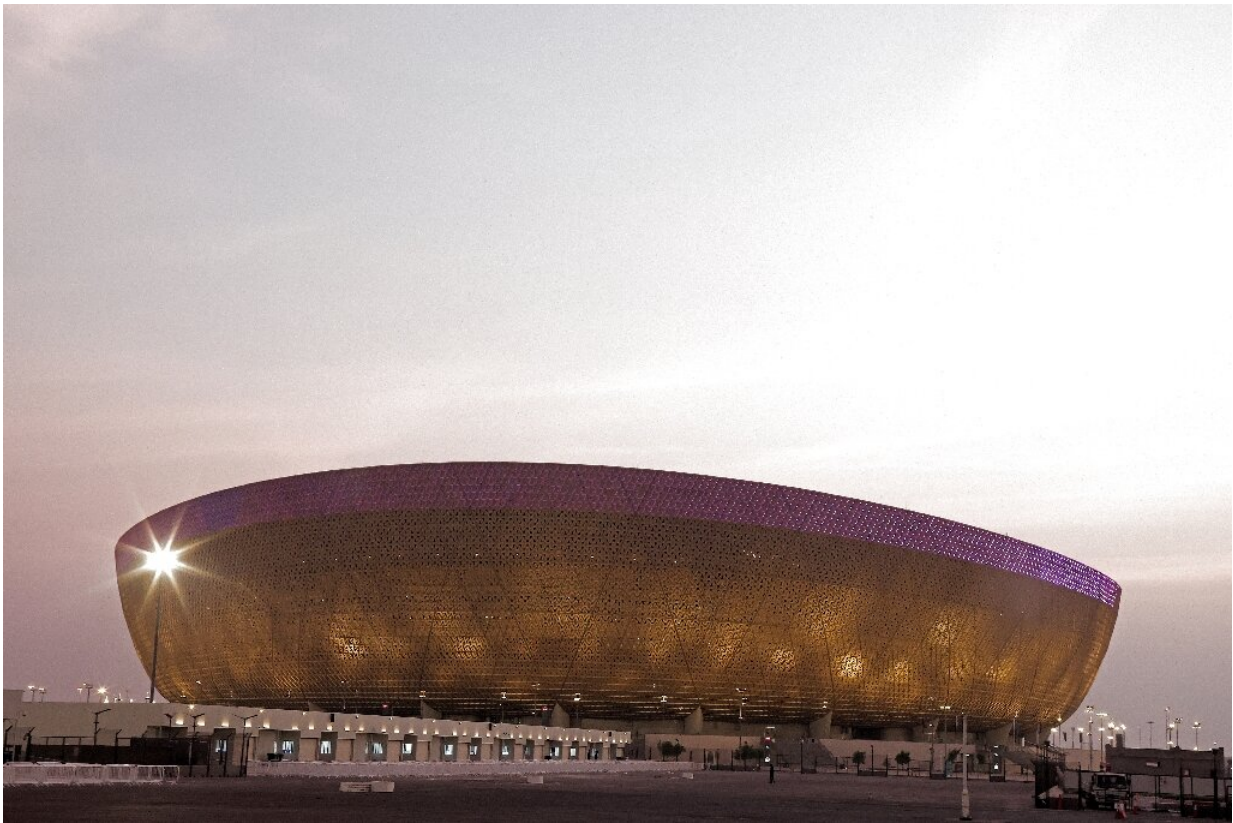


Host Qatar's World Cup 'carbon neutral' claims under fire

October 19 2022, by Julien MIVIELLE



Most of the expected emissions from the FIFA World Cup in Qatar are from transport, infrastructure building and housing.

Organisers have promised a carbon neutral World Cup next month in Qatar but environmental groups are warning that the tournament will be

far more polluting than advertised.

Hassan al-Thawadi, secretary general of Qatar 2022, said organisers will achieve net-zero emissions for the tournament as a whole "by measuring, mitigating and offsetting all our [greenhouse gas emissions](#)".

This promise has failed to convince sceptics, however. Former Manchester United ace Eric Cantona recently slammed what he called an "ecological aberration", pointing to the [carbon footprint](#) of what will be eight air-conditioned stadiums.

Julien Jreissati, programme director of Greenpeace Middle East, has accused organisers of "window dressing", insisting that claims of net-zero emissions from the tournament "could be considered greenwashing/sportswashing".

Gilles Dufrasne, a researcher for Carbon Market Watch and author of a report into Qatar 2022's climate credentials, said that carbon neutrality claims were "misleading and dishonest about the true climate impact that the event will have."

Organisers of football's marquee event said it will generate 3.6 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent, compared with 2.1 million generated by the previous edition, in Russia in 2018.

The vast majority of these emissions, some 95 percent, are indirect from things like transport, infrastructure building and housing.

But Carbon Market Watch says that the hosts' estimate is incomplete. It says that Qatar has underestimated the footprint of constructing eight new stadiums, for example, by a factor of eight, generating 1.6 million tonnes of CO₂ instead of the 200,000 tonnes disclosed.

Some of this difference can be explained by methodology. Qatar deems that most of the new stadiums will be used well after the tournament is over, meaning that their environmental impact shouldn't be tied specifically to one event.

Carbon Market Watch differs, pointing out that banking on continued use of eight massive sporting venues in a country of just 2.4 million inhabitants is risky.

'Huge error'

Stadium air conditioning in Qatar, contrary to popular belief, is expected to only contribute a minimal amount to the tournament's climate impact.

"It's relatively minimal compared to total emissions from constructing stadiums or from air transport," said Dufrasne.

Given the vast amounts of infrastructure Qatar has had to build in order to accommodate the world's largest sporting event, some experts believe the tiny Gulf nation was destined to struggle to keep emissions down.

"The huge error was made in December 2010 at the moment the World Cup wasn't awarded to a country that already had all the infrastructure," said Giles Pache, a specialist in logistics at France's Aix-Marseille University, referring to the United States, which missed out on FIFA voting to Qatar.

"In Qatar we were starting with nothing, hosting a global event built on sand," said Pache.

"The US was really well equipped" in terms of stadiums and hotels, he said.

To achieve carbon neutrality, tournament organisers have promised that emissions will be offset in the form of carbon credits. These, in theory, balance out the emissions produced by saving emissions elsewhere in the world.

With Qatar, organisers are working on [renewable energy projects](#) in Turkey as part of this scheme.

Jreissati said these [carbon](#) credits constituted a "distraction".

"They give the impression that a solution that doesn't necessitate efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through ambitious political decisions is possible," he said.

"We need to reduce emissions at source as soon as possible."

For future tournaments Dufrasne said he hoped for a "systemic reflection" in how World Cups are organised.

This could include extending the gaps between tournaments or hosting global versions of the event.

"Hold matches across the world, playing in stadiums that are closest to the two teams playing," he suggested.

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