”.

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Al Jaber argued that the deal, reached in the hottest year on record, was a comprehensive response to a global stocktake that found countries were failing to live up to the goals of the landmark Paris climate agreement, particularly a commitment to try to limit global heating to 1.5C (2.7F) above preindustrial levels.

“We have delivered a robust action plan to keep 1.5C in reach,” he said. “It is an enhanced, balanced, but make no mistake, a historic package to accelerate

climate action. It is the UAE consensus. We have language on fossil fuel in our final agreement for the first time ever.”

Countries from the global south and climate justice advocates said the text fell short of what was needed on emissions reductions and finance to help the most vulnerable cope with worsening extreme weather and heat, and included language that appeared to placate fossil fuel interests.

There was confusion in the plenary hall shortly after the agreement was passed as many parties had assumed there would be a debate over the text. The Alliance of Small Island States, representing 39 countries, said it had not been in the room when the deal was adopted as it was still coordinating its response.

Its lead negotiator, Anne Rasmussen, from Samoa, did not formally object to the agreement and believed the deal had good elements, but said the “the process has failed us” and the text included a “litany of loopholes”. “We have made an incremental advancement over business as usual when what we really needed is an exponential step change in our actions and support,” she said. Her speech was met with a standing ovation.

Most praise for the deal focused on the call to transition away from coal, oil and gas. Prof Johan Rockström, of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany, said: “No, the Cop28 agreement will not enable the world to hold the 1.5C limit, but yes, the result is a pivotal landmark. This agreement delivers on making it clear to all financial institutions, businesses and societies that we are now finally – eight years behind the Paris schedule – at the true ‘beginning of the end’ of the fossil fuel-driven world economy.”

The UN secretary general, António Guterres, tweeted: “Whether you like it or not, fossil fuel phase-out is inevitable. Let’s hope it doesn’t come too late.”

John Kerry, the US special presidential envoy for climate, said: “While nobody here will see their views completely reflected, the fact is that this document sends a very strong signal to the world.”

Key points to come out of the deal included:

- It reinforced the 1.5C goal and recognised it would require a 43% emissions cut by 2030 and 60% by 2035 relative to 2019 levels. It implies a major increase in targets and policies when countries submit new commitments in 2025.

- Countries backed a call for global renewable energy to be tripled and the rate of energy efficiency improvements doubled by 2030.
- A statement that global emissions should peak by 2025 was dropped. China, among others, objected to this despite evidence it may be on track to peak its own emissions by then.
- Language backed by fossil fuel interests found its way into the text, including “transitional fuels” – seen as a code for natural gas – and “carbon capture and utilisation and storage”.
- Little progress was made on climate adaptation and finance, which the deal acknowledges will need trillions of dollars in support.
- A loss and damage fund to help the most vulnerable repair the damage from climate breakdown was operationalised – a major step forward – but significant work remains to build its capacity.

The strained nature of the agreement reflects the UN climate conference’s consensus process. Once a deal is reached, individual countries are responsible for delivering on the agreements through national policies and investments.

Many developed countries had joined the most vulnerable in publicly pushing for a phase-out of coal, oil and gas. The European Union said there was a “supermajority” in support for the idea, but many wealthy countries wanted it only to apply to “unabated” fossil fuels – those where the emissions from burning them are not captured.

Saudi Arabia and a few allied countries objected to the inclusion of any reference to reducing the production and consumption of fossil fuels in the text of a potential deal. After the deal, a Saudi Arabian representative reportedly said the texts agreed “do not affect our exports, do not affect our ability to sell”. Opec, the group of oil producers of which Saudi Arabia and UAE are both members, congratulated the Cop on the “positive outcome”.

Stiell said Cop28 had needed to signal a “hard stop to humanity’s core climate problem – fossil fuels and their planet-burning pollution” – and the final agreement left a lot of room for interpretation. It was up to countries to commit to its most ambitious interpretation, he said.

“If all countries don’t take this approach, loopholes leave us vulnerable to fossil fuel vested interests, which could crash our ability to protect people everywhere against rising climate impacts,” he said.

Mohamed Adow, from the thinktank Power Shift Africa, said the deal sent a strong signal but he agreed there were too many loopholes “on unproven and expensive technologies like carbon capture and storage, which fossil fuel interests will try and use to keep dirty energy on life support”.

He said: “Some people may have had their expectations for this meeting raised too high, but this result would have been unheard of two years ago, especially at a Cop meeting in a petrostate. It shows that even oil and gas producers can see we’re heading for a fossil-free world.”

Countries will reconvene at Cop29, which will be held in Baku, Azerbaijan, next November.



[1/12]United Arab Emirates Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology and COP28 President Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber attends the plenary, after a draft of a negotiation deal was released, at the United Nations Climate Change Conference COP28 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, December 13, 2023. REUTERS

Nations strike deal at COP28 to transition away from fossil fuels

By Valerie Volcovici, Gloria Dickie and William James

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- Summary Companies
- COP28 reaches deal to reduce fossil fuels consumption Summit President Sultan Al Jaber calls accord 'historic' Small island states say deal does not do enough OPEC wanted focus on emissions not fuels

DUBAI, Dec 13 (Reuters) - Representatives from nearly 200 countries agreed at the COP28 climate summit on Wednesday to begin reducing global consumption of fossil fuels to avert the worst of climate change, a first of its kind deal signaling the eventual end of the oil age.

The deal struck in Dubai after two weeks of hard-fought negotiations was meant to send a powerful signal to investors and policy-makers that the world is united in its desire to break with fossil fuels, something scientists say is the last best hope to stave off climate catastrophe.

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COP28 President Sultan Al Jaber called the deal "historic" but added that its true success would be in its implementation.

"We are what we do, not what we say," he told the crowded plenary at the summit. "We must take the steps necessary to turn this agreement into tangible actions."

Several countries cheered the deal for accomplishing something elusive in decades of climate talks.

"It is the first time that the world unites around such a clear text on the need to transition away from fossil fuels," said Norway Minister of Foreign Affairs Espen Barth Eide.

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"It has been the elephant in the room. At last we address it head on," he said.

More than 100 countries had lobbied hard for strong language in the COP28 agreement to "phase out" oil, gas and coal use, but came up against powerful opposition from the Saudi Arabia-led oil producer group OPEC, which argued that the world can slash emissions without shunning specific fuels.

That battle pushed the summit a full day into overtime on Wednesday.

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Members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries together control nearly 80% of the world's proven oil reserves along with about a third of global oil output, and their governments rely heavily on those revenues.

Small climate-vulnerable island states, meanwhile, were among the most vocal supporters of phasing out fossil fuels and had the backing

of huge oil and gas producers such as the United States, Canada and Norway, along with the EU bloc and scores of other governments.

"This is a moment where multilateralism has actually come together and people have taken individual interests and attempted to define the common good," U.S. climate envoy John Kerry said after the deal was adopted.

A representative for the Alliance of Small Island States also addressed the plenary, complaining that the agreement had been gaveled before its delegates had arrived in the room, and criticising the text as unambitious.

"We have come to the conclusion that the course correction that is needed has not been secured. We have made an incremental advancement over business as usual, when what we really need is an exponential step change in our actions," she said.

But she did not formally object to the pact, and her speech drew a standing ovation.

Danish Minister for Climate and Energy Dan Jorgensen marveled at the circumstances of the deal: "We're standing here in an oil country, surrounded by oil countries, and we made the decision saying let's move away from oil and gas."

OPEC RESISTANCE

The deal specifically calls for "transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly and equitable manner ... so as to achieve net zero by 2050 in keeping with the science."

It also calls for a tripling of renewable energy capacity globally by 2030, speeding up efforts to reduce coal use, and accelerating technologies such as carbon capture and storage that can clean up hard-to-decarbonize industries.

Now that the deal is struck, countries are responsible for delivering through national policies and investments.

In the United States, the world's top producer of oil and gas and the largest historical emitter of greenhouse gases, for example, climate-conscious administrations have struggled to pass laws aligned with their climate vows through a politically divided Congress.

U.S. President Joe Biden scored a major victory on that front last year with passage of the Inflation Reduction Act, which contained hundreds of billions of dollars in subsidies for electric vehicles, wind, solar and other clean energy technologies.

Mounting public support for renewables and electric vehicles from Brussels to Beijing in recent years, along with improving technology, sliding costs, and rising private investment have also driven rapid growth in their deployments.

Even so, oil, gas, and coal still account for about 80% of the world's energy, and projections vary widely about when global demand will finally hit its peak.

OPEC Secretary General Haitham Al Ghais had said in a letter dated Dec. 6 to OPEC members and allies at COP28 that the world should target emissions rather than fossil fuels themselves, rallying them to oppose any deal targeting oil.

Oil producers have argued that fossil fuels can be cleansed of their climate impact by using technology that can capture and store carbon dioxide emissions. Carbon capture, however, is expensive and has yet to be proven at scale.



Cop28: second draft text of climate deal calls for ‘transitioning away’ from fossil fuels

Latest draft does not include a commitment to phase out or phase down fossil fuels, as many countries, civil society groups and scientists have urged

- See all our coverage of Cop28

Adam Morton *in Dubai*

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- The Cop28 presidency has released a second proposed text of a climate agreement Photograph: Dominika Zarzycka/NurPhoto/Shutterstock
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A new draft climate agreement released at the Cop28 climate summit in the United Arab Emirates has for the first time explicitly called on nations to transition away from fossil fuels to avert the worst impacts of the climate crisis.

But the latest proposed text, released by the Cop president, Sultan Al Jaber, early on Wednesday, did not include an explicit commitment to phase out or phase down fossil fuels, as many countries, civil society groups and scientists have urged.

Instead, it called on countries to contribute to global efforts to transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems “in a just, orderly and equitable manner, accelerating action in this critical decade, so as to achieve net zero by 2050 in keeping with the science”.

At Cop28 it feels as if humanity’s shared lifeboat is sinking. There are only hours left to act

Vanessa Nakate

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The release of the proposed compromise followed a fraught 36 hours of negotiations after Al Jaber released a draft which was roundly rejected by rich and poor countries, who described it as “grossly insufficient”, “incoherent” and a “death certificate” for low-lying and vulnerable nations.

The new proposal said countries recognised “the need for deep, rapid and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in line with 1.5C pathways”.

It called for a tripling of global renewable energy capacity by 2030 and repeated previously agreed language that they would accelerate efforts “towards the phase-down of unabated coal power”.

It also called for the development of “zero- and low-emission technologies” including “renewables, nuclear, abatement and removal technologies such as carbon capture and utilisation and storage, particularly in hard-to-abate sectors, and low-carbon hydrogen production”.

The draft is meant to reflect the consensus view of nearly 200 countries gathered at the conference in Dubai, where scores of governments have insisted on strong language to signal an eventual end to the fossil fuel era against protests from Saudi Arabia and members of the oil producing group OPEC.

Country representatives have been called to what the Cop28 presidency hopes is a final meeting later Wednesday morning, where they could pass the deal and end two weeks of tough negotiations that have run a day into overtime.

Norway's minister for climate and the environment, Espen Barth Eide, said the new draft was the first time that the world had united around "such a clear text on the need to transition away from fossil fuels". "It has been the elephant in the room, at last we address it head on," he said.

Stephen Cornelius, WWF's deputy global climate and energy lead, said the new draft was a "sorely needed improvement from the last version, which rightly caused outrage", but should have gone further. "The language on fossil fuels is much improved, but still falls short of calling for the full phase out of coal, oil and gas," he said.

Rachel Cleetus, policy director and a lead economist for the climate and energy program at the Union of Concerned Scientists the text sent a strong signal that world leaders recognised the need for a sharp turn away from fossil fuels towards clean energy in this decade, aligned with scientific warnings.

"The finance and equity provisions, however, are seriously insufficient and must be improved in the time ahead in order to ensure low- and middle-income countries can transition to clean energy and close the energy poverty gap," she said.

Melanie Robinson, global climate program director at the World Resources Institute, said: "This text makes a clear call for the world to transition away from fossil fuels and accelerate action this decade. This would dramatically move the needle in the fight against climate change and overcome immense pressure from oil and gas interests."

But Bill Hare, chief executive of Climate Analytics, said there were major problems with the text, and it looked like a "major victory for the oil and gas producing countries and fossil fuel exporters". He said it included no commitment to peak global emissions by 2025, as was necessary, and included language "opens the door to false solutions".

Deals struck at UN climate summits must be passed by consensus, at which point individual countries are responsible for delivering on the agreements through national policies and investments.

If the language about transitioning away from fossil fuels was adopted it would mark the first time in three decades of COP climate summits that nations agreed

on a concerted move away from oil, gas and coal – products that now account for about 80% of global energy.

Scientists say fossil fuels are by far the largest source of the greenhouse gas emissions driving climate change.

Sultan Al Jaber, president of the talks on behalf of the United Arab Emirates, had earlier engaged in an intense round of shuttle diplomacy throughout Tuesday and had meetings with heads of delegation singly and in groups planned until 3am on Wednesday.

Climate justice advocates have told the Guardian that rich countries have failed to show the leadership necessary to solve the climate crisis, and many are too mired in their own hypocrisy over fossil fuels to break the impasse at Cop28,

Saudi Arabia and a few allied countries were in a small minority that had publicly raised strong objections to the inclusion of any reference to reducing the production and consumption of fossil fuels in the text of a potential deal.

Many developed countries have publicly pushed hard for a phase-out of coal, oil and gas – but with caveats such as “unabated” or just coal, in the case of the US.

In contrast, many in the developing world – despite their desire to see global temperatures limited to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels – say any commitment to phasing out fossil fuels must be “fair, funded, and fast”, with the rich polluting countries transitioning first.