

Brussels, 8 January 2024

TO: European Commission and ESABCC
Wopke Hoekstra, Commissioner for Climate Action
Ottmar Edenhofer, Chair European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change

Open letter calling for a firewall between carbon emissions, land sequestration and permanent removals in the EU

The European Union must explicitly separate targets and policies for emissions reductions, carbon sequestration in the land sector and permanent removals in its post-2030 climate framework

Dear Commissioner Hoekstra and Professor Edenhofer,

Currently, the European Climate Law sets a maximum amount for removals occurring from natural sinks that can be used to achieve the 2030 net emissions reduction target of at least 55% compared to 1990 levels.

The 2030 target establishes partial separation, and building on this sensible and precautionary approach, the undersigned urge EU policymakers to set separate and distinct targets and policies for gross greenhouse gas emissions reduction, net carbon dioxide sequestration in the land use (LULUCF) sector and permanent carbon dioxide removals. This must be done across the entire EU climate policy architecture, including the setting and implementation of the 2040 target, and the updated nationally determined contributions of the EU and its member states (EU NDC).

The EU must move beyond a 'net' approach when establishing its future climate targets. The current 55% net reduction target is misleading, as, when excluding LULUCF from emissions, it equates to around [52-54%](#) of reduction.

Benefits of separation

Setting independent and distinct targets for emissions reductions, land sequestration, and carbon removals is beneficial for several reasons:

- 1) Avoiding a slow down of emissions reduction efforts.** Net targets treat carbon sequestration in the land sector and permanent removals as substitutes for emissions reductions. This risks so-called "mitigation deterrence", i.e. emission cuts being delayed or replaced by current or promised future removals or sequestration.
- 2) Identifying a sustainable role for removals.** Depending heavily on carbon sequestration and removals to meet future climate targets deflects from necessary emissions reductions and undermines the objective of limiting global warming, while increasing the cost of achieving net negative emissions in the future. This is the case for both land-based sequestration activities, which take time to absorb carbon and are susceptible to extreme events, and for most of the novel permanent removal methods, whose feasibility, scalability and impacts are still uncertain. Separating LULUCF sequestration from emissions reduction targets and establishing a fair and sustainable

target for permanent removals maximises the benefits of both activities and ensures accountability while guaranteeing decarbonisation is at the forefront of EU climate policy.

- 3) **Providing better governance for land-based sequestration and permanent removals.** On the one hand, land-based carbon sequestration is vulnerable to human or natural disturbances, but if enhanced through nature restoration activities and sustainable agricultural and forestry practices, it has multiple benefits for biodiversity and ecosystems. On the other hand, permanent removals have a higher potential to effectively supplement climate change mitigation by securing millennia of storage permanence, but its deployment at scale can be limited due to technological constraints, and energy, land and water requirements. Both types of activities can negatively affect biodiversity and the rights of local communities and indigenous peoples. Addressing these activities separately through distinct targets and dedicated governance frameworks helps provide a safer regulatory space to maximise the benefits and address the risks while increasing trust and transparency.
- 4) **Enhancing certainty for project developers.** Today, developers of high-quality land-based carbon sequestration activities and permanent removal methods experience uncertainty due to a lack of strategic vision and policy. Maintaining the separate LULUCF target and incentivising nature restoration activities and sustainable agricultural and forestry practices without quantifying the carbon, beyond LULUCF accounting, allows for nature protection and carbon sequestration without placing excessive burden on landholders. At the same time, setting explicit targets for permanent removals would better support developers by reducing regulatory risk and providing long-term clarity, in turn supporting investment.
- 5) **Demonstrating that emissions reduction and removals are different.** Once released into the atmosphere, CO₂ emissions have a permanent and often irreversible impact on the Earth's climate, ecosystems and human health. If done well, land-based carbon sequestration and permanent removals can help limit this damage, but they cannot undo them (if done badly, they can actually increase emissions). The effect of emitting carbon and then removing it from the atmosphere is more detrimental than not emitting it in the first place. Keeping targets and policy frameworks separate helps clarify this physical principle.

Our demands

We urge EU policymakers to align with what the majority of respondents (54%) to the [European Commission's public consultation on the EU Climate Target for 2040](#) advocated for: **three separate targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions, land-based sequestration and permanent carbon removals.**

In particular, at this stage, we call on the European Commission to place the principle of three distinct targets at the heart of its [upcoming Communication on the EU climate target for 2040 and its accompanying impact assessment](#).

Furthermore, the Commission should uphold the separation approach in subsequent proposals surrounding the setting and implementation of the 2040 target, and the updated EU NDC.

The undersigned,

Academics and scientists (in alphabetical order):

Name	Affiliation
Jonas Allesson	Lund University
Jelle Bijma	Alfred-Wegener-Institut, Helmholtz-Zentrum für Polar- und Meeresforschung
Timothée Bourgeois	NORCE Norwegian Research Center
Alina Brad	University of Vienna
Johanna Braun	Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research
Wim Carton	Lund University
Selene Cobo	ETH Zurich
Mark Cooper	University of California, Davis
Danny Cullenward	Kleinman Center for Energy Policy, University of Pennsylvania
Kate Dooley	University of Melbourne
Kate Ervine	Saint Mary's University
Jens Friis Lund	University of Copenhagen
Jesse Jenkins	Princeton University
Wolfgang Knorr	Lund University
Bård Lahn	University of Oslo
William Lamb	Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change (MCC)
Moritz Laub	ETH Zurich
Chieh-Yu Lee	University of Groningen
Simon Lewis	University College London
Wolfgang Lucht	Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and Humboldt University Berlin
Laura Marín-Samper	University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria
Nils Markusson	Lancaster University
Duncan McLaren	UCLA School of Law
Lucrezia Nava	City University of London
Andreas Oschlies	GEOMAR

Paul Price	Dublin City University (Adjunct Staff) and eNGOs
Gaurav Sant	UCLA's Institute for Carbon Management
JP Sapinski	Université de Moncton, Canada
Manfred Sargl	University of the Bundeswehr Munich
Etienne Schneider	University of Vienna, Department of Development Studies
Volker Sick	Global CO2 Initiative at the University of Michigan
Doreen Stabinsky	College of the Atlantic
Nixon Sunny	Imperial College London
Bronislaw Szerszynski	Lancaster University
Samantha Eleanor Tanzer	Delft University of Technology
Matthew Tarduno	University of Illinois at Chicago
Juanita von Rothkirch	ETH Zürich
Stefano F. Verde	University of Siena
Constanze Werner	Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research

Research institutes, think tanks and research consortia (in alphabetical order)

Carbon Drawdown Initiative

Environmental Justice Network Ireland

Institute for Carbon Removal Law & Policy, American University

Institute for Sustainable Development

NEGEM

NewClimate - Institute for Climate Policy and Global Sustainability gGmbH

Oeko-Institut e.V.

Sandbag Climate Campaign ASBL

Third Generation Environmentalism (E3G)

Companies and business associations (in alphabetical order):

Aether Diamonds

Airhive

Arca

Bakz4ever

Blue Dot Change
Carbo Culture
Carbon-Based Consulting LLC
Carbonaide
CarbonBuilt
Carbonfuture
Climate Action Platform - Africa
ClimateStrategy
Climeworks AG
Clo Carbon Cymru
Consult Climate
Deutscher Verband für negative Emissionen (DVNE)
Direct Air Capture Coalition
Earthbilt
Equatic
EuroCommerce
German Biochar e.V.
NEG8 Carbon
Nori, Inc.
Parallel Carbon
Patch
Planetary Technologies
Reverce
#SustainablePublicAffairs
Terrafixing Inc.
Thallo

Non-Governmental Organisations (in alphabetical order):

Bellona Europa
BEUC, The European Consumer Organisation
Break Free From Plastic

Carbon Market Watch

CarbonPlan

Centre for Grower-centric Eco-value Mechanisms

Clean Air Task Force

ClientEarth

Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe

Climate Action Network (CAN) International

Climate Litigation Network

Comité Schone Lucht

ECOS

European Environmental Bureau

Friends of the Earth Ireland

Global Citizen

Green Transition Denmark

Greenpeace Germany

Iceland Nature Conservation Association

L'Observatoire du Principe Pollueur-Payeur

Leefmilieu

LIFE Education Sustainability Equality e.V.

Naturskyddsforeningen - Swedish Society for Nature Conservation

Natuur & Milieu

Natuurpunt

Oxfam EU

remove

SEO/Birdlife

Tapp Coalition

Terraset

Transport&Environment

Umweltinstitut München e.V.

Urgenda

WISE Netherlands

WWF European Policy Office

ZERO - Association for the Sustainability of the Earth System

Zero Emissions Platform

Logos below

Logos of companies, institutes and organisations supporting this call (in alphabetical order):





