

Environment: Carbon capture and storage – what’s the real goal?

JohnMenadue.com 17 Nov. 2024 By Peter Sainsbury



Carbon capture and storage fails to deliver carbon but succeeds for governments and industry. The pros and cons of reducing your personal carbon footprint. How best to tackle Australia’s land clearing loopholes.

Carbon capture and storage is not the solution

[Kevin Morrison](#) has succinctly summed up the carbon capture and storage (CCS) con trick being pulled on us by the fossil fuel industry and governments around the world, including our own:

‘... global energy-related CO₂ emissions rose by 410 million tonnes (mt) to reach a new high of 37.4 billion tonnes in 2023. Given that it has taken around 50 years to capture less than 10mt per annum of CO₂, it is going to take a heroic technical effort to meaningfully reduce the 37 billion tonnes of CO₂ being pumped into the atmosphere each year, and a gargantuan sum of money to build the CCS facilities. Chevron and its [Gorgon](#) CCS partners have invested more than AU\$3.2 billion in the Gorgon CCS project to bury a total of around 9.5mt of CO₂, which equates to a cost of AU\$336.8 to bury a tonne of CO₂. Apply that to the 37 billion tonnes of CO₂ of energy-related emissions each year, and the cost is in the trillions.’

... but oil and gas companies keep promoting the fantasy

Despite the evidence, which they are [fully aware of](#), fossil fuel companies have been playing a canny game on CCS. Publicly they [bignote](#) their 'successes' with CCS so far, even though [not one CCS project](#) worldwide has ever reached its CO2 capture target. And they shout about its [future promise](#) for not only for their own activities but also for transport and industry more generally ('see how the work we're doing on CCS will help others'). In this deception they've been assisted by some of the USA's major [media companies](#) such as the New York Times, Reuters and the Washington Post, and, unlikely as it seems, even [National Public Radio](#) (NPR).

But behind closed doors, the oil and gas companies lobby governments hard for subsidies for further CCS development and payments for every ton of CO2 removed from the atmosphere, while ensuring that governments do not set quantified carbon capture targets by claiming that the technology isn't yet well enough developed for such a move.

CCS consistently fails for society but is a winner for governments and fossil fuel companies. It's hard not to conclude that its real goal is being met.

Personal carbon footprint con tricks

CCS is just one of a long list of climate action hoaxes that includes: plant gazillions of trees, buy carbon offsets, stop eating meat, buy local, eliminate air travel, recycle plastics, etc. That's not to say that we shouldn't plant more trees, eat less meat, support local producers, avoid plastics, repair and recycle items, have more virtual meetings, travel by train, etc. There are excellent reasons why we should be doing all of these but making a serious contribution to managing climate change isn't one of them.

Not one of them individually, nor all of them together, is going to solve our global warming problem. Nor will they solve any of the other serious environmental problems we face regarding biodiversity, the nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, ocean pollution, etc. etc. etc.

Measure your personal carbon footprint if you want and take action to reduce it but don't be fooled into thinking that getting everyone to do it is the magic bullet for global warming. Apart from anything else, even if we could get everyone to do it simply out of the goodness of their hearts, it would take more time than we've got.

Governments and multinational companies have the responsibility and the resources to make the changes that are necessary at the national and international levels to combat climate change. At any particular time, however, the incumbent ministers, board members and CEOs have very short-term, self-preservation priorities and are not concerned about the long-term welfare of their country or business, never mind humanity as a whole.

As a result, they promote a myriad of DIY con tricks that are all designed to avoid meaningful, collective, political, industrial and economic action to rapidly reduce and eliminate greenhouse gas emissions. Their aim is deflect the responsibility for taking action away from themselves and on to individuals by convincing the public that a) multiple small actions to reduce each individual's carbon footprint will do the job (they won't), and/or b) industry and governments have matters in hand (they haven't), and/or c) there is no need for the public to be more concerned and more politically active (there is).

So please, keep doing the right thing in your personal life for whatever reason turns you on but also do what you can to promote the rapid political and economic change at societal levels that is absolutely essential.