

# An apology to our overseas friends - Is Australia really acting on climate change?

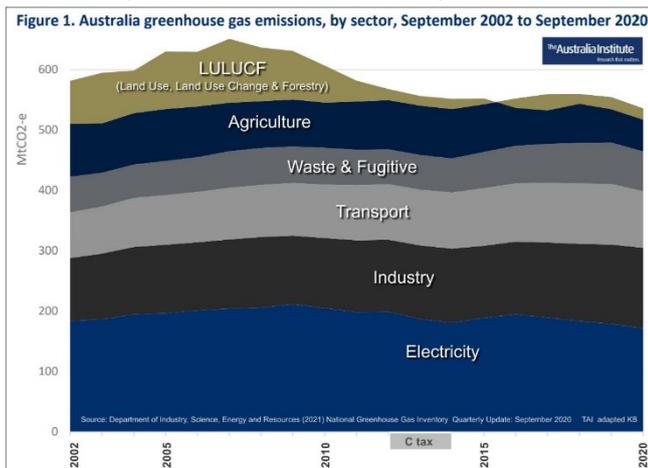
**Who is acting?** Most Australian people want strong climate action – and quickly. So do our State Governments. However, the National Government led by Scott Morrison is all smoke and mirrors – and hyperbole.

During Glasgow, expect to hear about “our unique Australian plan”, “technology not taxes”, “not a revolution but a careful evolution”, “gets the balance right”, “choices not mandates” and amazingly “Australia’s actions on climate change speak louder than the words of others.”

His Government has done everything to block serious action. He was eventually pressured into a net zero 2050 target – but the important question is how you get there, not the target itself. Slow action could see the carbon budget for a 1.5°C rise blown out well before 2030. Their target of 26-28% emissions reduction by 2030 is hopelessly low. Now under great pressure, they say 35% is possible.

But this 35% is much lower than targets of 50-60% in other countries and much lower than targets of the states in Australia. Morrison is riding on the coattails of others.

**Our high emissions.** Even if Australia achieves a 35% reduction below 2005 emissions, we are starting from some of the highest per capita emissions in the world. And much of the 26% is due to less land clearing (see graph) – which should not happen anyway. Actual emissions have plateaued, apart from a small recent dip due to COVID.



**Technology, taxes and regulation.** PM Morrison keeps saying we don’t have the technology yet – but we do, just not the technology he favours, like carbon capture and storage, unproven at scale, and new coal-fired power stations that he will subsidise. Chevron has failed to deliver the promised storage of 80% of emissions from its massive LNG plant off north-west Australia. The technology we need is already available! We have more rooftop solar, per person, than any other country. Very large wind and solar farms are planned. High voltage DC transmission lines are needed to connect widespread solar and wind to the electricity grid and pumped hydro storage to firm up supply at night or when solar and wind are low.

Morrison aims to discredit the opposition Labor Party and the Greens, painting them as big regulators and taxers. In reality, his regulations for the gas and electricity markets are unbelievably complex and byzantine. Moreover, we have taxes in the form of carbon credits paid by large emitters, currently the price is A\$26/mtCO<sub>2</sub>e. Our state

Victoria requires emitters to buy energy efficiency certificates that funds renewable upgrades in households.

**Excuses.** Our PM uses the excuse that the National Party won’t accept an increase in the 2030 target. Morrison’s coalition with them holds government by one seat. But Morrison agrees with them! He keeps boasting that Australia will over-achieve our current pathetic 2030 target, which climate scientists say should double to 60% to keep global temperature rise under 2°C.

**A gas-fired COVID recovery.** The PM’s plan for economic recovery after COVID has been gas-fired. He set up a special task force for COVID recovery, which was dominated by gas industry people. And his office recruited many staff with a fossil fuel background.

There has been a massive push to open new gas fields across the country and subsidise gas infrastructure. He fully supports keeping pipelines full of methane while trials go on with injecting small amounts of hydrogen.

Victoria, our state, is the biggest user of gas, with winter use three times summer months. Morrison has pressured the state to explore for more gas, rather than pressing for energy efficiency and electrification in dwellings that are hard to keep warm.

**Powerful corporations.** Many corporations accept a 2050 target, but resist fast action and are comfortable with Morrison’s approach.

Mining interests have been very powerful in recent Australian politics – as indicated here with Morrison holding up a lump of coal in Parliament - “Nothing to fear here” he said



**Murdoch media’s heavy influence.** The Murdoch media, including its influential *Sky News* online channel (1.2 million followers), tabloids and national daily *The Australian*, have actively resisted serious action on climate change and indeed promoted misinformation. While they have recently endorsed a net zero 2050 target, they have downplayed the need for a stronger 2030 target and have suggested that nuclear energy could be the way to go – despite ample evidence that, in Australia, it would be much more expensive than renewables.

**What is Australia’s economic future?** The Government keeps saying that coal is the second most valuable export apart from iron ore. Australia is now the leading exporter of methane (natural gas). Ironically, it is this government that has done most to hollow out Australia’s economy, increasing its reliance on these exports. However, there is a growing awareness that Australia could use our sunlight and wind resources to power the nation with renewable energy, and use some of that energy with water to make the hydrogen required in green manufacture of steel, aluminium and many other products.

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