



If there is a climate emergency, why aren't the government doing more about it?

Alex Edwards MSc

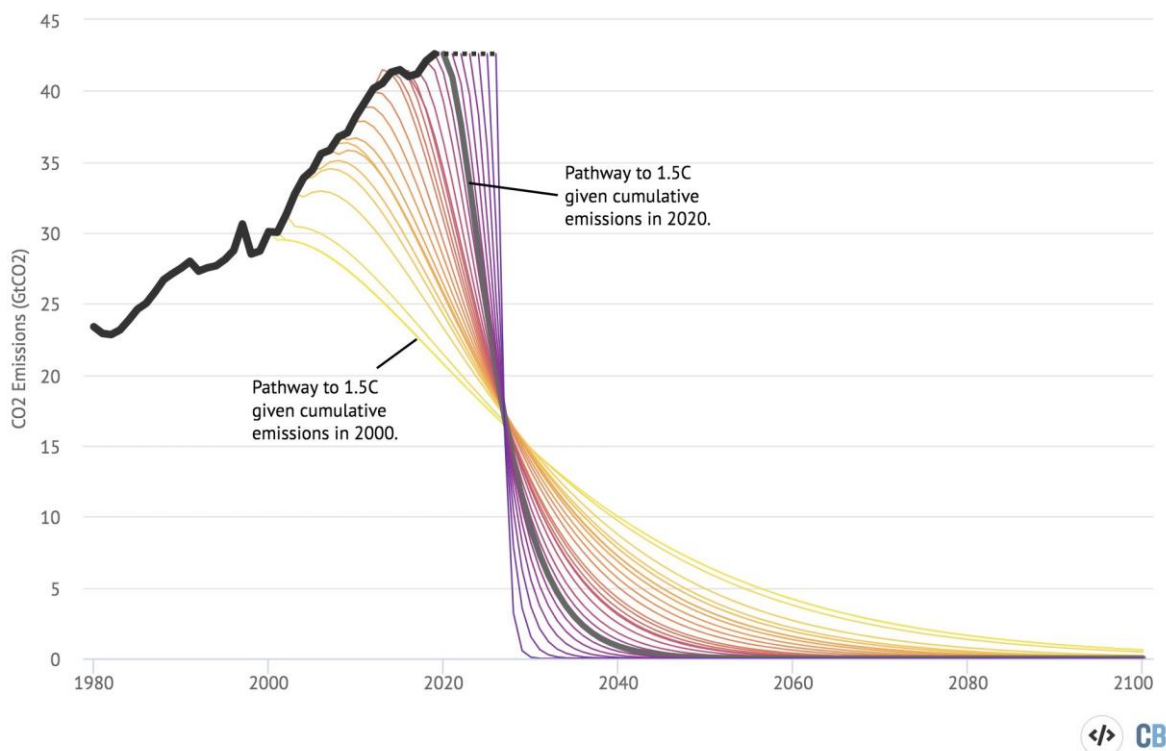


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In 1988, NASA climate scientist Dr James Hansen [testified in front of the US congress](#), stating that “the greenhouse effect has been detected and it is changing our climate now” and that NASA was 99% confident that the observed warming was a result of human activity and not due to natural variation. This moment is often highlighted as a [social tipping point](#) on the issue of climate change. Yet despite this new awareness of climate change, emissions continued to rise.

If governments had taken the necessary actions to decarbonise our societies decades ago, when climate change started to become a major global concern, the speed with which we would have had to have acted would have been a fraction of what is now required today. This can be demonstrated by the [graph below](#) – the longer we leave it before acting the quicker and more disruptive the required change will be. This therefore means that, small incremental change is no longer enough, instead as the [IPCC states](#), we now need “rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented change in all aspects of society” if we are to limit global warming to 1.5°C.

Limiting warming to 1.5C is increasingly difficult without large-scale negative emissions



So why, despite knowing about the science of climate change for decades (in fact the science has been known about for [centuries](#)) are emissions still rising?

The answer is that some tremendously powerful companies/ organisations, have spent vast amounts of energy and money trying to stop effective responses to this crisis. These companies are choosing to block or slow the change we desperately need to continue profiting from an unsustainable system. The most notable of these are the fossil fuel companies whose products are the primary drivers of climate change. What makes the actions of these companies even worse, is that they have known since around the [1980's](#) that their products would cause untold damage to the planet. Yet the internal reports of these companies, which predicted with [surprising accuracy](#) our current warming, were not used to warn governments and the public about the threat of climate change – they were hidden away and have only recently been leaked. Instead, the companies embarked on campaigns of [disinformation](#) and [deceit](#), and took [measures to actively prevent](#) governments from taking action on climate change.

Some of the tactics used by these companies was revealed in a recent investigation by Unearthed (Greenpeace's investigative platform in the UK), which demonstrated how fossil fuel companies – in this case ExxonMobil – fight against climate action. Keith McCoy, a senior lobbyist for ExxonMobil, was [recorded saying](#): “Did we aggressively fight against some of the science? Yes. Did we hide our science? Absolutely not. Did we join some of these shadow groups to work against some of the early efforts? Yes, that's true. But there's nothing, there's nothing illegal about that. We were looking out for our investments. We were looking out for our shareholders.” These techniques however, are not unique to the fossil fuel companies – the [meat](#) and [car industries](#) have also sought to undermine climate action.

These companies have also helped pass laws to ensure their future profits. However, this makes it very difficult to reduce emissions and protect the environment if a country is at risk of being sued for doing so. This is exactly what happened recently with Italy when it made the decision to ban oil and gas projects close to its coast. Rockhopper Exploration, a UK-based company, is [suing the Italian government](#) for \$275 million, in order to recover the lost profits it would have made from an oil field off the Adriatic coast. It can do this because Italy was a signatory to the little-known Energy Charter Treaty (ECT), which gives energy companies the power to sue countries in international arbitration tribunals for policies that would affect their future profits. There are currently [53 signatories](#) to the ECT, including all of the EU, the UK, several Asian countries and Australia. The UK is the [most vulnerable](#) of all signatories to the ECT, with an estimated £120 billion worth of fossil fuel infrastructure owned by offshore companies. There is therefore a fear, that the risk of being sued, will [dampen or delay climate legislation](#). What's worse, is that there is a 'sunset clause', meaning that even if a country withdraws from the ECT, as Italy did in 2016, they are still subject to the treaty for 20 years after they have left.

Now that it is no longer possible to deny the science, the next tactic of those who profit from this unsustainable system is to [delay action](#). One such tactic we must look out for are arguments that suggest it is now too late to avert catastrophic climate change, that the death and displacement of hundreds of millions of people is now inevitable. It is not too late. What we need now is a concerted effort to counteract those who seek to delay climate

action and continue to make profits at the expense of current and future generations. People power can pressure governments to enact the climate legislation we need and ban all new fossil fuel extraction - as called for by the International Energy Agency (IEA), the worlds leading energy organisation – and begin a rapid transition to renewable energy. A better world is possible, we just need the courage to fight for it.