

The Net-Zero Industry Act – a welcome spotlight and a warning bell for CO₂ storage

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The European Commission has recently published the [Net-Zero Industry Act](#), a proposal meant to boost the Union's autonomy when it comes to developing and manufacturing "net-zero technologies". The Act **lists carbon capture, utilisation, and storage (CCUS) as one of eight key net-zero technologies** for achieving the EU's climate neutrality goals, sets a goal for storing 50 million tonnes of CO₂ per year in the EU by 2030, and mandates Member States to clearly state how they will enable carbon capture and storage (CCS). These targets imply a massive roll-out of CO₂ storage projects in the EU over the next decades, whose deployment is expected to be further detailed in the Commission's [forthcoming CCUS strategy](#). This is a welcome spotlight on CCS as a solution to mitigate residual, hard-to-abate emissions and enable negative emissions, but also **a warning bell for the growing CCS project pipeline to be implemented in a just, efficient, and transparent way**. This means appropriate public engagement, particularly of local communities affected by the construction and operation of large-scale CO₂ storage infrastructure.

One of the most important provisions of the Net-Zero Industry Act, when it comes to CCS, is that it breaks the "chicken-and-egg" cycle by **specifically assigning to oil and gas producers the responsibility of making CO₂ storage capacity available** to achieve the CO₂ storage target. Oil and gas companies such as Total and Equinor have already been heavily involved in the European portfolio of commercial-scale CCS projects, which was very sparse until recently. Despite the project pipeline having grown considerably in these last several years, by 2020 only [35.4 million tonnes](#) of CO₂ had been captured and stored (one ten-thousandth of Europe's estimated capacity, and well below the *yearly* target for 2030). The obligations of the Net-Zero

Industry Act for oil and gas producers, as well as the sheer size in the gap in CO₂ storage that must be plugged by 2030, means that **the EU will see a significant ramp-up in CO₂ storage activity by oil and gas companies**. It also means that these oil and gas companies will need to make a significant effort to engage citizens and institutions, and to prepare their CO₂ storage sites in a way that is aligned with principles of good governance and procedural justice – namely, **ensuring that communities are an integral part of the whole process** of exploring, preparing, using, and managing CO₂ storage sites.

Why is this a warning bell? Firstly, because as far as Europe has examples of good governance and public engagement for deploying CO₂ storage projects, it has examples of failed ones. These can lead to the delay or even cancellation of CCS projects, but more importantly to a missed opportunity when it comes to engaging citizens and institutions with “net-zero technologies”. **Transparency, fairness, and robust public engagement in CO₂ storage projects are essential to build trust in CCS and can serve as an example for the large-scale rollout of other “net-zero technologies**. Secondly, engaging citizens with the CO₂ storage projects deployed in their backyards is a basic tenet of procedural justice. Any reticence of project developers to fully inform the public of the necessity, benefits, and costs of CO₂ storage will only detract from a fair implementation of the transition to climate neutrality. **The deployment of CO₂ storage as a tool to reach net zero emissions will only be as legitimate as it is just**. Thirdly and finally, in a world of technology optionality, members of the public will be bombarded with an increasing number of carefully selected snippets of information about the new projects, products and services emerging from the race to low-carbon. Informing and engaging citizens and institutions with CO₂ storage, CCUS, and indeed all net-zero technologies, is essential for them to make informed choices. CCUS is not a single technology, and every application will be different. Some applications, such as certain pathways for carbon capture and utilisation (CCU) may not contribute to climate mitigation at all. **The discernment necessary to push forward only those applications that are truly beneficial comes with timely and transparent communication by objective messengers**. And it is never too early to start.

CO₂ storage and CCS will play a big role in the EU's race to reach net zero emissions. The Net-Zero Industry Act highlights this, and future policy measures will only strengthen it. But this role risks to be shelved if it is not brought squarely into the public view. After all, few successful roles are ever played in the dark.

The Energy Policy Group (EPG) association is an independent think-tank, specialised in energy and climate policies. Founded in 2014, EPG gathers experts who are working together in international research projects. EPG is highly focused on the larger context of European policies and of the global trends, in its endeavour in promoting a constructive dialogue on decarbonisation among the decision makers and the larger audience.



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