



In a historic ruling, a Dutch court ordered fossil fuel giant to cut its emissions 45% by 2030

## Description

Climate campaigners worldwide are celebrating after a Dutch court on Wednesday ordered fossil fuel giant Royal Dutch Shell to cut its carbon emissions 45% by 2030, compared with 2019 levels—a historic ruling that activists hope is just the beginning of holding the oil and gas industry accountable for driving the climate emergency.

“Our hope is that this verdict will trigger a wave of climate litigation against big polluters to force them to stop extracting and burning fossil fuels.”

*Sara Shaw, FOEI*

“This is a landslide victory for climate justice,” said Sara Shaw of Friends of the Earth International (FOEI). “Our hope is that this verdict will trigger a wave of climate litigation against big polluters to force them to stop extracting and burning fossil fuels. This result is a win for communities in the Global South who face devastating climate impacts now.”

The first-of-its-kind ruling—which Shell told the *Wall Street Journal* it expects to appeal—came from the district court in the Hague and is the result of legal action brought by Friends of the Earth Netherlands, or Milieudefensie, along with over 17,000 individuals and six other organizations.

The individual co-plaintiffs and groups—which included ActionAid, Both ENDS, Fossielvrij NL, Greenpeace Netherlands, Jongeren Milieu Actief, and the Waddenvereniging—demanded that Shell’s emissions reduction goals align with the Paris climate agreement, which aims to limit global heating to 1.5°C by 2100.

“The court orders Royal Dutch Shell ... to reduce its CO2 output and those of its suppliers and buyers by the end of 2030 by a net of 45% based on 2019 levels,” the court said, according to *Agence France-Presse*. “Royal Dutch Shell has to implement this decision at once.”

Milieudefensie Director Donald Pols declared that “this is a monumental victory for our planet, for our children, and a big leap towards a livable future for everyone. The judge has left no room for doubt: Shell is causing dangerous climate change and must stop its destructive behavior now.”

*AFP* noted that the Netherlands is particularly threatened by the climate emergency because a third of the country is below sea level. The Dutch government, which has also [faced](#) climate litigation demanding bolder commitments, has pledged to cut carbon emissions 49% over the next decade.

Shell had previously pledged to cut CO2 emissions 30% by 2035 and 65% by 2050—but in February, the company announced new targets: 20% by 2030, 45% by 2035, and 100% by 2050, compared with 2016 levels.

Pointing to the company’s investments in biofuels, electric-vehicle charging, and renewables, a Shell spokesperson told the *Journal* on Wednesday that “we want to grow demand for these products and scale up our new energy businesses even more quickly.”

Andy Palmen, interim director of Greenpeace Netherlands, [asserted](#) that Wednesday’s ruling means “Shell cannot continue to violate human rights and put profit over people and the planet.”

“This verdict is a clear signal to the fossil fuel industry. Coal, oil, and gas need to stay in the ground,” Palmen added. “People around the world are demanding climate justice. Today the court confirmed that the fossil fuel industry cannot continue their climate pollution. We can hold multinational corporations worldwide accountable for the climate crisis.”

As Roger Cox, a lawyer for Milieudefensie, put it: “This is a turning point in history.”

“This case is unique because it is the first time a judge has ordered a large polluting corporation to comply with the Paris climate agreement,” Cox explained. “This ruling may also have major consequences for other big polluters.”

Pols concurred, saying that “this verdict is an enormous step forward for the international climate movement.”

“One of the world’s biggest polluters has finally been held responsible,” he continued. “I am filled with hope for the future, as we know that the climate crisis does not wait and does not stop at our borders.”

That is why it is so important that the judge is now forcing Shell to take responsibility for its actions. This is also a clear signal to the other big polluters must stop wrecking the climate.”

In the United States, Friends of the Earth’s Kate DeAngelis promised that “the day of reckoning is coming for U.S. fossil fuel companies.”

“The Biden administration must heed this warning,” DeAngelis said, “and do its part to end dependence on fossil fuels by ending all support for overseas fossil fuel projects and other fossil fuel subsidies.”

That demand echoed a letter that 13 members of Congress sent last week to President Joe Biden, who has committed to halving U.S. emissions by 2030 and recently announced an International Climate Finance Plan that some progressive campaigners argue falls short of what is needed.

The ruling in the Netherlands also came after the U.S. Supreme Court on Monday [sent](#) three climate cases against oil and gas giants back to lower courts, which followed the high court’s decision the previous week to return Baltimore’s case to a federal appeals court. U.S. communities behind the climate liability suits and fossil fuel corporations are fighting over whether the cases should be decided in state or federal courts, with the industry.

By Jessica Corbett

**Date Created**  
05/29/2021