

## About the Vattenfall Sale - A Swedish point of view

Because human kind is slowly committing suicide. We have built our entire society on the burning of fossil fuels, which in turn is fuelling climate change. And climate change is now threatening not only society, but life as we know it. Saying this is not propaganda or exaggeration – it is scientific fact.

Researchers have calculated that to have a 50/50 chance of staying below +2°C average global temperature increase, we need to keep 80% of known fossil resources in the ground. Swedish state-owned energy company Vattenfall bought lignite operations in Germany in 2001 for €7.5 billion. In 2015, the Swedish government, wanting to be at the frontline of climate mitigation, gave Vattenfall orders to move away from fossil fuels for the sake of becoming a climate neutral company. So Vattenfall put the mines up for sale and had one bidder left when the bidding closed in March this year: Czech energy investor EPH together with the private equity group PPF Investments. EPH runs coal mining in Czech republic, and has stated that they are expecting a "coal renaissance" in Europe, counting on the energy prices to go back up in 2022 when the final nuclear power plant in Germany closes. Both EPH and PPF are found in the Panama Papers and are seen by many as irresponsible and completely lacking environmental consideration. They have promised to keep up the mining in Lausitz for as long as they possibly can.

Currently, Vattenfall as a state-owned company has asked the Swedish government for permission to go through with the deal. The government is now looking into it, and have set up a group consisting of a handful of economists and lawyers who are doing a so-called "Fairness opinion" to investigate the business conditions of the deal. The government will not reveal who these people are, nor on what date we can expect their report and the government's decision.<sup>1</sup> However, they have hinted it might come sometime in June.

There are rumours going around saying that the deal can only be stopped by a majority vote in Parliament to change the owner directives of Vattenfall and make environmental concern as important as economic gain in this case. But there are also professors in political science, and the president of the Vattenfall board himself, stating that it is the government who are the owners of Vattenfall and therefore have the power to stop the deal if they want to.<sup>2</sup>

The minority government consists of the Social Democrats, Sweden's biggest party, and the Green Party, who only got 7% of the votes in the last election. The Greens are very quiet on this matter though they have voted within the party to leave the coal in the ground. The Social Democrats have been completely silent, and the minister in charge of handling the deal, Mikael Damberg, is hardly seen. The six parties in opposition, are either interested in getting rid of the mines or not saying anything, except for the Left Party that are the only ones energetically agitating for keeping the mines and responsibly phasing out the mining.

Civil society and academia in Sweden are strongly objecting the sale. Well-renowned professor in environmental science, Johan Rockström, has been very active politically on this issue, for example writing a debate article together with internationally known author Naomi Klein and activist Bill McKibben,<sup>3</sup> stating that this is Sweden's biggest opportunity ever to show climate leadership, act by example and be the change we want to see in the world.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.svd.se/hemligstamplat-nar-vattenfalls-brunkolsaffar-granskas/i/snabbt/om/vattenfall-saljer-tyska-brunkolen> 2016-05-05

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.di.se/artiklar/2016/5/10/fritt-fram-att-stoppa-brunkolsaffar/> 2016-05-11

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.svd.se/vattenfalls-forsaljning-maste-stoppas/om/naringsliv:debatt> 2016-04-19

Activists in Sweden have done a multitude of actions against the sale for years already, escalating in the last months. For example, there have been actions outside the Vattenfall headquarters in Stockholm leading up to their Annual General Meeting on April 27, when people were laying pretending to be dead in front of the entrance to symbolise the victims of climate change that Vattenfall is partly responsible for. Greenpeace Sweden has together with several other organisations collected 65,000 signatures against the sale and handed them over to minister Mikael Damberg; street musicians have donated their concert proceeds to help get activists to the mines in Germany; and a class of 7<sup>th</sup> graders in Halmstad started their own petition against selling the coal when they heard of the deal. On May 3 there was an action in Malmö outside the local Vattenfall office, before waving off the international team of cyclists beginning their fossil free ride by bike from Sweden to Ende Gelände. Over 100 Swedes have travelled to Ende Gelände by bus, and many more who could not join in person followed the action as Digital Witnesses online<sup>4</sup>.

There is much conversation and concern heard in Sweden – mainly by civil society and NGOs, while the government stays silent. Many people feel that the mines are Sweden’s responsibility and that we cannot simply sell off the emissions imbedded in the ground to clear our conscience. The climate knows no borders and doesn’t care who emits what – every gram of greenhouse gases counts and needs to stay in the ground.

Still in Vattenfall’s Swedish mines is coal worth 1.2 billion tons of greenhouse gases. That is the equivalent of 24 years of Sweden’s current annual emissions as an entire nation. Sweden and Germany are two of the countries in the world with the best conditions to successfully leave the coal in the ground, phase out the mining with care for local inhabitants, mineworkers, and the environment. One suggestion has been to hand over the ownership of the mines to a foundation run by the Swedish and German governments together, with the soul aim of responsible phase out as soon as possible.

If we are serious about wanting to be at the forefront of climate mitigation and honouring the Paris Agreement, which we signed together with Germany and 175 other states on April 22, we must keep it in the ground. Climate change is produced locally, and the future is created by us and the decisions we make today. Let us actively build the future we not only need, but also want.

Annika,  
environmental scientist and one of many concerned Swedes  
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<sup>4</sup> <https://breakfree2016.org/digital-witness/>