

# Australian government proceeds with pro-business climate change policies after Glasgow summit debacle

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The Liberal-National government of Prime Minister Scott Morrison is proceeding with its nakedly pro-business policy agenda on climate change, following the predictable failure of the United Nations (UN) Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, Scotland (known as COP26).

The Glasgow summit was the latest in a long trail of UN climate meetings that failed to even come close to delivering the necessary action to slash carbon emissions at the scale and speed required to prevent an escalation of global warming let alone to resolve the environmental crisis.

The event underscored the impossibility of addressing climate change within the framework of the profit system. Capitalism divides the world into rival nation-states and maintains the private ownership of the means of production—including fossil fuel industries that are both highly profitable and highly destructive—sabotaging any rational and scientifically-based resolution of the crisis (see: “The Glasgow summit, climate change, and the case for socialism”).

The Morrison government is among the most criminally reckless governments in the world on climate change policy.

Ahead of the Glasgow summit, Canberra announced a goal of reaching net zero carbon emissions by 2050. The *World Socialist Web Site* characterised this target as a “blatant sham,” explaining: “Net zero by 2050 is not aimed at making a serious contribution to resolving global warming. In fact, it has been adopted with precisely the opposite agenda in mind—unveiling the target just days before the United Nations COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, Scotland, Morrison hopes his target will reduce mounting international pressure.

The government’s aim is to allow Australian capitalism to continue to function as one of the world’s worst greenhouse gas emitters on per capita and gross domestic product bases.”

This analysis has since been repeatedly confirmed. The Morrison government withheld its modelling commissioned for the 2050 target until November 12, the final day of COP26. This so-called modelling, comprising a 100-page document written by the corporate consultancy giant McKinsey, had been kept under wraps to avoid international scrutiny.

Its release makes clear that net zero emissions by 2050 is less a policy than an unsubstantiated slogan. By 2050, McKinsey predicted that government climate policies would see a net 85 percent reduction in carbon emissions. The remaining 15 percent required to reach net zero, the document explained, will be achieved by “further technology breakthroughs.” No further information or detail was included.

In other words, the so-called modelling was nothing more than wishful thinking projected three decades into the future.

Government policy, moreover, is based on fraudulent emissions accounting. Its “net zero” target refers to the expectation that there will still be substantial carbon emissions in 2050, with the “net” effect supposedly reduced to zero through various offset schemes. These include profit-generating ventures such as paying land owners in Australia and internationally not to clear their lands. Even if there had been no planned deforestation, the offset mechanisms are effectively used as an alibi for corporate polluters.

Moreover, the claimed emissions reductions through such schemes are not scientifically valid. Several

scientists told the *Guardian* that the McKinsey modelling on carbon offset schemes through land use policies was bogus, going “beyond the upper bounds of what publicly available peer-reviewed science suggested was possible.” Richard Eckhard, University of Melbourne professor of sustainable agriculture, told the newspaper that “some of the per-hectare soil carbon storage numbers were roughly double what was likely to be achievable.”

The false calculations underlying the Australian government’s net zero target prompted the Germanwatch pro-environment organisation to rank Canberra last out of 63 countries’ climate change policies. Global governments were assigned a score assessing their policies, with the highest set at 17-18. Australia’s assigned score was zero, below the second-worst placed Algeria, which scored 1.3.

Australia now ranks as the third largest exporter of fossil fuels, behind Russia and Saudi Arabia.

The Morrison government’s present-day policies are all directed towards the funnelling of public funds to different corporate sectors, above all the fossil fuel and agricultural sectors.

The prime minister announced on November 10 the establishment of a new so-called Low Emissions Technology Commercialisation Fund. This will receive \$500 million in public funds, with another \$500 million in funding anticipated from corporate investors. The money will subsidise business spending on new technologies that the government hopes will contribute to the net zero target.

The targeted technologies include those related to battery efficiency, livestock emissions, solar panels, and carbon capture and storage. These are largely untested technologies, and with regard to carbon capture and storage (CCS), highly dubious. CCS involves diverting greenhouse gases released via oil and gas mega-projects, and permanently storing them underground. The government and corporate lobbyists have touted this as a means of making the natural gas industry “green.”

The technology, however, has proved highly unreliable. Only on a small minority of drilling sites has it proved feasible, and even then only a fraction of the released greenhouse gases are able to be captured. The longer term prospects of preventing leaks of the sequestered gases remain unknown.

The Morrison government has seized on the promise of effective CCS to boost the fossil fuel sector.

Government ministers welcomed the watering down of the COP26 communiqué on coal, from a call to “phase out” to “phase down” the industry. Morrison publicly rebuked comments of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson that the Glasgow summit had sounded “the death knell for coal power,” instead insisting that Australia would continue mining and exporting coal for “decades to come.”

The additional half a billion dollars in public funding being funnelled into the corporate sector, through the new Low Emissions Technology Commercialisation Fund, comes on top of the previous \$9.5 billion in corporate subsidies through the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC).

This body was established by the former Labor government. Both the Labor and Liberal parties are equally committed to grossly inadequate climate change policies, centrally geared not towards resolving the environmental crisis but rather to boosting corporate profits.

For months, the Labor Party has refused to publicly release its proposed climate measures. Today Labor leader Anthony Albanese is holding an event to release the party’s plan ahead of the next federal election due by May next year. Previous Labor governments have done nothing to reduce emissions, while Albanese has repeatedly courted the coal magnates and other fossil fuel emitters. As with the government policies, it can safely be predicted the Labor’s plan will amount to smoke and mirrors.



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