

CALLING OUT GREENWASHING:

The dangers of relying on carbon offsetting to compensate for continued fossil fuel emissions.

Carbon credits solve climate problems for no one except fossil fuel companies. The use of carbon offsetting to achieve net zero is intrinsically flawed and becomes a smokescreen for those who wish to continue polluting. None of this should detract from the dire need to protect biodiversity and people's health and livelihoods. These should be priorities for governments without having to look to carbon trading to implement them.

Some buzzwords used in climate targets and negotiations, such as 'nature-based solutions (NbS)' and 'net zero', are very ill defined and lack an agreed framework of practice. As such they are often used in vague and confusing ways, which encourage the idea that we can recover and store as much CO₂ as we want to produce. This ignores the reality of a limit to the capacity of nature to absorb the carbon; it leads to viewing nature as nothing but a potential carbon sink, and thus obscures the critical importance of reversing biodiversity loss for its own sake.

The way these terminologies are currently used confuses the system, conflating different carbon sources and inhibiting people from adequately understanding or responding to the task at hand. This makes it very difficult to come to any kind of meaningful agreements or targets and allows corporations and governments to pursue business as usual.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

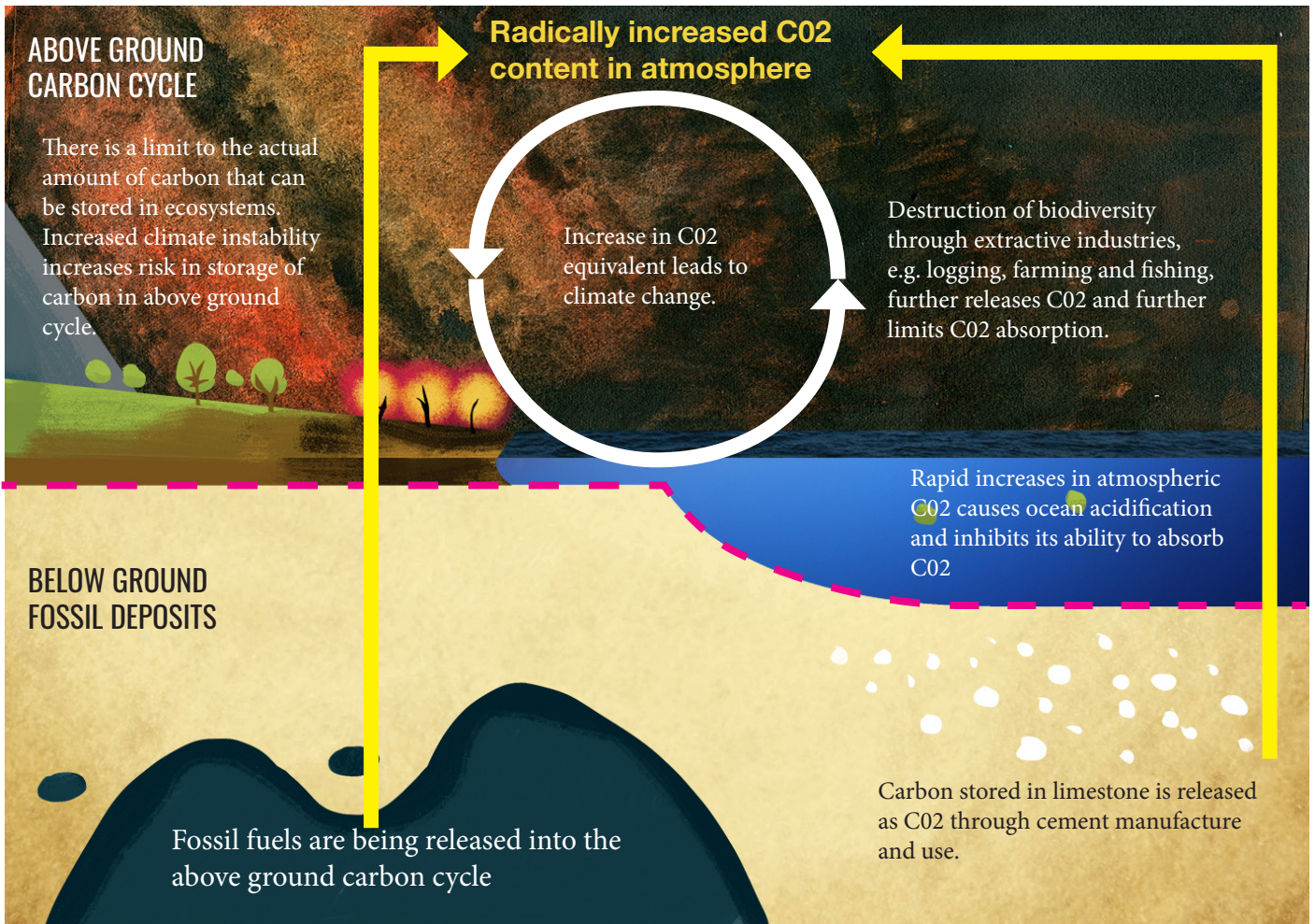
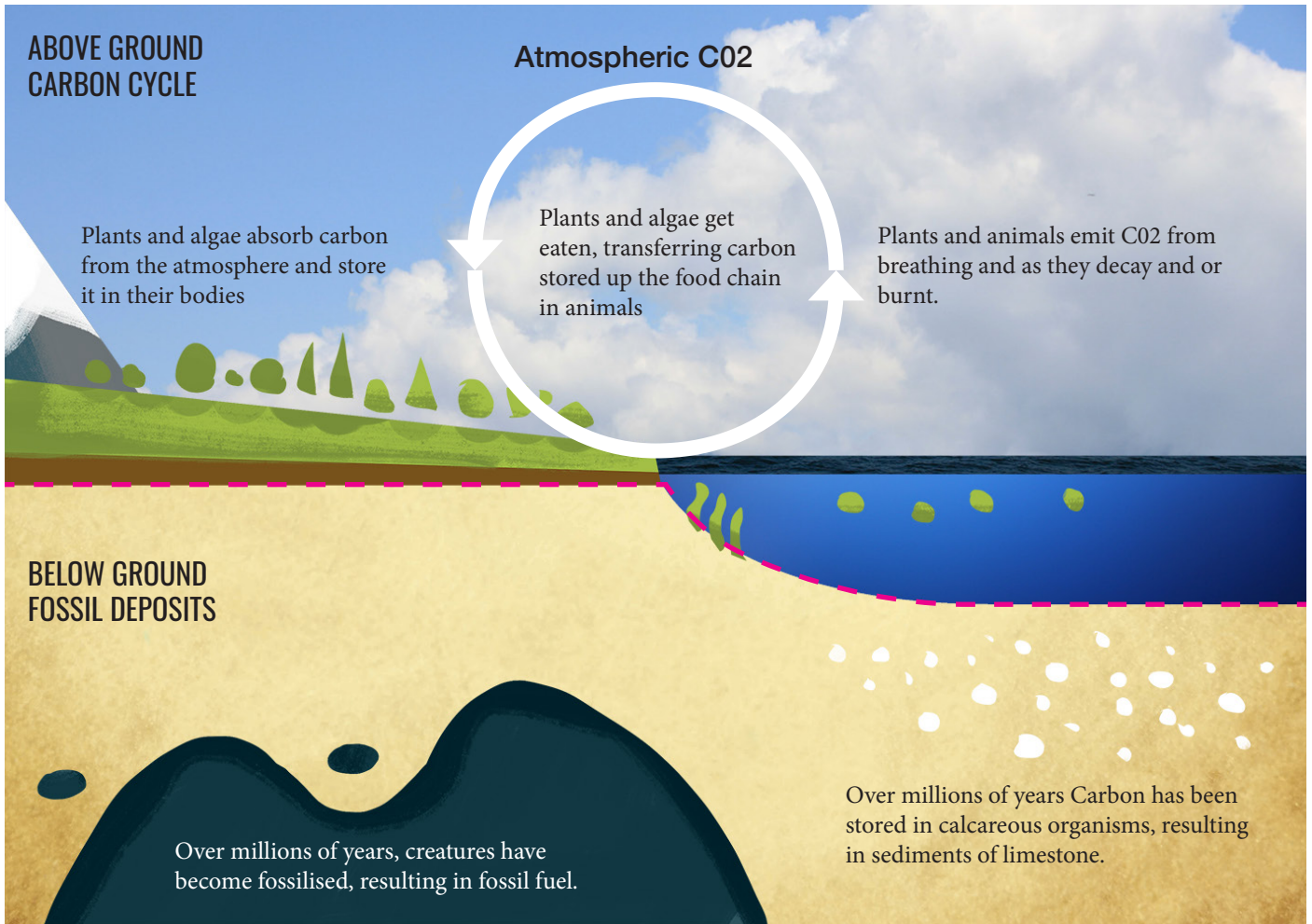
It is time to call out as greenwashing and work to stop claims that Nature-based Solutions [NbS] can effectively offset continued fossil fuel use. We call for an outright ban on the terms Net Zero and NbS in climate negotiations and within corporations and government, so that a more nuanced discussion can take place that sees actual emissions being reported with year on year reduction targets. Ecosystem restoration and 'development' needs to be treated in a case by case basis in its own right, led by the people directly concerned.

When banning these terminologies (Net zero, Nature-based Solutions) we should ask that:

- Carbon sequestration should be a voluntary market, where it is illegal to use offsetting to achieve 'net zero'.
- Adaptation, mitigation and loss and damage should therefore not be part of net zero targets but should be demanded of corporations to complement efforts in reduced production of fossil fuels and emissions.
- Strong efforts should be made to prevent further damage of intact ecosystems, in a way that avoids the corporate purchase or control of land, or restriction of access to native populations.

This can then facilitate the necessary actions to deal with the REAL PROBLEMS:

- Agreement on a text at COP28 to phase out fossil fuels, by setting a safe and decreasing limit on fossil fuel production, and encouraging emission reductions as fast as possible to avoid the reliance on compensatory mechanisms to reach 'net zero'.
- Treat land-use as a distinct issue by prioritising like-for-like compensation, and by promoting agroecology and other genuinely regenerative forms of local agriculture/OR and permaculture which increase[s] biodiversity, carbon storage, frees communities from using fossil fuels and supports food sovereignty.
- Call for transformational ownership of fossil fuels, where shareholders pledge to limit production, re-routing dividends into the renewable transition of the corporations.



THE NEED TO STOP EMISSIONS AT THEIR SOURCE

HOW DO NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS BECOME A SOLUTION FOR POLLUTERS ONLY?

The main source of the damage is that of securely stored fossil fuels being released into the carbon cycle, radically increasing the total amount of carbon in the above ground carbon cycle. Presenting NbS as solutions in their own right, allows the two distinct sources of carbon to be viewed as the same thing, and the two important topics to be conflated. So long as corporations make net zero targets by removing and storing atmospheric carbon, they are allowed to continue polluting from securely stored sources of fossil deposits. This narrow view also allows all carbon to be viewed as atoms, rather than part of complex ecosystems.

AN UNSTABLE STORAGE METHOD

The carbon cycle is, as the name suggests, dynamic, meaning that carbon is continuously being released. Therefore any method of storing carbon is volatile. There is no guarantee that projects are actually successful.

THE SIZE OF THE PROBLEM

There is not enough land or biological potential for so many polluters to rely on nature-based solutions to compensate for their emissions.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

NbS dictates land use and creates land rights issues. This leads to a corporate 'carbon colonisation' of land. Land use decisions, and therefore people's lives, are subject to the polluters' whim. While carbon, rather than distinct ecosystems, remains the focus, NbS may even be counterproductive for biodiversity.

CARBON CAPTURE AND STORAGE

The same problems apply to mechanical carbon capture and storage. They are so far unproven technologies that require a huge amount of energy to store the carbon, creating huge profitable markets for those who wish to continue polluting. This is a market of indulgences and does not stop the source of the problem. In many cases the storage of CO₂ below ground is used in advanced oil recovery, further extracting fossil fuels.

WHY IS NET ZERO A PROBLEM?

Net zero is an accounting mechanism. Without full transparency and a common framework, it can become a tool for deception.

OWNERSHIP OF FOSSIL FUELS?

We can only keep fossil fuels in the ground if the people who control them are willing to do so. So long as shareholders steer corporations solely for profit, it becomes near impossible to set a limit on the total amount of fossil fuel that can be produced. This brings into question the ownership of fossil fuels.

“I consider it essential to insist that “to seek only a technical remedy to each environmental problem which comes up is to separate what is in reality interconnected and to mask the true and deepest problems of the global system”. It is true that efforts at adaptation are needed in the face of evils that are irreversible in the short term...Nonetheless, we risk remaining trapped in the mindset of pasting and papering over cracks, while beneath the surface there is a continuing deterioration to which we continue to contribute. To suppose that all problems in the future will be able to be solved by new technical interventions is a form of homicidal pragmatism, like pushing a snowball down a hill.”

“May those taking part in the Conference (COP28) be strategists capable of considering the common good and the future of their children, more than the short-term interests of certain countries or businesses. In this way, may they demonstrate the nobility of politics and not its shame. To the powerful, I can only repeat this question: **“What would induce anyone, at this stage, to hold on to power, only to be remembered for their inability to take action when it was urgent and necessary to do so?”**”

Pope Francis, Laudate Deum, To All People of Goodwill On The Climate Crisis, 2023

