Climate jobs and jobswash: challenging false solutions

Greenwashing meets redwashing – the case of CCS

October 31st 2026

Aled Dilwyn Fisher

OILCHANGE INTERNATIONAL

The case of CCS



Why CCS is greenwashing



Why CCS is red/jobwashing



What we can do about it

Why CCS is greenwashing

- 88% of projects cancelled before 2018 – and getting worse (DNV).
- DNV project database – utilisation rates (emissions actually capture vs. stated capacity) around 50%.
- Never achieved a capture rate (emissions captured vs. total emissions) over 80% (despite claiming 90-95% as standard!).

Why CCS is greenwashing

Put simply:

The vast majority of CCS projects fail.

The few that are finished don’t meet their goals…

… and they only capture part of the emissions from the industries they’re attached to. You’re locking-in pollution!

Why CCS is greenwashing

Example – gas-CCS:

- Does nothing for the emissions from extracting/transport gas.
- 80% capture rate at best → still huge new emissions.

Why CCS is greenwashing

Example – fertilisers:

- Does nothing for the emissions from extracting/transport gas.
- Vast majority of emissions come when fertilisers are used in fields.
- Only captures small part of emissions from part of production.

Why CCS is greenwashing

But we need to do everything, so it's OK to try new things and fail?

Well, failure isn't cheap:

- CCS is among the most expensive climate options (IPCC).
- $79 billion in global subsidies over several decades –> can only capture at best 0.1% of world's annual emissions!

Why CCS is greenwashing

- UK has committed £24bn+ to CCS projects.
- None yet operating; average delay of 2 years, many cancellations.
- Previous governments spent hundreds of millions on failed projects.
- To meet CCS targets would need £264bn in subsidies!

Why CCS is greenwashing

So why do so many serious people support CCS?

- CCS technology comes from the oil and gas industry.
- Oil and gas companies paid for research in the 1990s that established CCS as a way to meet future climate targets.
- CCS lobbyists have been highly active in the UK and EU, and even at the IPCC and UN climate summits.

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Carbon Captured

How the fossil fuel industry turned the plan to solve climate change into a plan to save itself.

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The Guardian UK

June 2025

Reeves promised oil industry ‘quid pro quo’ over windfall tax in private meeting

Government accused of making ‘secret exchange deal’ with fossil fuel companies to compensate for tax hike



Corporate Europe Observatory

April 2024

The Carbon Coup

How corporate capture is locking Europe into a fossil fuelled future



BBC

October 2021

COP26: Document leak reveals nations lobbying to change key climate report



The Guardian UK

November 2024

Almost 500 carbon capture lobbyists granted access to Cop29 climate summit

More lobbyists for the controversial technology were present this year, despite debate about its viability

Why CCS is greenwashing

- Most CCS projects are still for expanding fossil fuels – gas-CCS, ‘blue’ hydrogen/ammonia

- CCS presented as “unavoidable” for ‘hard-to-abate’ sectors like cement and waste incineration – but reduced consumption, better recycling/reuse, and use of alternative materials would reduce emissions far better.

- Even at its ‘best,’ CCS can’t reduce emissions enough – need structural change (i.e. no non-radical futures!).

Why CCS is greenwashing

CCS is also not without risks:

- CO2 leaks have led to mass poisoning events in the USA.
- CO2 storage offshore is a new risk to vulnerable oceans.
- Carbon storage will need to be monitored – without exaggeration – *for all eternity* to avoid leaks leading to future climate change.

Why CCS is greenwashing

The ultimate check-mate for systemic change:

“Don’t worry, we can carry on more-or-less as before – and develop some cool tech at the same time…

“… and, of course, save and create jobs!”

Why CCS is job/redwashing

UK government claims on CCS jobs:

- £22bn funding over 25 years → 8.5 million tonnes CO2 per annum → directly create 4,000 new jobs and "support" 50,000 jobs "as the sector matures in the 2030s"

Where does this claim come from?

Another government press release!

Why CCS is job/redwashing

- CCS jobs claims usually based on grey literature – non-peer-reviewed reports, directly from industry or think-tanks.

- ‘Size of the prize’ studies = maximum potential jobs given a set of (usually optimistic) assumptions or simplistic approaches based on multiplier effects.

Why CCS is job/redwashing

Frequent assumptions that exaggerate CCS job claims:

1. No consideration of job creation potential of alternatives, e.g. circular economy.

2. Exaggerated job losses from *not* pursuing CCS, i.e. assuming nothing else happens so that all the jobs are just lost.

Another e.g. of bias against systemic change/non-radical futures!

Why CCS is job/redwashing

Frequently ignore:

- Negative effects of CCS on jobs from e.g. inflation.
- Competition for labour between different climate policies.
- That job claims can be boosted by assuming low wages.

Why CCS is job/redwashing

Peer-reviewed literature using computable general equilibrium (CGE) models (especially Karen Turner, Centre for Energy Policy, Strathclyde) shows more complex picture, but even these assume:

1. Completely unrealistic CCS success and capture rates.

2. UK's first-mover advantage – importing CO2 from Europe – despite e.g. Norway and others also planning this.

3. Initially over-sized infrastructure for transport and storage.

Why CCS is job/redwashing

Example – Cavillo et al. (2025):

- Transitory annual job gains peak at 11,000+ in construction in cluster regions…
- …but job displacement peaks of around 5,200 in retail, services, and hospitality in other regions from waste-cost drive price pressures.
- Direct FTE jobs from CCS = just 404. Similar in Norway (28 direct jobs at Northern Lights).

Why CCS is job/redwashing

Example – Cavillo et al. (2025):

- Assumes 50 million tonnes CO2 storage annually = more than the government's own objective (20-30 million tonnes) and much more than current world storage!

- Based on staged introduction of Track 1 and Track 2 CCS clusters – no guarantee that happens in practice at all.

Why CCS is job/redwashing

Example – Cavillo et al. (2025):

- “Potential congestion of nascent activity in the net zero space could exacerbate resource and skills competition… impacting not only… CCUS projects but the dynamics of the wider transition.”

- “With no intervention, the relocation of skilled labour could significantly affect wage rates and labour costs across the CCUS networks and other UK sectors requiring similar skillsets... This could have wider public policy implications, not least in terms of regional disparities and ‘just transition’ agendas.”

Why CCS is job/redwashing

Example – Turner et al. (2021):

- Predicted net job losses of 14,448 across entire economy.
- Based on 4 CCS clusters by 2030 and net-zero by 2050.
- Main issue here was risk of higher costs for capture firms, leaking to offshoring of jobs.

Why CCS is job/redwashing

Example – Turner et al. (2024):

- 4,395 FTE new jobs in total, with 432 in CCS transport and storage.
- Assumes 54 million tonnes CO2 annually stored from 2030!

Why CCS is job/redwashing

Example – Turner et al. (2024):

- “Where the combination of the persisting labour supply constraint and wage bargaining trigger cost and price pressures across the economy, wider job creation will be limited, particularly in more labour-intensive sectors where the impact on wage costs, associated with even lower paid jobs, limits expansion.”

- “Competition for scarce labour resources between even just one major industrial decarbonisation solution and other existing activities in the economy bring complex and challenging trade-offs.”

Why CCS is job/redwashing

There is no guarantee that CCS projects and policies will create large numbers of well-paid, permanent, decent jobs, even if planned projects and policies are successful to an unprecedented degree and achieve their aims.

The quantity, quality, and location of CCS jobs, as with any sector, will depend on how projects and policies are designed. But, in any likely scenario, most new CCS jobs, by their nature, will be relatively short-term ones in construction.

Why CCS is job/redwashing

The effects of CCS policy can very easily lead to net job losses across the entire economy, especially where they contribute to increased prices or labour shortages in general are not addressed.

Crucially, there is much to suggest that there are better alternatives for job creation that are also far superior from climate policy and overall cost perspectives, especially related to circular economy policies that create sustained employment.