

Defund fossil fuels to save nature, says top environmental fund boss

by [Louise Guillot](#) • AUG 22 • 8 MINUTES READ

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SUSTAINABILITY INSIGHTS

By LOUISE GUILLOT

with Leonie Cater, Antonia Zimmermann, Zia Weise, Joshua Posaner and Bjarke Smith-Meyer

TODAY'S TOP LINE — As countries gather for a major biodiversity summit in Vancouver today, the head of top global environmental fund is calling on governments to defund activities that are harmful to the environment.

Good afternoon, everyone! In the meantime, share your tips, tricks and tales with Louise Guillot at lguillot@politico.eu, Leonie Cater at lcater@politico.eu and Antonia Zimmermann at azimmermann@politico.eu. Find us on Twitter at [@l_guillot](#), [@LeonieACater](#) and [@_Zimmerfrau](#).

BIODIVERSITY

INTERVIEW — MORE CASH FOR BIODIVERSITY ONLY GOES SO FAR: As part of last year's global COP15 deal, countries pledged to channel more money toward environmental protection — but that won't be enough to tackle biodiversity loss if they also continue to pour cash into sectors like the oil and gas industry, according to the head of a top international environmental fund.

"The political challenge is not mobilizing resources, it's something more complicated, [it's to] stop investing in those activities that destroy nature," Carlos Manuel Rodríguez, CEO of the [Global Environment Facility](#) (GEF), an international funding structure that assists countries in reaching global green goals, told me in a video call from Washington. Read more from my conversation with Rodríguez [here](#).

Timing: His comments come as countries gather in Vancouver [starting today](#) to discuss how to boost international funding for nature conservation. As part of the meeting, Rodríguez is set to launch a [new fund](#) to support developing countries in reaching ambitious nature conservation targets [agreed](#) at COP15.

Starting gun: The creation of the new fund is "significant" because it is the first to be "dedicated to biodiversity conservation," said Midori Paxton, head of ecosystems and biodiversity at the U.N. Development Program, adding that it "sends the message that [biodiversity] is as important as climate."

What's at stake? The creation of the new fund is an important step in the implementation of the [COP15 deal](#), which committed world countries to stop and reverse biodiversity loss by the end of the century. As part of the new agreement, rich countries agreed to boost their support to developing countries and increase international aid for nature conservation to \$20 billion per year by 2025 and \$30 billion annually by 2030. The new fund is meant to help channel that money to vulnerable countries but also indigenous peoples and local communities working to protect the environment, Rodríguez told me. Rich donor countries like Canada, France and Germany are expected to announce contributions later this week.

CLIMATE CHANGE

TIMMERMANS PACKS HIS BAGS: The chief architect of the European Green Deal is heading for the exit. Frans Timmermans will resign from the European Commission after a left-wing alliance today formally chose him as its lead candidate ahead of November's general election in the Netherlands, my colleagues Karl and Zia report.

Frexit: Timmermans, who ran unopposed, gathered a large majority of supporters in today's vote for the joint Labor-Green list, scoring [91.8 percent](#) of votes. His exit comes at a crucial time for climate action both at home and abroad. This year's COP28 U.N. climate talks are just round the corner, and a [backlash](#) against the Green Deal is brewing as the EU election approaches. Several green laws must still be finalized, and some have yet to be proposed.

Let the jostling begin: Timmermans also leaves open three powerful positions in the Commission; existing commissioners will have to jostle for the roles of executive vice president, climate commissioner and commissioner in charge of the Green Deal.

Read the full story from Karl and Zia [here](#).

Policy in limbo: Top among the many unanswered questions that Timmermans leaves behind is what will happen to the EU's 2040 climate target. According to the European Climate Law, the Commission must propose that target and table a 2030-2050 carbon budget in the first half of 2024, just before EU elections. EU experts have called for a 90 percent to 95 percent reduction — but appetite for more climate action is waning in Brussels as the EU elections draw near. With Timmermans' departure, the Commission loses its loudest advocate of ambitious targets.

More question marks: The 2040 target isn't the only item that Timmermans is leaving on the Commission's to-do list; my colleague Zia examined the top five issues [here](#).

CHEMICALS

SINKEVIČIUS TALKS PFAS AT HOME: Environment Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius is back in his home country of Lithuania this week, where he met with national laser and chemical industry associations on Monday to talk about efforts to restrict so-called "forever chemicals," or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), which have been linked to a host of health issues.

Reassuring industry: The [toxic chemicals](#) are currently used in everything from solar panels and wind turbines to semiconductor manufacturing and paint. Earlier this year, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden [submitted](#) a proposal to restrict PFAS across the bloc, sparking backlash from several corners of European industry. In a post on Twitter (or X, as it's now known), Sinkevičius [insisted](#) that tackling PFAS pollution "shall not block scaling up EU's net zero tech," and pledged that

Brussels will “continue working together & supporting innovative solutions & alternatives.”

Feedback: Industry groups, national authorities and civil society have until September 25 to weigh in on the PFAS restriction proposal. There are already reams of feedback to read through [here](#).

INDUSTRY CHOOSING WHAT TO DISCLOSE ON ANTIBIOTICS IN WASTEWATER:

Pharmaceutical companies are being left to set their own standards when it comes to preventing antimicrobial resistance through effective management of antibiotic manufacturing waste, with hit-and-miss results, a [new report](#) by the Access to Medicine Foundation reveals.

More on that from my health colleague Ashleigh [here](#).

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AIR POLLUTION

LONDONERS ELIGIBLE FOR GRANT TO SCRAP POLLUTING VEHICLES: The expansion of London’s Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) to all city boroughs on August 29 has become a [major political talking point](#) over the last few months, pitting Mayor Sadiq Khan not only against Conservatives in power nationally, but also against many in his own Labour Party. Many think the plan to counter toxic vehicle pollution will hit poorer households the hardest, given the current cost-of-living crunch.

Doing out the cash: In order to soften the blow, local motorists as of this week can apply for a £2,000 “scrappage grant” from the local administration to defray the cost of upgrading cars that don’t meet the ULEZ standards. The scheme also offers £1,000 for scrapping a motorcycle.

Price point: Grants worth £52 million have already been approved for motorists in the British capital, the city’s Transport for London transport regulator said in an emailed statement, with the total subsidy envelope set at £160 million.

Food for thought: My climate colleagues Abby Wallace and Charlie Cooper in the U.K. report that a flurry of recent polls show support for the country’s overall 2050 net zero target remains strong. But the picture becomes more complex when you throw in questions around cost, they write, with more than half of respondents to [one recent poll](#) saying climate policies should only be introduced if they don’t result in “additional costs for normal people.”

SUSTAINABLE FINANCE

GREEN BITCOIN: You might have missed it but it’s still making the rounds on crypto Twitter (or should we now say “crypto X”?). Accounting giant KPMG published a [12-page report](#) this month that offers a counter argument to criticism surrounding Bitcoin’s notorious greenhouse footprint.

Bitcoin’s thirst for energy has [attracted the attention](#) from policymakers in Brussels, who question the cryptocurrency’s benefit to society other than guzzling [more electricity than Austria](#) over a year. But the KPMG report is downplaying Bitcoin’s bad reputation, noting that some companies minting (or rather “mining”) bitcoins use renewable energy.

Plus: The heat generated from running their servers can also go to heating commercial buildings, greenhouses and even swimming pools, the report said.

Meh: The report will cheer up Bitcoin-backers but do little to sway critics, especially as there are alternatives to Bitcoin's mining method (so-called proof-of-stake systems) that consume far less energy. "Now we just wait until they discover the benefits of leaving your oven on 24/7," anti-crypto X'er [Alex de Vries commented](#).

GREEN GLANCES

Spanish firefighters are close to stabilizing massive wildfires in the Canary islands, [Reuters](#) reports, but authorities recommend residents stay indoors amid "very unfavorable" air quality.

The International Trade Centre has warned that EU deforestation rules risk having a "catastrophic impact" on global trade. More from the Financial Times [here](#).

Japan is set to release treated radioactive water from the damaged Fukushima power plant on Thursday, [Reuters](#) reports. The U.N.'s nuclear watchdog [said](#) it will have "negligible radiological impact on people and the environment" but local fishermen [are still worried](#).

The European Consumer Organisation is [hiring](#) a sustainability and green claims policy officer.

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