



**Politicians will only take CCS seriously if they believe there is widespread support for it**

## Join the battle for carbon capture

Supporters of carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology have to face an uncomfortable truth: they are not winning the battle to secure the massive public funds that will be needed if CCS is to become a significant carbon abatement solution in the UK and Europe any time before 2025. This is bad news for utilities.

Michael Jacobs, a senior UK government environment adviser, made headlines in April when he expressed doubts about the EU's goal of having 12 CCS demonstration projects across Europe by 2015, and said there had to be an "incentive mechanism" to make it happen.

A successful mechanism would inevitably involve pumping billions of euros of public money into CCS, not the paltry "tens of millions" that the UK government is prepared to invest in its sole demonstration project. Recent analysis by investment bank Climate Change Capital showed that each demonstration will need one *billion* euros in capital expenditure, and that funding will have to come from the EU, because "no single member state will deliver".

There is at least one clearly identifiable loser in this stand-off between national governments and the EU over who pays for CCS: the utilities that want to participate in demonstration projects and make CCS a commercial reality.

Any utility that is competing for the UK demonstration project, planned for 2014, must be nervous to hear that the government is planning to invest "tens of millions". What if the total capital cost for a CCS-ready 440MW coal-fired station is close to one billion euros, as Climate Capital predicts? Who pays the balance? Utility shareholders or customers?

Utilities will argue that they can't be expected to pick up the tab for a major societal problem such as global warming. But to have any possibility of securing more public funding, utilities and other CCS supporters must persuade a much wider audience of their case. In other words, a propaganda offensive on CCS is needed, one that has to be waged outside the corridors of power.

The blunt truth is that politicians will only start taking CCS seriously if they believe there is widespread support for it. At present, the opposite is true. The evidence so far is that there is almost no understanding of – far less support for – this complex technology, in the UK or the

rest of Europe. Changing that will require a skilful public advocacy campaign that educates the public about the technology, provides reassurances about safety, and highlights the potential for making deep cuts in carbon emissions.

If the British public can get its head around the fact that there is enough geological capacity in the North Sea to store the UK's carbon emissions for many years to come, supporters of CCS might be able to persuade people that this is one solution that is "absolutely critical", to quote Michael Jacobs again.

It's by no means certain that greater awareness will lead to widespread support. The prominent environmental groups are largely hesitant, preferring to concentrate on truly "clean" technologies such as wind or solar power. Some, like Greenpeace, are actively hostile, labelling CCS a "false solution". The views of these popular activists have the potential to swing the public debate one way or the other.

The mainstream media would be another important influence group. New technologies tend to be subject to media scares of one kind or another. Think of the "brain cancer" headlines that plagued the mobile phone industry a few years ago. In the same way that local activists campaign against new cellular masts, it's easy to envisage alarm being whipped up over the transport of carbon dioxide through new pipelines from power stations to storage points that might be hundreds of miles away. It would be better to educate the local and national media about CCS safety than wait for a pipeline planning application in a built-up area to generate scare stories that might spiral out of control.

Most industry experts would agree that it's hard to see how we can address our big energy challenges – securing new supplies and drastically cutting greenhouse gas emissions – without CCS as an integral part of our energy mix. But unless CCS supporters, including our major utilities, start making the case for it loudly and clearly to the British people, it's equally hard to see how it's ever going to become a reality.

**Geoff Beattie, managing director, Cohn & Wolfe Global Consultancy**

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