

Cop28 president's team accused of Wikipedia 'greenwashing'

Exclusive: UAE using site to 'control narrative' amid criticism of oil boss leading climate summit, say critics

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- Sultan Al Jaber, the Cop28 president, is the CEO of Abu Dhabi National Oil Company. Photograph: Karim Sahib/AFP/Getty Images

The Cop28 president, Sultan Al Jaber, has been accused of attempting to “greenwash” his image after it emerged that members of his team had edited **Wikipedia** pages that highlighted his role as CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (Adnoc).

Work by Al Jaber’s team on his and the climate summit’s Wikipedia entries include adding a quote from an editorial that said Al Jaber – the United Arab Emirates minister for industry and advanced technology – was “precisely the kind of ally the climate movement needs”. They also suggested that editors

remove reference to a multibillion-dollar oil pipeline deal he signed in 2019, the [Centre for Climate Reporting](#) and the Guardian can reveal.

“Oil companies and their CEOs are taking greenwash to a whole new level – seizing control of global climate conferences, then getting their own employees to airbrush out criticism of their blatant hypocrisy on Wikipedia,” said Caroline Lucas, the Green party MP.

The UAE government, which controls about 6% of the world’s oil reserves, has been criticised for appointing a fossil fuel boss as head of Cop28, which will be held in Dubai in November. Last week, [130 US and EU lawmakers](#) called on Al Jaber to be removed from his post as the summit’s president.

Meanwhile, Al Jaber has been working with major consultancy firms and PR agencies to promote his work as an advocate for Emirati investment in green energy. His appointment as [Cop28](#) president was welcomed by the likes of John Kerry, the US special presidential envoy for climate, and other key figures in international climate diplomacy.

Pointing to Al Jaber’s work on climate issues over the past decade, a spokesperson for Cop28 said: “We will continue to ensure that all publicly available sources of information about the presidency and its leadership remain factually accurate and up to date.”

Al Jaber’s role as both CEO of Adnoc and Cop28 president is at the centre of the controversy. The company is forging a [major expansion of the UAE’s fossil fuel output](#) despite the International Energy Agency having said there must be no new oil and gas projects if the world is to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050. A series of edits to Al Jaber’s Wikipedia page since March last year reveal the extent to which his team has tried to control public perception of his record in the fossil fuel industry.

[A Wikipedia user](#), whose identity is unknown but who disclosed they were being paid by Adnoc, [suggested editors remove the reference to a \\$4bn agreement](#) Al Jaber signed in 2019 with US investment giants BlackRock and KKR for the development of oil pipeline infrastructure. The user said there was “too much

detail” and suggested the page say that Al Jaber had simply attracted “international investment” in Adnoc.

The user also recommended that editors delete a quote from the Financial Times which highlighted the dissonance between Al Jaber’s role as the UAE’s climate tsar and his driving of Adnoc’s fossil fuel expansion. Instead, they suggested that the page note the company was using the revenues from this increased oil output to “invest in carbon capture and green fuel technologies”.

In this case, only some of the changes they suggested were actually added to Al Jaber’s Wikipedia page.

“Well sourced material that includes pertinent information (even if it’s a little more detail than ideally the company would like to see shared in an article) would always be retained,” an editor told the user.

A spokesperson for Adnoc said: “We are very proud of Dr Sultan’s achievements as a global energy leader and regularly review content to ensure accuracy. Update requests were submitted to Wikipedia in the spring and summer of 2022, which were fully transparent and compliant as per Wikipedia’s guidelines.”

More recently, a member of the Cop28 team has been directly editing Wikipedia articles, despite having been “strongly discouraged” from doing so by one of the website’s volunteer administrators.

In February, a user going by the alias Junktuner made a number of edits to the climate summit’s Wikipedia page. The Cop28 team confirmed that its head of marketing, Ramzi Haddad, who uses the same handle on Twitter, owns the Junktuner account. Haddad only disclosed his ties to Al Jaber after being **questioned by an administrator**.

The US senator Sheldon Whitehouse, who led last week for Al Jaber to be replaced as the summit’s president, said: “It’s not surprising that Cop28 is trying to burnish Al Jaber’s green credentials, but the fact remains that as an oil executive he is also overseeing a lot of damage to the planet.”

Whitehouse called on the UN, which oversees the Cop process, to “rethink how to run these very important forums” to avoid undue influence by the fossil fuel industry.

The climate summit’s Wikipedia page includes a quote from Amnesty International saying: “[Sultan Al Jaber] cannot be an honest broker for climate talks when the company he leads is planning to cause more climate damage.” Beneath it, **Haddad added a quote from a Bloomberg editorial** which stated that “Al Jaber is precisely the kind of ally the climate movement needs”. He has also added links to Al Jaber’s website and social media accounts.

The administrator wrote to Haddad: “The nature of your edits, such as the one you made to 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference, gives the impression you have an undisclosed financial stake in promoting a topic.

“Paid advocates are very strongly discouraged from direct article editing.”

Despite later disclosing his conflict of interest and **saying he would “refrain from further edits”**, Haddad has **continued to make minor changes** to Wikipedia pages.

It has also come to light that **Haddad made a series of edits anonymously** – where only an IP address is visible – before he was “aware of the proper conflict of interest procedures”. Haddad revealed the information in response to more questions from the Wikipedia administrator after the Centre for Climate Reporting contacted the administrator.

Haddad also promoted Al Jaber’s green credentials anonymously. He **added to Al Jaber’s Wikipedia page** that he was “the first CEO to ever serve as Cop president, having played a key role in shaping the country’s clean energy pathway”.

A Cop28 spokesperson said: “Cop28 has and will continue to ensure online descriptions of the Cop28 presidency are accurate across all online platforms, including Wikipedia.” They added that the changes were “all evidence based”.

Edits have also been made by **a user being paid by Masdar**, the UAE government-owned clean energy company of which Al Jaber was formerly CEO and is now chairman of the board. They worked to make **Al Jaber's role at Masdar more prominent on his page** the day after the Guardian revealed his appointment as Cop28 president in January. They added that Al Jaber's "goal is to expand Masdar's clean energy capacity to 100GW by 2030, making it the second largest renewable investor in the world". Masdar did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Marwa Fatafta, who leads work in the Middle East by the digital rights group Access Now, said the "alarming" revelations were part of broader attempts by the UAE to "control the narrative" and "polish up the image of Al Jaber".

"Once he was appointed, there was pushback," she said. "And I think these criticisms will be amplified further and further as we get closer to Cop28, so I see it as a preemptive step to try and control and shape the narrative as much as they can."