

Australian Labor government issues sham 2035 climate target

Mark Wilson
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Last Thursday, the Australian Labor government released its 2035 target of a 62-70 percent reduction in domestic greenhouse gas emissions relative to 2005 levels. The new target forms Australia's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) that the government is required to submit every five years under the Paris Agreement signed in 2015.

A joint media statement by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Treasurer Jim Chalmers and Climate Minister Chris Bowen referred to the target as “ambitious but achievable” and “the right target to protect our environment and secure our prosperity.”

In reality, the new target does not even come close to what would be required to keep global warming levels “well under 2°” in line with the aims of the very limited Paris Agreement itself. A 2023 independent expert report commissioned by the World Wildlife Fund Australia found that a 1.5° consistent pathway for Australia's domestic emissions required a reduction of 90 percent by 2035 (relative to 2005 levels) and net zero emissions by 2038.

Labor's target, supposedly based on advice from its own appointed Climate Change Authority, falls short even of what was scientifically recommended years ago as a 2030 target.

The Climate Council in 2021 estimated that Australia would need to commit to a 75 percent reduction in emissions by 2030. Labor's previous 2022 climate target of a 43 percent reduction by 2030, adopted with the backing of the Greens and “Teal” independent members of parliament, disregarded the scientific evidence, just as the latest target has.

Labor previously claimed that the government was “on track” to meet the woefully inadequate 43 percent target, despite mounting evidence to the contrary published by independent climate scientists. In the

words of Rod Sims, the chair of the “green industry”-backed Superpower Institute, “the government's new and existing policies don't seem up to the task of meeting the 43 percent by 2030 target, let alone the new 62–70 percent cuts five years later.”

Even more damning is the silence in Labor's target regarding Australian fossil fuel exports. In *Australia's 2035 Nationally Determined Contribution*, a 36-page report outlining the new target, not a single mention is made of the fact that domestic emissions only account for a minority of Australian capitalism's emissions. The report instead tries to hide this fact by claiming that “Australia's emissions are 1.15 percent of global emissions” and “Australia is the 15th largest emitter.”

In fact, when Australia's fossil fuel exports—such as coal and liquified natural gas (LNG)—are accounted for, Australia is the second largest climate polluter globally and is responsible for 4.5 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions. In other words, the Labor government's target, as inadequate as it is, only deals with a quarter of the country's total fossil fuel output.

These coal and gas exports are only set to increase. A report issued last year estimated that Australian fossil exports would increase by 50 percent by 2035, mostly outside the UN and Paris Agreement reporting frameworks.

Far from representing an alternative to the previous Liberal-National government, Labor has doubled down in its support for fossil fuels. Since taking office in 2022, the Albanese government has approved at least 31 new coal, oil and gas developments, which add up to a cumulative emissions total of 6.5 billion tonnes of CO2 equivalent, or 12.5 percent of global annual emissions.

Four of these approvals have taken place during the Labor government's second term since being re-elected

in May, including the 40-year extension to Woodside's giant North West Shelf gas project, which received its final approval one week before the new target was released.

In June, the Climate Action Tracker initiative assessed the government's climate policies as "insufficient," saying it would lead to global warming of over 3° if it were to be adopted by governments internationally.

The Climate Action Tracker report also highlighted the fact that most of the meagre emissions reductions that have occurred so far have been largely due to reported reductions in emissions from land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF). Since 2015, this sector has been classified as a "carbon sink," removing more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere than it emits.

As of 2024, domestic emissions had fallen by 28 percent relative to the baseline year of 2005, but without the LULUCF "carbon sink," emissions had only reduced by 2 percent. Moreover, the government had "repeatedly revised its land sector sequestration projections, creating the illusion of action," therefore "raising concerns that accounting methods, rather than actual emissions reductions, are driving reported progress."

More and more scientific evidence demonstrates the catastrophic impact of climate change. A government-issued climate change risk assessment published only days before the 2035 target was released, estimated that, for example, 1.5 million people in Australia are at risk of sea levels rising by 2050 and that heatwave deaths would occur 2-4 times more frequently. That was based on the current projection that the world is on track for almost 3° of warming this century.

The fraud of Labor's target is underscored by the lack of specific measures to reach it. Climate Change Minister Bowen has even refused to commit to the 90 percent reversion to renewable energy sources that the government's Climate Change Authority (CCA) stated is necessary to achieve the 62 to 70 percent target by 2035.

In response to criticism about the inadequate target, Bowen asserted that a more ambitious one was not "achievable." By achievable, Bowen really means that an adequate climate target cannot be implemented without cutting significantly into corporate profits.

The scientific and technological means do exist to

rapidly transition away from fossil fuels. What stands in the way is the domination of the world economy by the capitalist profit system, which the Labor government defends.

The Monash University-based Climateworks Centre in 2023 modelled, using a tool developed in collaboration with the official Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), a possible emissions reduction pathway of 85 percent by 2035 and net zero by 2039.

That pathway would be compatible with keeping global warming levels below 1.5°, based on the possibility of rapidly replacing fossil fuel-generated electricity with renewable sources."

But Labor remains committed to the profit interests of fossil fuel corporations, and is based on the defence of capitalism, which is driving the world into an ecological breakdown. Its target is directly in line with that proposed by the Business Council of Australia (BCA), which represents the largest corporations operating in the country. The BCA expressed beforehand its opposition to any target above a 70 percent emissions reduction.

No capitalist party or government can be entrusted with the defence of science, the environment, or the lives and health of the population. The climate crisis arises out of the capitalist system and cannot be resolved within it. Only the working class, mobilised on a socialist basis internationally, can prevent the worsening disaster.



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