

COP28 a “tragedy for the planet” as Stockholm Syndrome took hold

David Spratt and Ian Dunlop (<https://reneweconomy.com.au/author/david-spratt-and-ian-dunlop/>) 19

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United Nations Climate Change



DUBAI 2023



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Up to 100,000 people – most of whom derive their professional status and income from climate-related politics, advocacy and business – flew into Dubai for the COP28 annual global climate policy-making event, the Conference of the Parties under the United Nations’ climate convention.

And the result?

An unmitigated disaster. Indigenous people, frontline communities and climate justice groups rebuked (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/dec/13/indigenous-people-and-climate-justice-groups-say-cop28-was-business-as-usual>) the deal as unfair, inequitable and “business as usual”.

At the final session, a weak and incoherent compromise resolution (https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cma2023_L17_adv.pdf) between petrostates and smaller states and advocates – which did not call for the phase-out of fossil fuels – was accepted without dissent and greeted with a self-congratulatory standing ovation, even as Pacific and small island delegates were barred by security from entering the room (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-12-14/pacific-islands-cop28-agreement-climate-change-sultan-al-jaber/103227422>).

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Too many glib responses were variations on the “moving in the right direction, but more needs to be done” mash, with “flawed but still transformative”

(https://www.theenergymix.com/change-in-tone-has-cop-decision-moving-in-right-direction-as-negotiators-work-overnight/?utm_source=The+Energy+Mix&utm_campaign=6459622a26-TEM_RSS_EMAIL_CAMPAIGN&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_dc146fb5ca-6459622a26-510013110) one classic example.

Within two days the COP28 president, who also heads the Abu Dhabi National Oil company, announced the United Arab Emirates would keep up its record investment

(<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/dec/15/cop28-president-sultan-al-jaber-says-his-firm-will-keep-investing-in-oil>) in new oil production.

Prof. Kevin Anderson of the University of Manchester described

(<https://twitter.com/kevinclimate/status/1735329275857760686>) the scene as “the infinite loop of the COP GroundHog days”.

It seemed a form of Stockholm Syndrome again took hold with cooped-up delegates – for decades held hostage to the denial-and-delay tactics of the fossil-fuel producers and the threat of veto from their captured governments – cheering an outcome which will push societies everywhere closer to civilisational breakdown.

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Such cognitive dissonance is the COPs' cultural norm. It is all about a performative outcome regardless of efficacy. Despite dozens of such "successes" over three decades, global emissions are still rising.

The politics is about incrementalism, compromises, deals and "pragmatic realism" which assume that one can negotiate with the laws of nature and mollify an existential risk by such behaviour. Avoiding climate risk, the supposed *raison d'être* for COPs, is neither discussed nor understood by the key negotiators.

Many people with a career in climate policy will celebrate any outcome, because to do otherwise would be to admit to the COPs' systemic failure, and risk their own professional future.

But many "outside the tent" in Dubai – the scientists, the most vulnerable states, the young activists and the civil society organisations with some spine – did not celebrate; they wept for humanity's future. Kevin Anderson summed it up (<https://www.barrons.com/articles/weak-tea-climate-scientists-push-back-against-cop28-cheer-4d120501>): "No doubt there will be lots of cheer and back-slapping... but the physics will not care."

There were two big items on the agenda: reducing emissions, mainly from fossil fuels, to zero; and finance. On the first, national delegates agreed to "transition away from fossil fuels," but words about the "phaseout" of oil, coal and gas advocated by civil society and 130 out of 198 participating countries did not appear.

Even then, there were get-out-of-jail cards aplenty. The big one was the acceleration of carbon capture and storage, which the fossil fuel industry claims will allow the production of oil, gas and coal indefinitely, except that the technology does not work at scale.

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Then there is the acceptance of “efficient” fossil fuel subsidies, and language around the need for an “orderly” transition which is now impossible largely as a result of fossil fuel industry denialism over many decades.

Climate finance is essential, especially for the developing and most vulnerable nations, through the Green Climate Fund, and a Loss and Damage fund which recognises the historic responsibility of high-polluting nations for the damage inflicted on those who have contributed least to the problem but have disproportionately borne the impacts.

Small island states characterised (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/15/cop26-pacific-delegates-condemn-monumental-failure-that-leaves-islands-in-peril>) the national commitments to these funds to date as trivial and disappointing, and Australia’s refusal to support a funding facility for loss and damage as “a deep betrayal and abdication of its responsibilities to its Pacific neighbours”.

From scientists, there was anger and condemnation. They know that after 28 COPs the level of greenhouse gases and coal use both hit a record high in 2023. And they have documented the growing emissions gap (<https://www.unep.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2022>) and production gap (<https://www.unep.org/resources/production-gap-report-2023>) between promises and actions by nations and the plans of the largest fossil fuel producers to keep on expanding production (<https://thebulletin.org/2023/12/the-stark-choice-facing-climate-conference-a-livable-climate-or-more-oil-and-gas/#post-heading>), which the COP has done nothing to practically prevent.

Michael Mann, of University of Pennsylvania said (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/dec/14/failure-cop28-fossil-fuel-phase-out-devastating-say-scientists>) that “the lack of an agreement to phase out fossil fuels was devastating”. Mike Berners-Lee of Lancaster University called COP28 “the fossil fuel industry’s dream outcome, because it looks like progress, but it isn’t”.

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Martin Siegert of the University of Exeter said that not making a clear declaration to stop fossil fuel burning “is a tragedy for the planet and our future. The world is heating faster and more powerfully than the COP response to deal with it.” And from Dr Friederike Otto of Imperial College London: “With every vague verb, every empty promise in the final text, millions more people will enter the frontline of climate change and many will die.”

The scientists and the policymakers appear to live in parallel worlds, and in a sense they do. The COPs, claiming to be informed by IPCC reports, disproportionately rely on emission-reduction scenarios generated by Integrated Assessment Models (IAMs) which incorporate energy, economy and a reticent analysis of climate impacts.

IAMs reflect more the social, technological and economic worldviews of the modellers than they do the physical realities. They have now been convincingly debunked in recent reports (<https://reneweconomy.com.au/slow-2050-net-zero-scenarios-not-worth-the-paper-theyre-written-on-say-economists/>) and analysis (<https://www.carbonbrief.org/guest-post-how-not-to-interpret-the-emissions-scenarios-in-the-ipcc-report/>).

Such models produce absurd propositions about “net zero 2050” (https://www.breakthroughonline.org.au/_files/ugd/148cb0_714730d82bb84659a56c7da03fdca496.pdf) being compatible with the Paris goal of limiting warming to 1.5–2°C, which have become the bread-and-butter of COPs. In fact, this year will nudge 1.5°C (with warming of 1.46°C to end November (<https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/climate-change-2023-will-be-warmest-year-record-eus-copernicus-2023-12-06/>)), and next year will very likely be hotter. Former NASA climate chief James Hansen warns (<https://mailchi.mpp/caa/how-we-know-that-global-warming-is-accelerating-and-that-the-goal-of-the-paris-agreement-is-dead?e=3763203384>) that “global warming of 2°C will be reached by the late 2030s” due to accelerated warming (<https://mailchi.mpp/caa/global-warming-acceleration-el-nino-measuring-stick-looks-good?e=3763203384>):



“The first six months of the current El Nino are 0.39°C warmer than the same six months of the 2015-16 El Nino, a global warming rate of 0.49°C/decade, consistent with expectation of a large acceleration of global warming. We expect the 12-month mean temperature by May 2024 to eliminate any doubt about global warming acceleration. Subsequent decline of the 12-month temperature below 1.5°C will likely be limited, confirming that the 1.5°C limit has already been passed.”

This should have been the core concern of the COP28 outcome, but it was never mentioned. Neither did increasingly dire warnings that big tipping points (<https://global-tipping-points.org/>) are already in play. Faster than forecast (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/dec/14/failure-cop28-fossil-fuel-phase-out-devastating-say-scientists>), climate impacts are triggering a cascade of tipping points in the Earth system.

And a blind eye was turned to warnings (<https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.abn7950>) from Stockholm University’s David Armstrong McKay and his colleagues that even global warming of 1°C risks triggering some tipping points.

Privately, eminent scientists worry that we are heading towards a truly existential 4°C when the now-emerging high-end risks are accounted for.

“Could anthropogenic climate change result in worldwide societal collapse or even eventual human extinction? At present, this is a dangerously underexplored topic ... yet there are ample reasons to suspect that climate change could result in a global catastrophe,” wrote (<https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2108146119>) the eminent Australian climate scientist Will Steffen and colleagues in August 2022.


Nothing at this COP has substantially moved us away from that trajectory. In fact, by fostering the delusion that “orderly” solutions remain possible, as opposed to the necessity of a disruptive emergency-scale mobilisation, it has made matters worse.

David Spratt has been research coordinator for the Breakthrough National Centre for Climate Restoration (Melbourne) since 2014. He was co-founder of the Climate Action Centre (2009-2012). He blogs at climatecoded.org.


Ian Dunlop was formerly an international oil, gas and coal industry executive, chair of the Australian Coal Association and CEO of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. He is a member of the Club of Rome and Chair, Advisory Board, Breakthrough National Centre for Climate Restoration. Executive Committee member of the Australian Security Leaders Climate Group.

This article was originally published by John Menadue’s [Pearls and Irritations](http://johnmenadue.com/) (<https://johnmenadue.com/>). Read the original version [here](https://johnmenadue.com/cop28-a-tragedy-for-the-planet-as-stockholm-syndrome-took-hold/) (<https://johnmenadue.com/cop28-a-tragedy-for-the-planet-as-stockholm-syndrome-took-hold/>).


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Jens Stubbe

2 hours ago

Think global and act local.

Australia is one of the biggest laggards with the lowest possible ambition to be acting on scientific research showing that the world needs to change.

It is simply baffling to observe that Australia prides themselves as being part of the solution while openly pursuing slow walk relative to global renewables transition.

Show some grown up policies and get going as fast at least as the rest of the world!!!

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Tim Forcey

5 hours ago

THE BLEEDING OBVIOUS

Thanks guys.

Someone had to say it.

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R **Robert**

7 hours ago



The article is right. We are suicidal lemmings.
 However...despair is not action...at least the "commitment" from 100+ countries to increase their renewables 300% by 2030 might be helpful...solar and batteries and other forms of storage are still getting cheaper and this year China alone is going to install twice as much solar than was installed globally in all of 2018.
 From 2018 to 2023, globally, annual installations would have gone from 105 Gw to 413 Gw, an increase of nearly 400% in 5 years.
 Europe's and the U.S.'s solar installs are booming (currently).
 Solar panel production could well be 1 Tw a year within 2 years.
 As solar gets cheaper and cheaper, and starts being installed at the rate of 1 Tw a year – by 2027? 2029? – it will push more and more coal and gas out of the way.
 EV's are currently saving burning 1.8 million barrels of oil a day.
 By 2030 – 5 million?
 Yes, maybe it's deckchairs on the Titanic but the transition is happening and happening fast.

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Jens Stubbe

→ Robert



2 hours ago

You Australians are missing out on terrific opportunities due to your lame government.
 Very few countries have the same opportunity you have and none would do a worse job.

0 0 Reply • Share ›



Joe

8 hours ago



COPout28, the Al-Jaber and his 2,456 Fossil Lobbyist mates delivered....for themselves!

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