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Saving LNG: Can synthetic gas and seaborne CO2 trade prolong the industry's life?

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Europe is currently struggling to reconcile its urgent need for LNG supplies with the commitments that have been made to decarbonise the continent's economies. This has led to calls for the new import terminals that are being developed in north-west Europe to be able to handle alternative fuels, such as hydrogen or ammonia. However, the requirements of these fuels are sufficiently different from those of LNG, making it unfeasible to construct a terminal which could switch from importing LNG to, for example, importing hydrogen. An ideal solution could be if the LNG itself were somehow decarbonised. The infrastructure chain could then be retained.

Several options of this sort are now being explored by the LNG industry. One decarbonisation approach that has been around for a long time, though making little actual progress, is the post-combustion capture of CO2 from the end use of the regasified LNG. But there are new aspects emerging to the carbon capture and storage (CCS) story, including liquefying the CO2 and shipping it back to the source of the LNG in order to be pumped into underground reservoirs.

There are also ideas to feed LNG facilities with gas whose carbon has come from the atmosphere rather than fossil fuels. These include biological and chemical routes, some of which may seem far-fetched and expensive – though the current level of LNG prices has perhaps changed views on what is considered expensive. Despite this, these decarbonised LNG schemes may be a lifeline that can potentially save the LNG industry from a future of a few more years of growth followed by terminal decline.



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