
THE METHANE MANIFESTO

How Europe can rapidly
reduce Methane Emissions
and Phase out Fossil Fuels

THE ISSUE

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is having a dramatic impact on the lives of millions, exacerbating the energy price crisis and the energy precarity problem for households across Europe.

However, **Europe's attempts to help end the war by weaning itself off Russian energy imports must not contradict the necessary and urgent need to transition away from climate-wrecking fossil fuels.** In this context, the European Commission's REPowerEU plan¹ fails to effectively break with dirty energy sources of the past and risks overlooking the powerful role that methane emissions play in exacerbating climate change.

Fossil fuel emissions are responsible for global warming, and **methane along with carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gases (GHGs) are cooking our planet, and our home, to above melting point.**

Methane, in particular, has a Global Warming Potential (GWP) that is **84-86² times greater than carbon dioxide** over a 20-year period. It is the main component of fossil gas and its concentration in the atmosphere is nearly **three times greater** than pre-industrial levels³. In 2021 alone, energy-related methane emissions rose globally by nearly 5%⁴ and it is totally our fault!

To keep global heating below 1.5°C, in line with the Paris Agreement, **slashing methane emissions in the short-term is vital but is not enough.** Addressing methane emissions does not make fossil gas and oil clean, and **it must not divert from a long-term target that phases out fossil fuels altogether.**

This is why we call on decision-makers to drastically improve the European Commission's Methane Regulation proposal⁵ in order to deliver a fossil free European Union by 2035 at the latest. The Regulation must include a reference to the implementation of clear and concrete plans to **phase-out fossil fuels**, as expressly asked by the European Parliament in its INI Report on the EU Methane Strategy.⁶ The plans must take into account national circumstances, raising ambition where possible and be transposed into national climate strategies **as well as explicitly recalled in other legislative proposals to deliver a methane emissions reduction at the root source.**

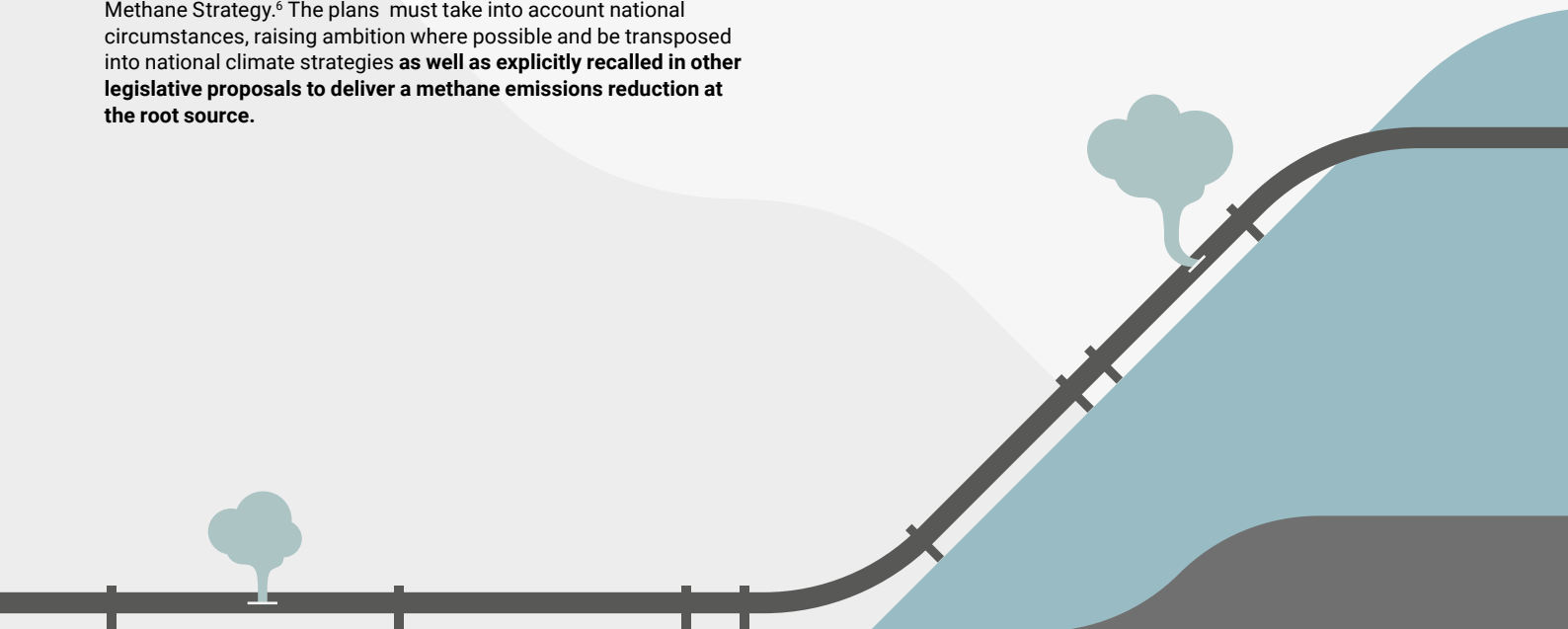
Curbing methane emissions within a broader and clear framework of fossil fuel phase-out, is:

AN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE

Oil spills, fossil gas extraction and coal mining are poisoning animals, soil and water systems. Fossil fuel production, distribution and use is estimated to emit 110 million tons of methane per year⁷. In particular, fossil gas production was responsible for a two-thirds increase in global methane emissions between 2008 and 2014, and shale gas produced by climate-wrecking hydraulic fracturing (fracking) accounts for half of this increase. Along with fossil gas operations, oil and coal sectors contribute significantly to methane emissions. In particular, the world's operating coal mines emit 52.3 million tonnes of methane per year,⁸ more than either oil or gas. Fixing methane leaks will be crucial in the short-term, if we want to meet the EU 2030 climate targets and cut GHG emissions by at least 55%. However, this will not deliver environmental restoration in the long-term, as this will not actually ensure a phase out of fossil fuels, but rather a small reduction in their emissions impact.

A HEALTH ISSUE

Methane is a main precursor of ozone, and **increasing levels of methane emissions are strictly linked to the rise of ozone in the atmosphere.** Ozone is responsible for 1430 premature deaths⁹ for each ton of methane emitted: in 2021 alone the energy sector released 135 million tons of methane.¹⁰ Methane is also an ever-present **threat to air quality inside our homes** due to the presence of gas boilers, gas furnaces and gas stoves, which are directly responsible for poor indoor air quality levels.



A SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUE

Methane emissions and fossil fuel pollution disproportionately impact marginalised and already vulnerable communities. The EU, which imports 90% of its gas and oil, is directly responsible for perpetuating and exacerbating these inequalities all around the world. In the U.S., the biggest Liquefied Fossil Gas (LNG) supplier to the EU in 2021,¹¹ 17.6 million people¹² live within one mile of an active oil or gas well. Most of them are low-income indigenous and Black/Afro-Americans, who are more exposed to fossil fuel-linked air pollution. As the effects of climate change worsen, the impacts will be felt strongest by those who are already vulnerable, marginalised and low-income. Climate change could push 120 million more people into poverty by 2030,¹³ especially in poor regions and countries. Additionally, fossil fuel imports in the EU are highly dependent on undemocratic, politically unstable and corrupt regimes, with well-documented human right violations. **Simply plugging and detecting methane leaks will not provide a permanent solution to the social inequalities fuelled by fossil fuels in both Europe, and the wider world.**

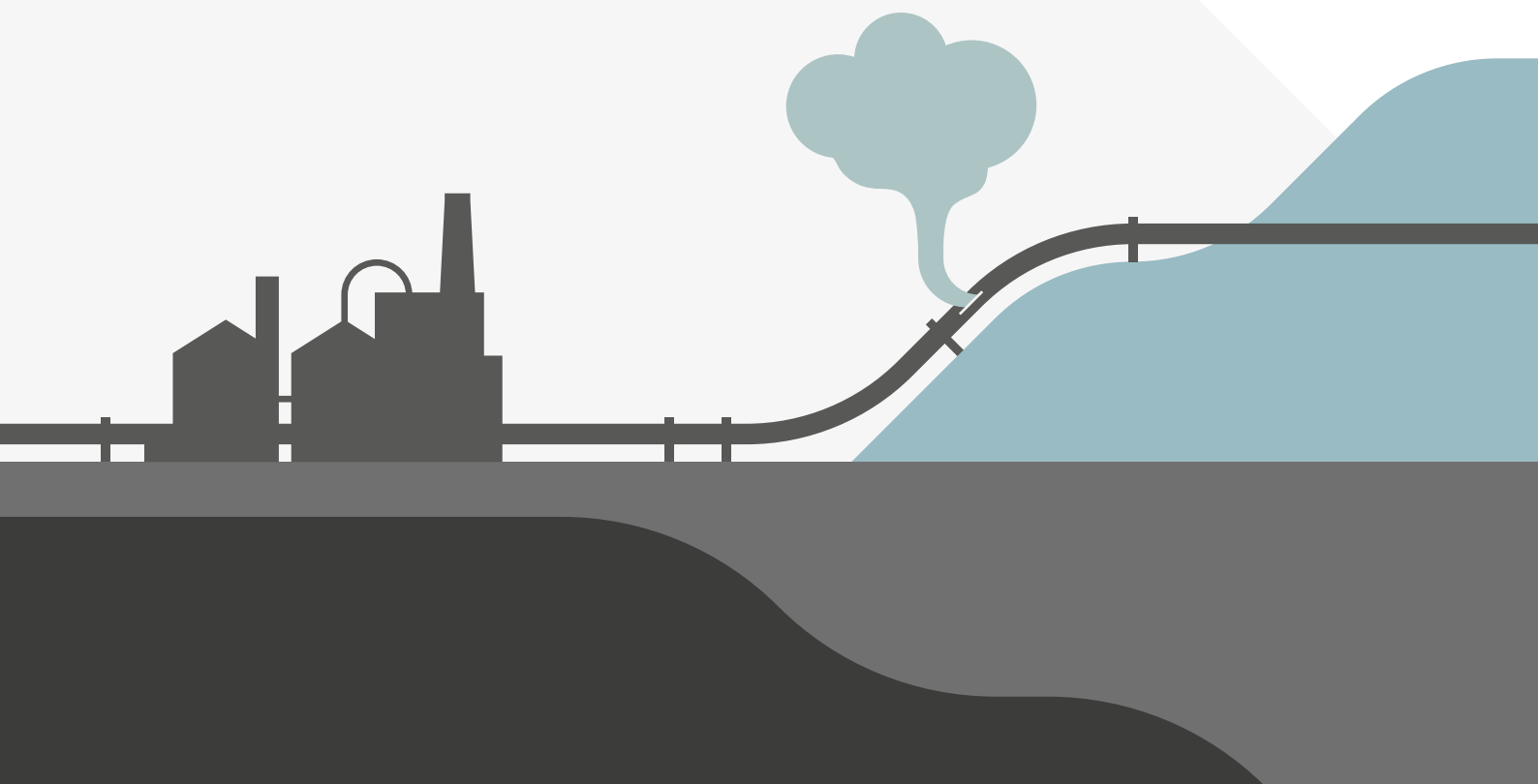
AN ECONOMIC ISSUE

Cutting methane emissions now, alongside plans for a longer-term fossil fuel phase-out, provides undoubtable economic benefits. The IEA estimates that 45% of methane leaks could be avoided at no-net cost for oil and gas companies because of the value of captured gas.¹⁴ Additionally, by limiting global warming it would be possible to prevent 73 billion hours of lost labour from extreme heat and 26 million tons of crop losses globally each year¹⁵ bringing clear financial advantages. The economic benefits of every ton of methane being reduced is nearly US\$ 4,300.¹⁶ Reducing methane emissions in the short-term needs to be coupled with a transition to a 100% renewable energy system, which can provide multiple long-term economic and climate benefits. **By ending investments in fossil fuel projects and promoting energy savings, energy efficiency, and renewables, Europe can reduce energy bills and its dependency on energy imports, create more green jobs, new business opportunities, and avoid stranded fossil fuel assets.**

A GREENWASHING ISSUE

Fossil gas imports and infrastructure expansion is being sold to Europe as the solution to its energy independence. This makes effective methane emission reductions critical, and reveals just why it is so important to talk about emission reduction in the context of a fossil fuel phase out. Methane mitigation measures can be a fertile ground for **greenwashing practices** and false myths such as labelling fossil gas a *transitional fuel*. Yet, there is no realistic situation in which fossil fuels can be extracted, transported and used without any methane or CO₂ emissions. **Curbing methane emissions must not lead to financing false solutions such as expanding LNG import capacity, or investing in fossil hydrogen (like so-called blue hydrogen) and renewable gases.** None of these solutions eliminates emissions, but instead all provide the fossil industry a distraction with which to extend the life of fossil gas.

Legislative initiatives designed to prevent methane leakage must be **drafted without the fossil fuel industry's influence.** Just like the tobacco industry was prevented from writing health legislation, oil, coal and gas interests have no place in shaping our climate laws. To protect our people, planet and the climate we need emission reductions under the Methane Regulation to be managed by an independent body that provides unbiased, science-led oversight, leading us out of fossil fuels in the long term, while keeping CO₂ and methane emissions to a minimum in the short term. A crucial decision in this respect could be **to extend the mandate of the politically independent European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change.**



THE WAY FORWARD

While reducing methane emissions, along with CO₂ and other GHGs, is a key step to fight climate change in the short term, it will not provide a solution to the above-mentioned environmental, health and social damages created by fossil fuels. Moreover, the proposed Methane Regulation fails to prevent all leaks, spills and accidents that result in methane emissions. **Additionally, measures included in the proposal would likely only come into effect around mid-2024 at the earliest**, with some specific provisions taking even longer. By that time it will be too late to just fix leaky pipelines if we want to keep our 2030 commitments to fight against climate change.

Signatories to this manifesto demand the following adjustments to the upcoming EU Methane Regulation.

- **Reference a phase-out of all fossil fuels by 2035 at the latest**, in line with the latest science. An EU-wide action plan to phase-out fossil fuels must take into account national circumstances, raising ambition where possible and be transposed into national climate strategies as well as explicitly recalled in other legislative proposals to deliver a methane emissions reduction at the root source. A fossil fuel lock-in should be prevented in other legislative proposals, i.e. the Gas Package, the Trans-European Networks for Energy (TEN-E) Regulation, the FuelEU Maritime Regulation and the Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation (AFIR).
- Reiterate, as was proposed by the European Parliament, the necessity to **halt all existing hydraulic fracturing operations and ban the authorization of any new fracking infrastructure in Europe**. This must go hand-in-hand with halting the expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure, as outlined by the European Parliament and the IEA.
- **Ensure that the costs of methane emission reduction measures are not paid by consumers** but are borne by fossil fuel industries themselves. The regulation should enforce the polluter pays principle, avoiding the burden of methane emission reduction costs falling on consumers.
- Decidedly **address greenwashing**, a widespread and consolidated practice among the fossil fuel industry. Compliance with measures contained in the Methane Regulation must not be used in industry marketing or propaganda to either appear greener or low-emission, or to prop up an argument that supports the extension of the life of fossil fuels.
- **Extend the mandate of the politically independent European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change**. This will provide unbiased, science-led oversight, leading us out of fossil fuels in the long term, while keeping CO₂ and methane emissions to a minimum in the short term.
- Include mandatory methane rules **that encompass the entire fossil fuel value chain**, including imports and the petrochemicals sector, as demanded by the European Parliament in its own-initiative report on the Methane Strategy. Acknowledging that the EU is heavily reliant on fossil fuel imports and most of its methane emissions happen outside its borders, it is necessary to apply the same standards for domestic and imported fossil fuels.
- Clearly analyse the **implications for policies and measures of using a 20-years time horizon for global warming potential**, as a complement to the 100-year timeframe currently used for methane emissions, as stressed by the European Parliament in its resolution on the EU Methane Strategy. Such an analysis on the short-term implications of methane emissions can better inform EU climate policies.

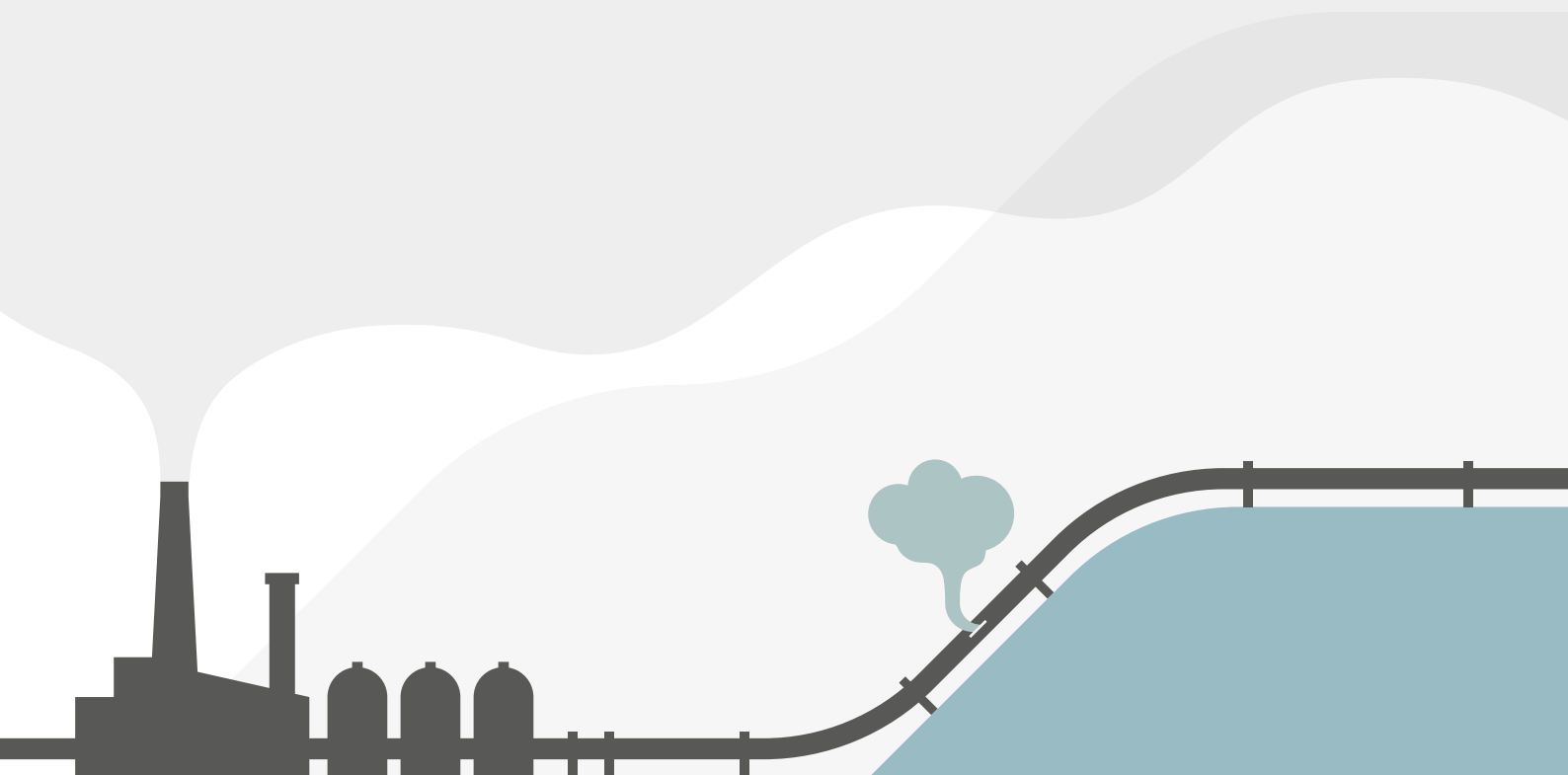
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