

24 February 2024

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Publication date: 31 January 2024

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ISSN: 0964-8496

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‘Dirtier than coal’ claim for LNG lingers on as new rules address methane emissions

Last week’s decision by the White House to pause pending and future applications to export LNG to non-FTA countries, citing the need to reassess the economic and environmental impact of LNG exports, once again highlighted the issue of methane emissions in the LNG supply chain – often referred to as the industry’s ‘Achilles heel’.

Reporting on the 26 January announcement, news outlets – including the UK’s Guardian – cited claims made last year by a prominent academic that, when all factors are taken into account, LNG is no cleaner in terms of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions than coal. If so, this would undermine the whole basis of a strong role for LNG in the energy transition.

Closer examination reveals that this claim is based on pessimistic assumptions on how much methane is leaked from upstream oil and gas operations. However, the fact that this possibility can be mooted at all is testimony to the importance of tackling methane emissions, which a series of major announcements made in recent months suggest is gathering momentum.

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