

RECHARGE

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COP28: Utilities unite to decarbonise and new offshore wind alliance launched

A group photo of the utilities alliance members. Photo: IRENA



Masdar agrees to open 1GW green facility in Jordan, and a surprise twist could reportedly see Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber return as COP president next year

By **Cosmo Sanderson**

Utilities around the world have reached a “landmark” pact at COP28 in Dubai to speed up their race to net zero, while a new offshore wind alliance was launched and controversy erupted over the invitation of 'arsonists to the firefighting convention'.

The brisk pace of dealmaking that has marked the annual climate summit so far continued today (Tuesday) as 25 utilities and a handful of power companies signed up to the 'Utilities for Net Zero Alliance'.

The “landmark joint commitment to advance electrification, renewables-ready grids, and clean energy deployment” will help the world reach net zero by 2050, said the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), which will help coordinate the alliance.

Led by the UAE’s grid operator TAQA, other alliance members include France’s EDF, Italy’s Enel and the UK’s National Grid.

IRENA said the primary focus of the alliance is hastening the renewables rollout and building the infrastructure needed.

It also offers a platform for “joint efforts to address supply chain bottlenecks, support the flow of capital to the power sector transformation in the global south, and engagement with policymakers and regulators.”

IRENA director general Francesco La Camera said that to “accelerate the deployment of renewables, we need concerted action to overcome existing infrastructure barriers through the modernisation and upgrade of power grids”.

Utilities are at the “frontline” of this modernisation, he said, and will have to invest significantly in “interconnectivity, flexibility, and balancing of the distribution system in pursuit of Paris Agreement climate goals.”

The alliance will now develop a “plan of action” to address challenges in decarbonising, including finding sufficient capital, building up capabilities and talent and facilitating regulatory support.

New offshore wind group launched

Ocean Energy Pathway (OEP) was launched with the goal of accelerating the energy transition by “unlocking the tremendous potential of offshore wind power.”

The non-profit is supported by the newly announced Ocean Resilience and Climate Alliance, a \$250m fund focused on “advancing ocean-based solutions to fight climate change.”

To achieve net-zero emissions globally, IRENA forecasts the need for 2TW of offshore wind by 2050 – but the sector has been battered this year by inflation and supply chain issues that have led to a spate of **high-profile project cancellations**.

Through support from the global wind industry and climate philanthropy, OEP said it will accelerate offshore wind development over the next decade in at least ten markets with significant wind resources at the frontier of the energy transition, including India, Brazil, Colombia and South Africa.

Rebecca Williams, the Global Wind Energy Council’s offshore wind chief, said that “countries across the world are turning to offshore wind to power their growing economies” and OEP will “help them realise their ambitions.”

The Global Offshore Wind Alliance meanwhile welcomed new members today, including its first supranational body – the European Union.

California, Brazil and Panama also joined the alliance, with the four new members bringing another 65GW of targeted capacity in total.

Masdar makes moves in Jordan

Masdar, the state-owned renewable energy company of COP28 host the United Arab Emirates, continued its spree of green deal making – signing up to develop a 1GW wind and battery energy storage system in Jordan.

It has also entered a memorandum of understanding to explore the feasibility of establishing a green hydrogen plant in the Jordanian port of Aqaba.

Saleh Al-Kharabsheh, Jordan's Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources, said the country was continuing in its efforts to become a "regional centre for green energy production."

Masdar is pursuing a target of 1 million tonnes of green hydrogen production by 2030 as part of the UAE's plans to "establish itself as a green hydrogen hub" and capture 25% of the global low-carbon hydrogen market by the end of the decade.

UAE cuts coal, COP courts controversy

The UAE also announced it has joined the Powering Past Coal Alliance – a coalition of governments and businesses working to advance the transition from unabated coal power to clean energy.

The significance of this is somewhat mitigated as the country already phased out coal last year, although that is much more recently than Malta, the other new alliance member did, back in 1996.

COP28 has meanwhile continued to court controversy, this time with news that a record number of fossil fuel lobbyists (around 2,400) have been given access to the conference. This number is more than four times higher than COP27 in Egypt – although this may partly be accounted for by stricter rules around delegates declaring who they work for.

Nevertheless, Climate Action Network hit out at the figure on X, formerly Twitter, writing: "You don't bring arsonists to a firefighting convention."

Much of the controversy around this COP has centred on its president, Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber, as he is head of the UAE's national oil company ADNOC.

In a twist of fate, Simon Evans of UK news publication *Carbon Brief* has **posted on X** that Al Jaber may find himself in the hotseat again next year as well at COP29.

This is because the host is due to be an eastern European state and Russia is vetoing all EU nations, while Armenia and Azerbaijan are vetoing each other. This reportedly only leaving seven mostly small states (and war torn Ukraine) eligible to host the highly expensive climate summit.

Al Jaber would be reappointed by default if no new country and president is agreed on, while the conference would take place by default in the German town of Bonn – home of the UN climate secretariat.