Press release

China off track on all key climate commitments as coal power approvals continue

BEIJING, 22 February 2024 - China is badly off track to meet several climate targets the country set for 2025 as a result of an increase in coal use and investment in coal power, finds a new report from the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air and Global Energy Monitor. Meeting most of the targets is still possible but requires determined action.

The report shows that China approved at least 106 gigawatts (GW) of coal power capacity and started construction on 70 GW in 2023, accelerating further the frantic pace of permitting seen in 2022, the equivalent of two new coal power plants per week, as well as starting construction on one new plant per week. China also commissioned 47 GW of coal-fired capacity and announced 108 GW in new projects in 2023.

Following its 2021 pledge to “strictly control” new coal power, Chinese approvals of new coal power plants increased fourfold over 2022 and 2023, compared with the previous five-year period between 2016 and 2020.

Since the beginning of 2022, an estimated 218 GW of new coal power plants have been permitted. 89 GW of this capacity had already started construction as of the end of 2023, while another 128 GW had yet to break ground.

The pledge to “strictly control” new coal power is just one of the climate commitments that China is struggling to meet.

China’s Nationally Determined Commitment (NDC) under the Paris agreement makes commitments to strictly limit coal consumption growth; reduce energy intensity; and reduce carbon intensity. The country’s five-year plans further set targets of increasing the share of non-fossil fuels to 20% of the energy mix and deriving more than 50% of the increase in energy use from renewable sources.

All of these targets are severely off track after 2023, based on a CREA analysis for Carbon Brief [1].
China’s deployment of clean energy accelerated dramatically in 2023. Most of the country’s climate targets for 2025 can still be met if this accelerated pace is maintained, energy demand growth returns to pre-Covid levels, and permits to new coal power plants are reviewed.

**Lauri Myllyvirta, lead analyst, CREA:** “The Chinese government has taken pride in reliably meeting or exceeding its earlier climate commitments. However, the energy- and carbon-intensive mode of economic growth during and after zero-Covid has put the country badly off track to its current targets, threatening to undermine China’s credibility. Yet, the record-breaking expansion of clean energy and electricity storage in 2023 provides an opportunity to reverse course.”

**Flora Champenois, research analyst, Global Energy Monitor:** “China’s ongoing coal plant permitting and construction boom continues to be at odds with President Xi’s pledge to strictly control new coal power projects, and out of step with the rest of the world. Overbuilding coal ‘just in case’ and with a ‘we’ll deal with that later’ approach is a costly and risky gamble, especially when alternative solutions are available to meet targets and address energy security.”

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Note to editors:
[1]: The analysis of China’s progress against 2025 climate targets is published on Carbon Brief simultaneously with the GEM-CREA report: Analysis: Record drop in China’s CO2 emissions needed to meet 2025 target.

**About Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA)**

CREA is an independent research organisation focused on revealing the trends, causes, and health impacts, as well as the solutions to air pollution. We use scientific data, research and evidence to support the efforts of governments, companies and campaigning organisations worldwide in their efforts to move towards clean energy and clean air.

www.energyandcleanair.org
About Global Energy Monitor

Global Energy Monitor (GEM) develops and shares information in support of the worldwide movement for clean energy. By studying the evolving international energy landscape, and creating databases, reports, and interactive tools that enhance understanding, GEM seeks to build an open guide to the world's energy system.

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