

Germany should phase out coal use by 2038: commission (Update)

26 January 2019, by David Courbet



Despite its green reputation, Germany remains heavily reliant on the dirtiest of all fossil fuels

Germany should stop using coal for electricity production by 2038, a government-appointed commission said Saturday, laying out an 80-billion euro roadmap to phase out the polluting fuel.

The commission agreed to the deadline after months of bitter wrangling as pressure mounts on Europe's top economy to step up its commitment to battling climate change.

The panel, consisting of politicians, climate experts, unions and industry figures from coal regions, announced the deal after a final marathon session ended on Saturday morning.

Under the plan, half of the up to 80 billion euros (\$91 billion) will go to the regions shuttering plants in the west and east of the country, while the other half will be spent on preventing electricity prices from rising.

"This is a historic day," the commission's head Ronald Pofalla said.

Economy and Energy Minister Peter Altmaier said the government would "carefully and constructively examine" the recommendations, the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung newspaper reported in its Sunday edition.

"If we all make an effort and do not lose sight of the common objective, we can make Germany a model country in terms of energy policy," added Finance Minister Olaf Scholz.

However energy provider RWE, which runs several coal-fired plants, said the cut off date of 2038 was "way too early".



Germany's government-appointed coal commission recommended all coal use come to an end by 2038

The commission's findings will now be passed on to the government, which is expected—barring a surprise—to follow the recommendations of the panel it set up.

The plan will be discussed at a meeting between

Chancellor Angela Merkel, Finance Minister Scholz and regional leaders on Thursday, national news agency DPA said.

Several plants using lignite or brown coal, which is more polluting than black coal, would be closed by 2022.

Other plants will follow until 2030, when only 17 gigawatts of Germany's electricity will be supplied by coal, compared to today's 45 gigawatts.

The last plant will close in 2038 at the latest, the commission said, but did not rule out moving this date forward to 2035 if conditions permit.

The affected regions, where tens of thousands of jobs directly or indirectly linked to brown- and black-coal energy production, will receive 40 billion euros as compensation over the next two decades.



Some environmental groups say 2038 is leaving it too late

Two billion euros will also be spent each year over the same period to stop customers from facing rising electricity prices.

'A new beginning'

Environmental groups had pushed for Germany to shutter more than 100 coal-fired power plants by 2030 as part of efforts to meet the country's target

of becoming carbon neutral by 2050.

On Saturday several groups hailed the announcement that coal use would end in Germany.

"This is a sign of a new beginning—we are finally taking our withdrawal from coal seriously," said Hubert Weiger of German environmental group Bund.

Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, head of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, said Germany was "returning to the path of climate protection".

Coal-fired power stations in Europe

292 operating in 27 countries
Capacity when opened, in MW



Source: Europe Beyond Coal, data to November 16, 2018

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Coal-fired power stations across Europe

While Greenpeace welcomed that there was a roadmap to phasing out coal, it said that 2038 was too late.

"We will continue to push for an earlier date," the environmental activist group said on Twitter.

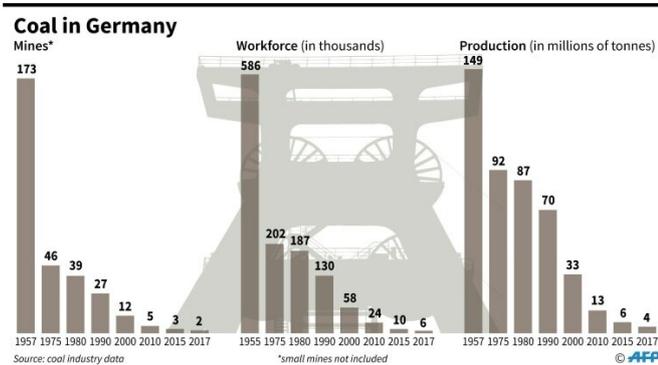
Major polluter

Despite its green reputation, Germany remains

heavily reliant on the dirtiest of all fossil fuels, in part because of Merkel's decision to phase out nuclear power by 2022 in response to the 2011 Fukushima disaster.

Germany has some of the most polluting power plants in Europe that contribute significantly to the country's carbon dioxide emissions.

Coal accounted for more than 30 percent of Germany's energy mix in 2018, putting it neck-and-neck with renewables like solar and wind energy.



Coal industry data in Germany from 1957 to 2017

Other European countries use significant less coal.

Many other European nations had already set a date for closing coal-fired plants, with France's deadline in 2022, and Britain and Italy's by 2025.

The German government admitted last year it will miss a 2020 target for cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent compared with 1990 levels.

It now expects to manage reductions of just 32 percent, undermining Merkel's role as a leading advocate of the Paris Climate Agreement.

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