

Coal-powered u-turns and plastic-eating enzymes. Can we save the world?

Every week, Maddyness looks at the good, the bad and the ugly in climate change news. Today, we look into a new landscape for foreign relations, Sudan's green recovery and some plastic-eating enzymes.

In the UK, we've had some very good news and some very bad news. At the start of this week, Boris Johnson announced a plan to power all homes with wind by 2030 and in so doing create "hundreds of thousands, if not millions of jobs" within the next decade.

This chimed a little strangely with the fact that, several days before, Cumbria Council had granted planning permission for the first new coal mine in the UK in 30 years.

"We can't claim to be fighting the climate crisis one minute, and open a new coal mine the next," said Gareth Redmond-King, climate change lead at WWF. Thankfully, the decision was put on hold by Housing Secretary Robert Jenkins a handful of hours later – but it's definitely a situation to keep an eye on.

Radically contradictory is nothing new in the strange old world of environmental decision-making. The past week saw a similar blip from South Korea. State-owned Korea Electric Power Corp (KEPCO) just approved investment into a new coal plant in Vietnam, despite the state's very fresh declaration (see below) of a "climate emergency".

Not so much a blip as a total inability to face reality is the Australian government's approval of a new gas field in New South Wales, as part of what Scott Morrison terms a "gas-fired recovery" from the COVID-19 recession. According to the country's Prime Minister,

"We are building a robust and competitive gas industry that will allow both gas producers and users to thrive, with lower prices and lower emissions benefiting all Australians."

Gas is being touted as a sexy new 'transition fuel', following pressure to move away from coal. But there's no time for transition fuels in a country that watched as wildfires decimated 18 million hectares of bush at the beginning of this year.

The big ideas

I've been checking out some more climate-conscious startups for Maddyne this week. Watch this space for articles on Purple Dot, who are trying to eliminate fashion waste, and SayPlants!, who are trying to turn Londoners plant-based by promising them free baklava.

Beyond this, have a look at the ideas and innovations from across the spectrum of politics, social justice and big business that caught my eye this week:

South Korea has declared a climate emergency and set a target of net-zero emissions by 2050.

Utah's Halcium has invented the Powerpod – the 'safest, most powerful wind turbine in the world', designed for urban environments.

Loyle Carner has partnered with Timberland, National Park City and Croydon council to 'regreen' heavily urban areas of south London. The result: a multi-use green community space.

Energy Sparks is a Bath-based 'child-focused environmental project' which, by harnessing the power of data, is lowering energy use and emissions from

schools.

An initiative to build climate change resilience into Liberia's cocoa and rice farming – via agricultural production, livelihood diversification, rural transport, and political commitment – has just garnered billions of pounds of funding.

In a real breakthrough for rubbish disposal, scientists have found a 'plastic-eating enzyme' that breaks plastic down six times faster than normal methods.

Peatland is crucial for carbon storage. SWAMP is working to maintain Peru's extensive peatland, generating 'knowledge on sustainable wetland management that is relevant to policymakers and practitioners'.

BlackRock has launched a sovereign bond ETF, forcing the sustainable investment debate into the political sphere. "Climate change could significantly impact government finances. We have argued that there is a link between climate change and creditworthiness," said Scott Harman, head of fixed income product management at FTSE Russell.

India has launched its first ever Green Strategic Partnership, with Denmark. The two countries are aiming to be at the forefront of the global fight against climate change.

The government in Sudan has created the 'National Solar Fund' to mobilise funding and investment. It hopes to use this solar energy to support a green recovery in health, agriculture and home energy access. Read more about the pivotal point Sudan stands at here.

Further reading

If you're still reading, here's even more reading:

Why Africa must lead on climate change, via *Forbes*.

Why everything you think you know about the geopolitics of climate change is wrong, via *Foreign Policy*.

Three scenarios for the future of climate change, via the *New Yorker*.

