

We cannot plant our way out

Marcus Tierney has spent twenty years building nature-based carbon projects. At Climate Week NYC his message was that the fastest win on the table is industrial, and coal mine methane is where it starts.

BY JUNEIA MALLAS & KAJ EMBRÉN · THE METHANE BRIEF · ISSUE NO. 20 · SEPTEMBER 28, 2026 · 4 MIN READ



Climate Week NYC, 20–27 September 2026. © StructureVision - Envato

CO2 Australia built its name on planting. So it carries weight when its chief executive, speaking to us from a block off Times Square at the end of the week, says: “We cannot plant our way out of the issues that have been created by the release of fossil fuels and their emissions.”

Nature remains critical, he insists. But nature-based projects take years to establish, and the world is heading past 1.5°C. By the figures he has seen, around 99% of carbon abatement to date has come from nature-based solutions and less than 1% from industrial processes. That imbalance was the thread he followed through more than 1,500 events.

The fruit nobody picks

“It is the lowest-hanging fruit,” Tierney says of ventilation air methane (VAM). “The technology has been around for decades. This is not research and development. This is a scale issue.”

The public stage proved his point. At the UN’s High-Level Solutions Dialogue on Methane on 22 September, some 30 speakers spoke for two and a half hours. Coal came up about eight times; VAM not once. The strongest figure of the week, that up to 75% of methane from metallurgical coal could be cut for less than 1% of the price of steel, was shared at an investor roundtable closed to the public.

Tierney found the same in the rooms he could enter. “I’m the one that has been raising it,” he says. “A lot of people are interested, but it is unfortunately still not front of mind.” The exception was the Climate Group’s Monday session, where speakers named coal mine methane as among the easiest wins for large-scale industrial abatement, with Asia-Pacific the place to deliver it.

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— Marcus Tierney, CEO, CO2 Australia

Say energy, not climate

In Washington, “climate” has become a word to avoid, so Tierney changed his vocabulary. He talked about an 85% abatement profile, but also about the heat a regenerative thermal oxidiser (RTO) recovers, which can feed cogeneration on site or go back to the grid. The people he met were “just as interested in the power generation output as they were in the total carbon abatement.”

The business case still needs someone to pay. VAM leaves the shaft at well under 1% methane; there is no gas to sell. Tierney’s answer is precision. He put it to [Puro.earth](https://puroearth.com/), which certifies industrial carbon removal such as biochar, that RTO abatement is at least as precise because it is measured at the meter: “It doesn’t matter whether the abatement is in China or Poland or Australia or the US. You have a consistency.” That is what credits under Article 6 need.

Who is filling the void?

His brightest note was Europe. “North America has pulled back, Europe has absolutely filled the void.” He cited the UK’s £400 million for the Tropical Forest Forever Facility, alongside \$3 billion from Norway and \$1 billion from Indonesia. The money is moving. Most of it, again, is going to forests.

In Australia, the push comes from the states. New South Wales now requires its largest emitting mines to abate at least 75% of their methane by 2032, and smaller mines by 2035, with the mine licence at stake. “When a single mine represents 3% of the whole of New South Wales total emissions,” Tierney says, “it’s a point issue.” Federally, the National Reconstruction Fund backs industrial decarbonisation at scale, and RTO units could be built locally.

The road to Antalya

Coal use hit a record last year, and Tierney expects wars disrupting oil and gas supply to keep it rising. If coal fills that gap, he argues, abating its methane at source is the least a just transition demands. Australia co-hosts COP31 in Antalya in November, and Tierney intends to write to the minister. “I’m very hopeful that [coal mine methane] has a higher point on the agenda than what it has had for many years.”

New York made it plain that the technology is ready and the money is flowing, mostly towards trees. Antalya will test whether any of it reaches the shafts.

For further information

The Methane Brief

<https://methanebrief.org>

Puro.earth: carbon removal certification

<https://puro.earth>

The Methane Brief, Issue No. 19: London named the gap. Will New York close it? (September 2026)

<https://www.methanebrief.org/coal-mine-methane-at-climate-week-nyc-2026-methane-brief/>

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Reporting, interviews and sourcing by Juneia Mallas & Kaj Embrén. Drafted with AI assistance; fact-checked and edited before publication.