

Proposal: “Renewables Are Not Enough”

Purpose: We worry that many people believe that renewable energy can solve the climate crisis without requiring us to make drastic changes to our lifestyles. It's the most common instance of a techno-optimistic approach to the climate crisis. Although renewables are absolutely critical, we believe that there are some simple misunderstandings that lead to a rosy-eyed view of a 100% renewable future. We believe that investment in renewables needs to be complemented by efforts to reduce our consumption, which would address not only the climate crisis but numerous other issues of environmental destruction and social injustice.

Our proposal is to create an accessible website that makes the argument that Renewables Are Not Enough. The main website will consist of five simple arguments to make our point, with 150-250 words in each section and links to scientific sources and further reading.

1. **We need to get to net zero emissions, then net negative emissions.** We must remember that in order to avert the worst of the future climate catastrophe, we cannot merely reduce emissions, but we also need to take CO₂ out of the atmosphere.
2. **Renewables are not zero emissions.** We must remember that while renewable energy is far cleaner than fossil fuels, it doesn't come for free. Steel, concrete, and other materials still cause emissions, not to mention other harmful social and environmental impacts (e.g., from mining).
3. **It's really hard to remove CO₂.** Technologies for removing CO₂ are still unproven to scale, expensive, and have numerous technological, economic, and political hurdles, as well as significant environmental and social risks. It's far easier and safer to reduce emissions than to rely upon removing emissions.
4. **Many sources of emissions won't be eliminated by renewables.** Emissions from agriculture, concrete and steel production, and jet fuel comprise nearly half of today's emissions, but would not be mitigated by renewable energy or electrification in the next few decades.
5. **Reducing consumption is a safe, just, and proven way forward.** We are exceeding the resource capacity of this planet. The best way to ease the burden on the earth is to take less from it. This can be done without sacrificing quality of life. And it could make a difference on our emissions relatively quickly compared to alternatives that require massive investments.

We need your feedback:

Whom should we reach? How should we reach them? We would like the website to be referenced in any discussion against excessive optimism placed in renewables. We think we could reach out to individuals and organizations in the area and share this with them, and see where it goes from there. But no ideas more specific than that.

Is this the right format? We like the idea of having a website that is dedicated to a specific argument that people can link to. But there are other ways we could share this message.

Is this a valuable project? Many people are aware that renewables are not enough. Many people are working on other environmental issues. Furthermore, we still need more aggressive political action on renewables, and we don't want to detract from that. But we feel there is insufficient attention given to “limits to growth” perspectives in the mainstream.