

What societies need to do. Extract from “Globaler Klimanotstand” 2020.

Thinking through what has not been thought through before

The necessary regulations fall into two categories. Those that:

1. will slow the pace of climate change as fast as possible, and
2. modify thinking and bring human behaviour into balance with nature.

1 - Policies to slow the pace of climate change

The guiding principle for emergency regulations is that they slow the pace of climate change as fast as possible. Economic and social disruption should be minimised, but these are secondary concerns. The primary goal is to reduce the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, and this means that emissions have to fall to zero as fast as possible.

To repeat my earlier point - cutting emissions to zero does not mean cutting them to NET zero as many governments and businesses currently suggest. Many people still seem to think that it will be possible for them to continue polluting the atmosphere as long as their activities are offset in some way – by buying carbon credits or planting trees, for example. But this does not work because buying carbon credits makes no difference to the chemistry of the atmosphere and planting trees takes too long to have any useful effect.

Societies need to cut emissions of all greenhouse gases to as close to zero as possible, and as quickly as possible by regulating not just the fossil fuel industry, the cement industry and the farming sector, but also all the sources of these gases - businesses, landfills, buildings, and mines as well as vehicles, trains, aircraft and ships. Governments also need to invest heavily in carbon capture, as well as methane capture, and find a way to store these gases so that they cannot be re-released, ever.

Smashing the glasshouse

Below is a list of policies needed to do this. It is not exhaustive and will not be ideal in every country. The policies are more appropriate for the rich world, than the poor world, which will need a slightly different approach. The targets set are deliberately ambitious because the faster societies stop generating greenhouse gases, the greater the chance global temperatures can be brought under control.

Transport

- Regulate so that local and regional public transport is free for all. Promote walking and cycling. Subsidise the cost of long distance rail travel.
- Subsidise investment in electric buses, delivery vans and ferry boats. Ban the use of diesel trains and buses within five years.
- Subsidise investment in small electric cars, as well as small electric bicycles/scooters with interchangeable batteries. Promote vehicle, bicycle and E-bike sharing. Progressively ban private car ownership.
- Ban all cars that generate CO₂ emissions above 120g/km¹ immediately. (The footnote provides a link to a list of vehicles affected. It is in French). Within three years ban all cars with emissions above 100g/km. Within five years, cut this to 90g/km for gasoline cars and ban all diesel cars.
- Ban commercial vehicles with CO₂ emissions above 200g/km. Cut this to 100g/km within five years and to zero within ten years.

1 For likely list of vehicles see https://www.ademe.fr/sites/default/files/assets/documents/consommation-emissions-vehicules-particuliers-2018_8521.pdf

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- To reduce the need for small deliveries and encourage localised consumption, impose a 25% tax on all online purchases² and mandate the use of centralised collection points for small packages.
- Limit private petrol and diesel consumption to 500 litres per person a year, and make this non-transferable. Reduce the annual limit by 50 litres a year for petrol and 100 litres a year for diesel (so diesel is banned for all personal use within five years). Establish separate annual fuel limits for companies, the agricultural sector and the state with the aim of cutting vehicle fuel emissions to zero within ten years.
- Regulate to reduce sea and long distance road freight by 20% a year – that is, by more than 90% compared to current levels within a decade.
- Ban cruise ships.
- Ban all flights less than 1,000 km and more than 3,000km. Give each citizen the right to one return flight a year. In five years, cut this allocation to one flight every three years. This allocation to be non-transferable.
- Ban all low cost airlines.
- Ban the sale of business and first class airline tickets, partly to make conventional airlines less profitable. Aim for the closure of most airports and zero aircraft emissions within ten years.
- Subsidise research into alternative forms of aviation.
- Establish a regulatory body to manage the closure of the conventional automotive industry, as well as the conventional aviation sector.

Buildings and power generation

- Legally set the maximum temperature for heating buildings at 20°C. Set a minimum cooling temperature of 26°C. Provide financial support to homes and businesses for insulation.
- Invest heavily in renewable power. Renewable energy technologies should be favoured on the basis of their long term environmental impact, not the cost of energy they generate. Remember – present-day sources of renewable energy require large quantities of non-renewable resources and some, like wood pellets, generate lots of CO₂.
- Rather than increasing the price of energy and penalising the poor, introduce mandatory emission cuts and energy rationing, with state supervision. Every organisation, business, household and building that generates greenhouse gases to be legally required to cut emissions by 12% a year (that is, by more than 30% within three years and more than 70% in a decade). All GHG emissions to fall to zero by 2035. Some of these emissions can be captured and stored, as long as this can be done without any risk to future generations.
- Remove all subsidies to the fossil fuel industry. Establish a regulatory body to manage the closure of the sector, with the coal and wood pellet industries shut first.

Business and industry

- Ban the use of fluorinated gases.
- Mandate the cement industry to cut production by 25% a year.
- Ban all single use products, including cups, bottles, food containers, supermarket packaging and plastic wrap, as well as any other packaging which cannot be disposed off harmlessly.
- Regulate all other packaging so that it is returned to source via the retailer. Any packaging which cannot be reused or disposed of harmlessly to be banned within three years.
- Ban the use of palm oil, and other products supplied as a result of deforestation.

2 Thanks to Richard David Precht. I also like his idea for people with large cars to have a sticker on the back which says “your future and your children’s future ist mir scheiss egal”.

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- Regulate manufacturers of complex goods, such as cars, electrical items and mobile phones to dismantle them at the end of their lives and recover all raw materials regardless of the cost.
- Ban the use of all non-essential energy consuming machinery and equipment, including elevators, escalators, fork lift trucks, bread slicers, electric doors, advertising bill-boards, water dispensers etc unless the power they use comes from renewable sources.
- Ban all electronic street displays and ban stores from lighting their shop windows overnight.
- Establish an independent authority to regulate product design to cut manufacturing and consumer waste to zero in 10 years, with ambitious interim targets. All products to be designed to maximise their lifetimes. Progressively ban the sale and use of complex products, including motor vehicles, ships, factory machinery, renewable power generating equipment, mobile phones and other electronic items, if they cannot be repaired, re-engineered and recycled.
- Regulate to ensure products are actually recycled and not just recyclable.
- Ban landfill and waste exports.

Agriculture and food

- Mandate the agricultural sector, and the fishing industry to reduce GHG emissions by 12% a year over the next ten years (70% lower compared to current levels within a decade) and to zero by 2035.
- Increase quotas to protect wild fish stocks and ban the use of environmentally destructive fishing methods.
- Ban farmers from using damaging fertilisers and pesticides.
- Ban the import of foodstuffs with a high carbon footprint, prioritise localised food production and sales, and radically downsize animal and fish farming.
- Establish a regulatory authority to regulate food prices and monitor the health effects of these changes.

Other measures

- Divert as much military and defence spending as possible to the climate effort and CCS development.
- Invest in tree planting, soil regeneration, and other natural stores of carbon, understanding that this will only help reduce atmospheric carbon by a very small degree.
- Ban deforestation, as well as any activity causing vegetative or other organic decay where the gases cannot be captured (including crop burning, camp fires, barbecues and the burning garden waste).
- Invest in methane capture from fossil fuel production, animals, mines and landfill.
- Ban emissions trading, carbon pricing and emissions off-setting because these mechanisms permit further emissions.
- Ban the private ownership of water, land and other natural resources, including wood. Regulate the use of these resources.
- Introduce a basic income for all, as well as wealth and inheritance taxes, to better share the financial consequences of the transition.
- Establish a communications organisation so that people are properly informed about the changes and the need for radical action. Establish local offices for citizens to provide feedback and suggestions.
- To help cover the costs of these changes, impose punitive taxes on the fossil fuel industry, cement makers, deforestation firms, carmakers, chemicals companies, fertiliser manufactures, airlines, metals producers etc and all those in the finance sector who have profited as shareholders in these businesses during the last 40 years.