

To: Federation Internationale de Football Association,
FIFA Strasse 20,
P.O Box 8044,
Zurich,
Switzerland

Re: Football community concerns over World Cup carbon neutrality claims

Dear Fatma Samoura, Gianni Infantino and Federico Addiechi,

From kick-about in the park, to Premier League derby days and the World Cup Final, football is a game of courage, teamwork and fierce loyalty. And with its ability to capture the hearts and minds of **billions of fans** across every corner of the globe, football has **an unrivalled opportunity to lead and inspire action** to protect and improve the world we live in by harnessing the values that make it *the* beautiful game.

When it comes to climate change, that opportunity is one we can't afford to pass up.

Record-breaking heat waves, flooding and poor air quality are already impacting the sport we love and depriving both young players and fans of a future in which football thrives. **Without ambitious and immediate action, climate change's grip on football's future will tighten.** Globally, we have seen sporting events and tournaments postponed due to extreme heat, players withdrawing because of the dangers of pollution and heat exhaustion, and the legacies of international sporting events vanishing as climate change creates conditions that make sport impossible to play.¹

Climate change is the opponent we must tackle - and we're already deep into extra time. Whatever shirt we wear or chant we sing, we've got **everything to gain from taking action.**

That's why at the World Cup - the biggest stage in world football - we want to see real leadership from our governing bodies, using football's unrivalled platform to set the bar for future tournaments. But, instead of taking this golden chance, **FIFA's currently set itself up to miss its best shot at goal.**

In just 18 days, the FIFA Men's World Cup in Qatar will kick off. The tournament has been labelled as the first "fully carbon neutral FIFA World Cup tournament", meaning its overall impact on the planet should be zero.² But that's not true. In reality, **FIFA's sustainability strategy for the Qatar World Cup rests on flawed carbon calculations**, questionable offsetting practices, and shifting the responsibility onto fans rather than shouldering it themselves. As criticism mounts around shameful human rights violations in Qatar, carbon neutrality claims are being used as a distraction. **Players, fans and the planet deserve better.**

For the sake of football fans of today and the fans of tomorrow, we call on FIFA to learn from the mistakes of Qatar and:

1. **Ditch the carbon neutral claim** for Qatar and launch a review before the FIFA Women's World Cup in July 2023.
2. Take a more **robust and responsible approach** to sustainability that aims to reduce emissions in the first place. The initial focus should be on largest sources of emissions.
3. **Only use offsets as a last resort** through the most well regarded, rigorous, and verifiable international offsetting mechanisms.

¹ [Lessons from a cancelled marathon: Athletic events, heat and the effects of climate change; Hereford football tournament postponed due to hot weather; Calls for heat policy in cricket after Joe Root sent to hospital; Climate change and the future of the Olympic Winter Games: athlete and coach perspectives.](#)

² 'Sustainability', FIFA, <https://www.fifa.com/social-impact/sustainability>

Climate change is our fiercest opponent and every member of the team needs to bring their A game. We're in the final moments of extra time and **we're heading for penalties - but it's not over yet**. As football fans and players, the ball is resting at our feet.

We look forward to hearing how you plan on addressing our concerns. Let's clear our heads, block out the noise, and shoot for goal.

Yours sincerely,

- Morten Thorsby (Union Berlin and We Play Green)
- Bart Vriends (Sparta Rotterdam)
- David Wheeler (Wycombe Wanderers)
- Elin Landström (AS Roma)
- Christian Dahle Borchgrevink (Vålerenga IF)
- Tessel Middag (Rangers FC)
- Emilie Bølviken (Lyn)
- Zoe Morse (Chicago Red Stars)
- Jasmyne Spencer (Angel City FC)
- Catie Collins (NYU Women's Soccer)
- Isabelle Ching (NYU Women's Soccer)
- Mathys Lefebvre (Pittsburgh Panthers Men's Soccer)
- David Goldblatt (author, 'Playing Against the Clock')



Notes on the 'carbon-neutrality' claims at the Men's FIFA World Cup 2022:

The carbon-neutrality claims made by FIFA in regards to the World Cup in Qatar are misleading, lack integrity, and rely upon deeply flawed carbon accounting calculations and questionable offsetting mechanisms. While carbon neutrality claims are often complex in practice, the main problems with FIFA's claim that Qatar will be "fully carbon-neutral"³ are as follows:

1. The calculation of the Qatar World Cup's environmental impact used by FIFA grossly underestimates the emissions that will be created by the tournament and probably underestimates important factors, such as fan travel, which is the largest source of emissions, as well as allocating the emissions from the construction of the stadiums onto hypothetical future users. What's more, the tournament is yet to take place, so knowing the true extent of the World Cup's environmental impact is extremely difficult, if not impossible. So claiming carbon neutrality before the World Cup even begins is impossible.
2. The carbon-neutral claim relies heavily on offsetting in a number of ways. The first is giving recommendations to fans and players on how to reduce their carbon footprint in day-to-day life. For instance, advising fans to cycle more and switch to a green energy provider. What's more, travelling fans are invited to offset the emissions from their flights to the World Cup. This mechanism is voluntary and shifts the responsibility onto fans, away from the tournament organisers. It is highly unlikely that this will lead to significant emissions reductions as the uptake of voluntary offsetting initiatives by private customers is generally very low. When looking at the airline sector for example, we see that very few customers choose to voluntarily offset the emissions from their flights and, in some cases, it is less than 1%.⁴
3. The second mechanism is through supporting regional carbon reduction projects by purchasing carbon credits via a new carbon market standard set up specifically for the Qatar World Cup, the Global Carbon Council (GCC). The GCC will support, among other, renewable energy projects in the region and despite having a proposed pipeline of over 200 projects, there are currently only three registered projects. The idea of offsetting emissions by bringing clean energy generation online is highly flawed and not supported by the main carbon market standards, the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) and Gold Standard (GS). Due to renewable energy now being cost competitive in most parts of the world, many of these projects will be built anyway, meaning that purchasing carbon credits from these will not provide any net reduction in emissions.
4. The World Cup in Qatar is boasting a completely dismantable stadium as part of their sustainability strategy, but this is only one of the eight stadiums built, and its carbon footprint is still substantial. In fact, the footprint of the dismantable stadium is larger than that of regular stadiums, and hence its overall benefit to the climate is highly dependent on whether, where, and for how long it will continue to be used. So far, there are no concrete plans for using the stadium in other locations - only vague announcements and intentions have been made.
5. The Qatar World Cup is creating the largest tree and turf nursery in the world in the desert to produce trees for stadium exteriors and grass for the stadiums and training grounds. However, it is unclear how much energy and scarce water resources this tree and turf nursery will require and there are concerns over the long-term storage of carbon emissions as it is highly unlikely the nursery will be operating over centuries. While the organisers are touting this as a green measure, it is in reality highly unlikely to generate any positive climate impact in the medium to long term.

³ <https://www.fifa.com/social-impact/sustainability>

⁴ <https://simpleflying.com/ryanair-passenger-offsets/>