

Climate crisis prompts Biden to halt new gas export facilities

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Cranes are seen near the construction site of the Venture Global LNG plant next to the Mississippi River in Plaquemines Parish south of New Orleans, Louisiana.

The United States, which ships more liquefied natural gas (LNG) than any other country, is hitting pause on new export facilities, the Biden administration announced Friday in a step hailed as vital to tackling the

climate crisis.

It comes as President Joe Biden looks to shore up youth voters energized by environmental issues in a tough election rematch later this year. He likely will face Republican candidate Donald Trump, who falsely calls human-caused global warming a "hoax" and has vowed to torpedo his Democratic opponent's climate agenda.

"This pause on new LNG approvals sees the [climate crisis](#) for what it is: the existential threat of our time," said Biden in a statement.

"While MAGA Republicans willfully deny the urgency of the climate crisis, condemning the American people to a dangerous future, my Administration will not be complacent."

The US is the world's leading LNG exporter, averaging 11.6 billion cubic feet (328 million cubic meters) per day according to the tracker CEDIGAZ, with seven terminals currently in operation.

Under the plan, new export applications would be subjected to indefinite review considering climate and wider environmental and [economic impacts](#), imperiling the future of 17 planned facilities.

If all 17 were authorized, LNG shipped from the US would be responsible for more [greenhouse gas emissions](#) than the entire European Union, according to one analysis.

Facilities impacted include Venture Global's proposed Calcasieu Pass 2 (CP2) in Louisiana, which would be the biggest terminal in the country and release annual emissions equivalent to those of 42 million cars, according to a letter penned to Biden in December by 170 scientists.

Scientists and [environmental activists](#) welcomed the move.

"We applaud the Biden administration for taking this tremendously important step to align its decision-making on gas exports with US climate goals," said Abigail Dillen, president of Earthjustice.

"As communities across the country face the devastating impacts of the climate crisis and fossil fuel pollution, it's never been clearer that rubber-stamping LNG exports is not in the public interest."

Fossil fuel industry groups also reacted strongly. The Independent Petroleum Association of America said in a statement that the plan would "bolster Russian influence" in the European gas market.

But a recent letter by 60 European parliamentarians to Biden said that while American LNG had previously helped the continent avoid an [energy crisis](#) brought on by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, EU member states are now reducing their gas demand, and "Europe should not be used as an excuse" to expand LNG exports.

Damage to coasts and fishing

Robert Howarth, an environmental scientist at Cornell University, told AFP that while natural gas has something of a reputation as a cleaner fossil fuel, "that's based on advertising from the oil and gas industry."

While it does produce less carbon when burned than coal or oil, this does not factor in the full life cycle of production and transport to end users, which involves leaks of the powerful greenhouse gas methane throughout.

According to Howarth's research, the overall greenhouse impact of LNG is roughly 25 percent worse than coal, even when the best technologies are employed.

Exporting LNG was barred by the US until 2016 to safeguard domestic gas supplies, but the ban was lifted following a decade-long fracking boom—and the exports have led to gas and electricity price hikes to US consumers, he added.

For Anne Rolfes, director of the campaign group Louisiana Bucket Brigade, the pause couldn't come soon enough. Existing LNG development has destroyed coastal wetlands and left residents more vulnerable to the impacts of hurricanes, she said.

"People have already had to move away because of rising sea level and increasing storms, yet this industry plans to build on that fragile coast," she told AFP.

Fisherman Travis Dardar added that catches were down by more than 50 percent in his native Cameron Parish, as LNG companies bought and tore down fishing docks.

"They're sacrificing the seafood industry for the petrochemical industry," he told AFP.

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