

STUDY: CLOSING COAL POWER PLANTS WON'T BUDGE THE NEEDLE ON CLIMATE CHANGE*

The speed of a global campaign to close coal power plants down is insufficient to make a major difference to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. That was the conclusion of a study led by Chalmers University of Technology in Sweden. The researchers found that the efforts of the Powering Past Coal Alliance (PPCA) were not as effective at combatting climate change as they might at first appear. The PPCA is made up of 30 nations, a host of regional governments and some corporate members too. The U.K., Canada, the state of California and Unilever are among those signed up.

But the Chalmers study, published this month in *Nature Climate Change*, found that many of the specific coal plants being slated for closure under the program were already nearing the end of their lifetime. It is widely accepted that coal power not using any kind of carbon capture and storage system, is likely inconsistent with international efforts under the Paris Agreement to limit warming to 1.5°C. The paper expects emission cuts from the PPCA pledges out to 2050 to represent just 0.67% of the total emissions in that period.

"The Powering Past Coal Alliance is a good start but so far, only wealthy countries which don't use much coal, and some countries which don't use any coal power, have joined," said Jessica Jewell, assistant professor at the Department of Space, Earth and the Environment at Chalmers University of Technology, and the lead researcher of the study. The study compared the characteristics of PPCA members and those of the world's largest users of coal. PPCA members were typically wealthy, democratic, transparent and with robust anti-corruption regimes. Members have low growth in demand for electricity and the coal plants that are in operation, are fairly old. With all that in mind, expanding the PPCA beyond those matching this description would surely make it more impactful. By contrast, nations with the world's largest coal usage tend to have a growing demand for electricity, with coal the largest single source of power and had poor safeguards against corruption.

The researchers conclude that while Spain and Germany could soon count themselves among the PPCA's members, India and China are unlikely to. Nations with strong domestic coal mining are also not considered likely to sign up any time soon. That might all seem fairly obvious. But program's like PPCA and others outside the power sector would seem to be geared for certain economies with the means to attract investment in infrastructure overhauls. One of the core tenets of the UN's climate change laws is the acknowledgement of "common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities". That is to say, everybody has to do their part but not necessarily the same way or to the same extent.