

How far does my responsibility go? *And yours?*

What's the point?

This feeling can often strike us as individuals, as business leaders, and as leaders of nations when we talk about climate change. Can we make any difference?

Despite widespread agreement on the catastrophic consequences of global warming, and despite a common understanding that change requires action, we can still doubt the impact of our own actions. For my contribution must be too small to make a difference, right?

I can also feel that way.

But human behavior and consumption habits are a crucial factor in whether we succeed in turning the climate tide and halting the disaster that is already underway. Put another way: we cannot succeed without your contribution – even if it may seem small. It is the sum of many small contributions that has created a great catastrophe.

Global warming does not come from nothing. It comes from the diverse actions of all people, businesses, and nations. It comes from us mutually encouraging each other to certain types of consumption. It comes from the way we choose to produce.

We all share responsibility.

I do, and so does EWII.

It caused quite a stir and made some headlines when I chose to serve more climate-friendly food to



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my guests. Some were even provoked by beautifully presented bread with potatoes I served to a guest. I never quite understood why, as I have learned to accept the food served to me with gratitude. The guest was also happy. Some shrugged, while many accepted the invitation to discuss how difficult it is to change habits. Habits that affect the climate.

Of course, choosing food is not the core business for me. However, that does not change the fact that my actions can influence others.

I have a responsibility.

Often, the responsibility is far more complicated than a discussion about potatoes and bread. I and EWII also have a responsibility for the purchases we make. For example, is it okay for our suppliers to burn wood to produce the heat we sell to our customers? I will return to that question.

A responsibility that weighs heavily on me is the responsibility for how we choose to measure and pursue climate goals. We must take global warming more than seriously. It concerns me whether what we do makes a difference – or if it just ends up as a good story.

When the UN signed the Paris Agreement, the world agreed to keep global warming below 2 degrees Celsius and preferably below 1.5 degrees. The 1.5 degrees have now been exceeded – sooner than anyone had imagined. It is a goal that has proven difficult to translate into actions. It is even harder to hold anyone accountable. Whose fault is it really?

- Danish politicians invented the Climate Act and the 70 % target, and they jumped on the net-zero target for 2050.
- The EU created its Fit-for-55.
- The Climate Act is meant to ensure that the Parliament is aware of its responsibility.

- The 70 % target is meant to ensure actions that reduce Denmark's CO₂ emissions by 70 % by 2030.
- The net-zero target is the UN's ambition to ensure actions that mean we do not emit CO₂ net in 2050.
- Fit for 55 is the EU's goal to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 % by 2030.

What they have in common is that they have been good for creating conversations. So far, so good. Unfortunately, they are also tools that create distrust in the political system. Especially the 70 % target has come to focus on accounting methods and fiddling. Net-zero has become the marketing and communication people's safe plank to excuse climate-damaging actions. If we burn some more oil, we can just say that we plant a tree as compensation. Thus, we ignore the conversation about whether we could have avoided emitting CO₂ and still planted the tree.

As a consumer, as a voter if you will, you quickly get lost in these discussions. On one hand, it is not difficult to understand that glo-

bal warming is happening – we see it with our own eyes when a flood hits Denmark, or when drought hits our favorite Spanish destination. It is probably also not difficult to understand that burning wood is associated with CO₂ emissions. But it can be hard to connect our own desire for a holiday with something destructive. Or to link our own desire for warmth in the living room with the climate catastrophe. And when we are then presented with a political calculation that tells us that the felled tree has been replaced by a newly planted tree that can absorb CO₂, we probably think that we can breathe out and let go of climate worries. Others have fixed it for us.

The problem is just that nothing is fixed. And we probably know that deep down.

Climate statistics

DiskIt is hard to maintain trust in the system when it becomes clear that far from everything is included in the 70 % target. Our burning of wood, international goods transport, shipping, and air traffic are not included. All that is not included results in more CO₂ emissions than what is included in the 70 % target. Read that sentence again:

We exclude more than half of Denmark's CO₂ emissions!

We are not presented with the complete picture. Instead, our attention is directed to sweet stories and partial problems. And the state and its companies are motivated to move some emissions from one statistic to another. So, it all looks better.

But it has not improved by appearing in another statistic.

You lose trust in the system when it becomes clear how the calculations are made. First, we calculate net: Cut down a tree. Plant a tree. Then it goes up in one statistic, and there is zero left. When the tree is burned, you accelerate the release of CO₂. But there was zero left. So, there is nothing to accelerate in the statistics. Unless you look at some of the countries where they do not plant a new tree – or offset the planting of a new tree. Then we follow the UN's rules. Denmark must calculate zero, and the other countries must calculate CO₂ emissions – which they do not necessarily do. Whether they do or don't, Denmark is not penalised for burning wood.

At EWII, we see ourselves as participants in a democratic political system. Therefore, we have a responsibility to point out the weaknesses of the 70 % target, and the weaknesses of Net-zero, Fit for 55, and the UN system. Especially, we have a responsibility to point out the unfortunate motivation it creates. As a nation, we praise ourselves for reaching the 70 %. As part of the global community, we should probably be ashamed or at least acknowledge that we have not moved much since 1990.

We emit almost as much CO₂ today as we did back then.

Most importantly, we have a responsibility to act where we can act. Our board supports that EWII

creates value by taking responsibility for the climate and the environment. That is our strength: As a self-owned company, we can put the purpose first. We must put the purpose first.

Many companies share that responsibility with us. The purpose is to reduce global warming. Reducing actual CO₂ emissions is the solution we know. Nevertheless, many fall into greenwashing, or worse: fulfilling the 70 % or 2050 net-zero target by harming the climate.

When EWII decided in the autumn of 2024 to stop burning wood-based biomass, it was precisely because we put the purpose first. Our heat suppliers burn wood, and therefore we must set demands: Stop it! When there is an alternative to biomass, we are obliged to move in that direction. Let the trees continue to absorb CO₂ instead of throwing them in the oven.

We can make the change

The discussions about what we can and should do to reduce global warming are truly difficult. We do not have perfect information available. So even when we make decisions with the best intentions, we will sometimes make wrong decisions. Even the most well-meaning consumer must spend disproportionately large amounts of time forming a basis for decision-making, and when it is not easily accessible and understandable, we easily fall back into the power of habit. It is not always a question of willingness to change. It is also about the ability to make good decisions.

When we then make good decisions, we must sometimes acknowledge that the world changes, so something else later becomes better. When biomass made its entrance, it was a better alternative than burning gas and oil. Today, we can produce heat from electricity generated by solar panels or wind turbines. Wood is no longer the best alternative, so even though it hurts to have to reverse a decision, it is the right thing to do.

Sometimes we discover that there are multiple problems that can be solved simultaneously. The climate catastrophe does not stand alone. Biodiversity is also hit by disasters. Extinct species never return. Surviving species are under pressure. There is a need to create space – a lot of space for biodiversity.

This fits well with a reduced need for land to grow trees for burning.

The problems of ensuring access to drinking water in Denmark are not yet a catastrophe. Hopefully, it will never become a catastrophe in Denmark. But it is truly a crisis and an increasing problem. Access to groundwater suitable for drinking is declining, and there is a great need to take care of the areas where groundwater suitable for drinking can be cultivated. Reduced wood burning provides more space – space for both biodiversity and groundwater protection.

What does this have to do with you and me as individuals? It is you and I who buy heat, electricity, and water, and enjoy the ecosystems that are both a pleasure and a production apparatus. We make choices. We set demands.

We can vote for those who stand for the board in EWII, another utility company, municipal elections, and parliamentary elections. We can demand change. We can create change.

How far does my responsibility really go? All the way.

Next time you doubt, remember that even a small contribution makes a difference. Especially when we give it together.

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