



Second Nature 062 (May 2026)

*Second Nature (SN) is a newsletter from the u3a Subject Adviser on Climate Change & Environment. To **subscribe** click [here](#) (you don't need to be a u3a member); to **unsubscribe** use the link in the email footer.*

All past issues are available [here](#).

There are no new subscribers this time - we may have reached peak Second Nature, at 484 subscribers. If you know someone who might like this newsletter please forward it to them.

In this issue: changes to the website, threat to New Orleans and Venice, beyond GDP, a dam across the Bering Strait proposed, nuclear power in Japan, liquid biofuels, in 2025 growth in low-carbon generation exceeded growth in demand, home batteries, UK EfW, NATO backing non-fossil sources of energy, fertiliser shortages threaten food security, screening the NEB film. SN062 draws on or links to content from The Conversation, the Guardian, Nature, Nature Sustainability, Greater New Orleans, Inc, the UN, Carbon Brief, New Scientist, Science Advances, the ScienceAdviser newsletter, Our World in Data, and resourcemia. All of it is gratefully acknowledged. I use sources that I believe to be credible and, in most cases, not behind paywalls. For some you may have to register.

Know your audience

The most used link in SN061 was Chris Rapley's piece [We need to treat Earth like a spaceship](#). In joint second place were the Our World in Data chart of [changes in energy use vs changes in GDP](#) and consumer journalist [Jane Hoskyn's article on impulse buying](#).

Hoskyn has now written another Guardian piece [I thought I didn't shop much - until I](#)

Moskyn has now written another Guardian piece [I thought I didn't shop much ... until I counted my clothes](#), an odd title given that her previous article implied that she shops quite a lot. She concludes *I choose more successfully when buying second hand ... [so] 've now made a resolution to buy no new clothes for the next year, undies excepted*. Two cheers for Jane.

Website changes

I've made some minor changes to [the website](#). I think that one of the most useful things to find on a website is a Recent List which advertises new content: SiteWorks (the platform that the u3a uses) doesn't provide one automatically, but I have added a page [New](#) to the main menu and I will maintain it the hard way. Don't expect a flood of new content though. The list of Notices has been moved from the Home page to New.

Some time ago I created a set of Scrapbook Pages: as the name implies these were a place to park 'raw' content that might later be used to compile newsletters and talks. They were not much used and tedious to maintain, so I've deleted them and moved any content that seemed worth keeping into Posts. Posts can be [categorised and tagged](#), and these labels allow you to find related content; see for example [Small Actions](#). Again, don't expect a flood of new material. Some newsletter content may be copied into the website as Posts.

In the press (and on the web)

In SN061 I linked to these two articles:

[New Orleans relocation must start now due to sea level \[rise\]](#) | Oliver Milman in the Guardian, 4 May

[Climate-driven depopulation and adaptation realities in America's coastal ground zero](#) | Törnqvist et al, Nature Sustainability, 4 May.

In a letter to the Guardian Michael Hecht says *rather than science, the [Törnqvist] study is an ideologically driven policy argument dressed in the guise of geological inevitability*. Mr Hecht is President and CEO of Greater New Orleans, Inc, an organisation *focused on economic development for the 10 parishes found in Southeast Louisiana ... creating the conditions where companies want to invest their capital and people want to raise their families*, so obviously he is not keen on the idea that the city must be abandoned.

[New Orleans deserves ambition and investment, not abandonment](#) | Guardian letters, 13 May

Venice is also at risk: a team that analysed how to protect it from sea-level rise say that “radical measures may be necessary” to save it. If rising waters — and the fact that the land itself is sinking under its own weight — overwhelm the current system of mobile barriers, Venice might have to be ringed in dykes or even relocated. Measures to raise the city, such as by injecting sea water into the rocks deep underground, could keep the current barriers effective at up to a metre of sea-level rise but that looks unlikely to be enough.

[Venice is sinking](#) | Robert James Nicholls, Marjolijn Haasnoot, and Piero Lionello in *The Conversation*, 21 April

Moving beyond GDP

Growth at any cost leaves us all poorer.

António Guterres, Secretary-General of the UN

A report commissioned by the UN proposes 31 new indicators to “complement and go beyond” gross domestic product (GDP) as the world’s main measure of economic growth. They include:

- Economic metrics such as household disposable income per person
- Environmental data such as a country’s greenhouse gas emissions and levels of particulate matter in the air
- Health and education indicators such as life expectancy and children’s performance in reading and maths
- Measures of wellbeing such as the proportion of women and girls subjected to violence.

[Beyond GDP](#) | UN

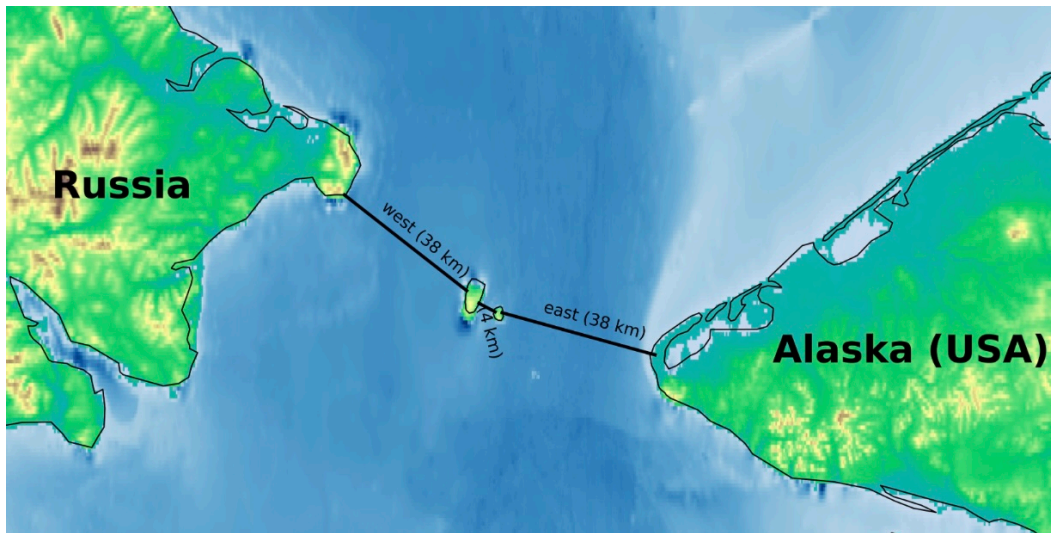
[Alternatives to the world’s favourite measure of economic health](#) | Marina Lenharo in *Nature*, 8 May (paywall)

[Science can take the lead in making better measures of economic growth](#) | Nature editorial, 12 May

In SN060 and SN061 I reported concerns about possible weakening or indeed collapse of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (**AMOC**). There is an excellent summary here:

[Is global warming tipping key Atlantic ocean currents towards 'collapse'?](#) | Cecilia Keating for Carbon Brief, 24 April

Researchers say that **a dam across the Bering Strait could prevent an AMOC collapse**. One of them, on seeing modelling that showed that the AMOC was stronger when there was a land bridge from Alaska to Russia, is reported as saying “OK, could we do this again?” *Source: ScienceAdviser newsletter, 12 May.*

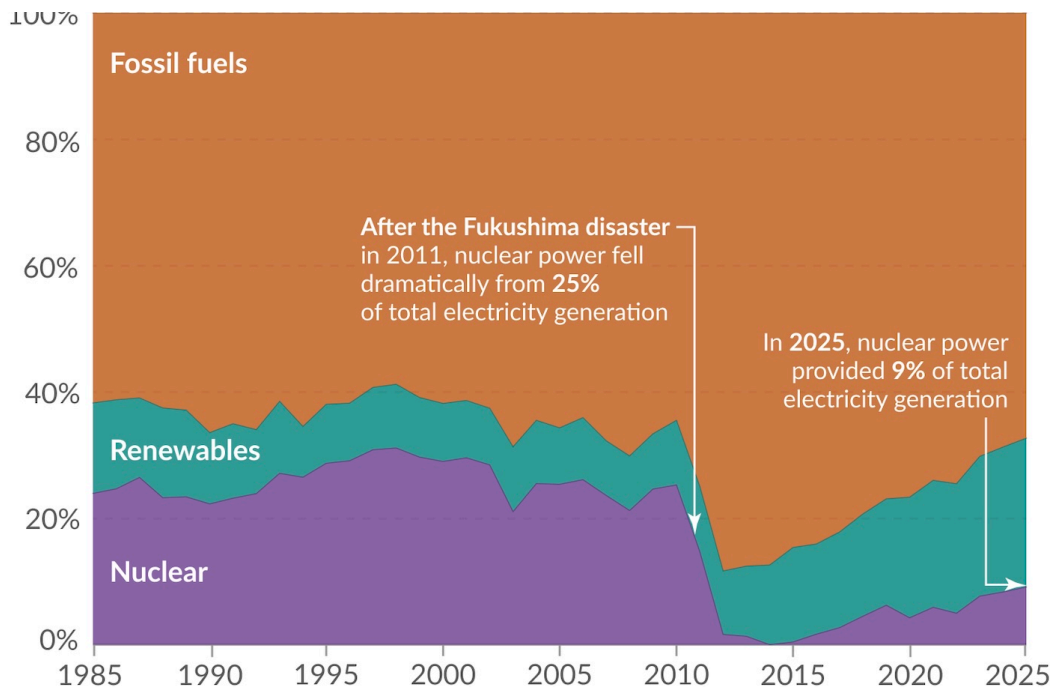


[A dam across the Bering Strait could stop the AMOC collapsing](#) | Joshua Howgego, New Scientist 9 May (paywall)

[The effects of a constructed closure of the Bering Strait on AMOC tipping behaviour](#) | Jelle Soons and Henk A Dijkstra, Science Advances 24 April

The always excellent **Our World in Data** has provided these Data Insights recently:

Japan nuclear: Japan closed down most of its nuclear plants after the Fukushima disaster in 2011, and production of nuclear electricity fell dramatically. The chart here shows Japan's electricity mix: coal and gas keep the lights on - Japan's per capita CO2 emissions were 7.77 tonnes in 2024, significantly higher than the UK at 4.53 tonnes. (These numbers, also from OWiD, are emissions from burning fossil fuels and industrial processes, including transport, electricity generation, and heating, but not land-use change. Japan's population in 2024 was around 123.8m cf 69.3m in the UK.) Reactors started to come back online in 2015, under stricter rules from a new regulator. As of early 2026, 15 reactors are running, compared with 54 before Fukushima, and nuclear's share of electricity is around a third of its pre-2011 level.



Data source: Energy Institute - Statistical Review of World Energy (2025) CC BY

[Japan closed nearly all of its nuclear plants after Fukushima, but some are coming back online](#) | Hannah Ritchie and Pablo Arriagada for Our World in Data, 14 May

[CO2 and greenhouse gas emissions - Japan](#) | Hannah Ritchie and Pablo Rosado for Our World in Data

[Global liquid biofuel production from cereal crops has grown sevenfold in the last 20 years, despite the rise of EVs](#) even though OWiD estimates that [putting solar panels on land used for biofuels would produce enough electricity for all cars and trucks to go electric](#).

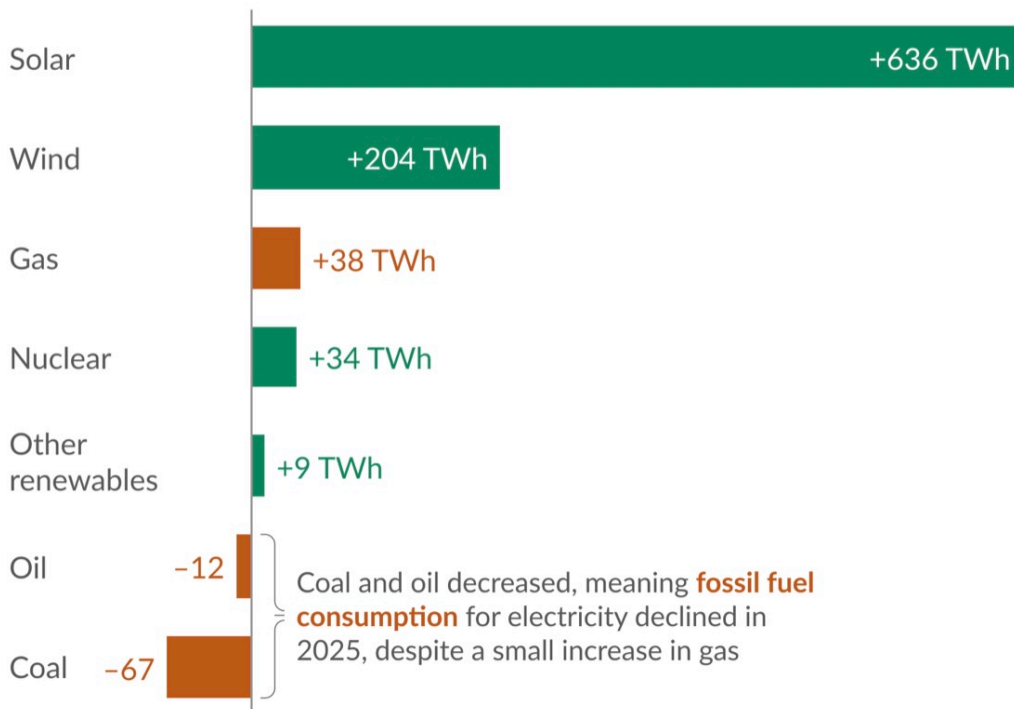
Global electricity production increased by around 850TWh in 2025, with solar and wind accounting for nearly all of this growth. The world burned more gas, but this was more than offset by a decline in coal and oil. One cheer overall I think: to reduce CO2 emissions overall fossil fuel use needs to fall not just in the power sector but also in other energy and industrial sectors.

Low-carbon sources met all of 2025's electricity demand growth



Electricity demand growth

Change in global electricity generation by source, 2024 to 2025.
Total generation rose by 850 terawatt-hours (TWh).



Note: "Other renewables" include hydropower, bioenergy, tidal and geothermal.

Data source: Ember (2026)

CC BY

This data comes from Ember's global electricity review — follow the link for more on this.

[Low-carbon electricity sources grew faster than demand in 2025](#) | Hannah Ritchie and Pablo Rosado in Our World in Data, 5 May

Home batteries are particularly useful to households which generate their own electricity. A solar and battery system can pay back its cost in nine to 13 years, according to the Energy Saving Trust, depending on where you live and how much time you spend at home.

[Home batteries: a 'gamechanger' for cutting energy bills?](#) | Jillian Ambrose in the Guardian, 9 May

Waste inputs to the UK's 64 operational **energy from waste** facilities rose 1.6% to 17.08 million tonnes in 2025. New capacity outpaced demand, with inputs at 83.7% of capacity.

Emissions reached a five-year high of 0.479 tonnes fossil CO₂ for each tonne of waste.

[UK EfW processed 17.1m tonnes in 2025 as capacity gap widens](#) | resourcemedia 5 May

No AI tools are used to compile Second Nature.

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