

23068 Is Fifa's football expansion putting money before planet?

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Fifa's claim that the Qatar World Cup was carbon neutral was considered by experts to be "misleading and dangerous", and its plans for further expansion come in spite of the fact Fifa's environmental strategy includes having signed up to the UN Sport for Climate Action Framework - with a target of net zero by 2040 and halving of emissions by 2030.

The majority of sport's carbon footprint comes from fan travel. Last year Fifa estimated about one million supporters would travel to Qatar for the men's World Cup.

Wycombe Wanderers player David Wheeler, the Professional Footballer's Association sustainability champion, described the logistics of the 2026 World Cup in North America as a "nonsense" and a "money-making exercise".

He also questioned the quality of the football in expanded tournaments comparing it to "junk food".

"We're damaging the climate - the climate is sick and potentially terminally ill," said Wheeler.

"We know how to reverse course, but instead we're doing the very thing that's making it sick and that's what I think Fifa is suggesting to do".

In the women's game there are fewer travelling fans compared with the men's, but the number is growing and Fifa has announced more than half a million ticket sales for this summer's Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand.

However, a newly created qualifying tournament - with 10 teams flying to New Zealand for 13 new games in the calendar to decide the final three places - has been called "unnecessary".

Ireland and Reading defender Diane Caldwell, who will be at her country's first Women's World Cup, said: "I'm sure Fifa will say they've done it to help the women's game grow. Of course we all want the game to grow, but it can be done in a sustainable way and not by flying 10 teams from different continents to New Zealand to compete. I think definitely it could have been avoided."

You can't forget the power that football has - it's the most followed sport in the world. If football cares about the climate crisis and actually demonstrates cutting emissions, can you imagine the impact that could have on billions of fans across the world?"

New Zealand and Hearts forward Katie Rood added: "The sooner we adapt and change, the longer we can play and keep enjoying these tournaments. What does the World Cup mean? Is it for the athletes, for the fans or for the profits?"

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