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GOVERNING AFTER GLASGOW

Melbourne School of Government



THE UNIVERSITY OF
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Policy Brief NET ZERO BY 2050

What Australia Should Bring to the
Table for COP26

26 October 2021 | Cristina Talacko &
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Coalition for Conservation

Summary

Key Points

This Policy Brief makes the following key points:

- (a) The upcoming COP26 United Nations Climate Change Conference (26th Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC), taking place in Glasgow from 31 October–12 November 2021, will bring countries together with the aim of accelerating action towards the goals of the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. A central objective is the achievement of very significant reduction of carbon emissions by 2030 and achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050.
- (b) Achieving net zero emissions by 2050 will require nothing short of a complete transformation of the global energy system, and as a major exporter of coal and natural gas, Australia must play its part.
- (c) Globally, momentum is building towards the net zero target and Australia's key trading partners and strategic allies are divesting from fossil fuels and embracing renewable energy. Australia needs to be part of a final negotiated agreement from COP26 that accelerates our targets, otherwise it will be left behind.
- (d) The Federal Government should not perceive this as a threat to the economic prowess in our regions – rather, it should be heralded as an opportunity to become a key innovator and exporter of renewable energy products and technologies.

Recommendations

This Policy Brief makes the following recommendations for the Australian Federal Government with respect to achieving net zero emissions by 2050:

- (a) **Clear commitment to Net Zero by 2050:** Australia must bring with it to COP26 a clear commitment to net zero emissions by 2050.
- (b) **A more ambitious 2030 target:** all States in Australia have paved the way for the Federal Government to boost its 2030 emissions target ahead of COP26.
- (c) **Federal action:** While attention has largely been centred on the Australian Government's emissions reduction strategy, our states, territories, and industries alike have made promising headway over recent years. This progress can and should be replicated at a federal level where practicable. It is recommended the Federal Government show clear support for these initiatives whilst at COP26, as this will also secure the interests of regional Australia.
- (d) **Step up as a global leader on climate action:** Australia has a critical role to play in building economic and climate resilience in the Pacific region, supporting renewables and mitigating the threats climate change poses to the region. Australia can and should enhance its soft power through climate action.

- (e) **Step up as global leader on clean technology:** The direction among Australia's industries is clear: renewables, green manufacturing and agriculture will lead us to economic prosperity as well as achieving net zero by 2050. More ambitious targets will convey a semblance of confidence to corporates and investors and cement our space as leaders in technologies and renewables internationally, rather than camouflaging our potential behind a lack of policy.
- (f) **Meet Australians' expectations:** What's more, these commitments and investments would clearly signal to the Australian communities, including the regions, that the Government wants to be part of the global climate solution. Prime Minister Scott Morrison should see this as an opportunity to deliver on what the vast majority of Australians are calling for and secure our position in the race toward net zero by 2050.

Net Zero By 2050

What Australia Should Bring to the Table for COP26

1. Introduction

The upcoming COP26 United Nations Climate Change Conference, hosted by Italy and the UK in Glasgow from 31 October–12 November 2021, will bring countries together with the aim of accelerating action towards the goals of the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). A central objective is the achievement of very significant reduction of carbon emissions by 2030 by reviewing Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

For Australia, these objectives will require nothing short of a complete transformation of the energy system, as we are a major exporter of coal and natural gas. The Federal Government ought not perceive this as a threat to the economic prowess in our regions – rather, it should be heralded as an opportunity to become a key innovator and exporter of renewable energy products and technologies.

In understanding the strength of this outlook, the Coalition has in principle reached an agreement to adopt Net Zero by 2050. Furthermore, Australia's states and territories, alongside key industries, have already made serious commitments to the net zero by 2050 target. Now is the time for the Federal Government to act in lockstep and attend the COP26 meeting with a comprehensive Long

Term Emissions Reduction Strategy and serious emissions reduction targets for 2030.

This Policy Brief sets out the main purposes of the COP26 Conference, the political stalemate at the federal level hampering clear policy on emissions reduction, and the contrasting action being taken by states, industry, and the farming sector. With these factors and the support for federal action on emissions reduction amongst a majority of Australians, there is clear scope for decisive policy proposals and commitments that can be made by Australia at the Glasgow conference.

2. COP26 United Nations Climate Change Conference

Australia must bring with it to the COP26 United Nations Climate Change Conference a clear, firm commitment to net zero by 2050 (currently agreed in principle by the Coalition) and a more ambitious 2030 target.

With increased climate change set to radically alter the global environment, the primary goal of the COP26 Conference is for countries to come forward with ambitious 2030 emissions reductions targets that align with reaching net zero by the middle of the century. This builds upon the Paris Agreement that emerged from COP21 in 2015, which is the culmination of 195 countries agreeing to limit global warming to well below 2°C and to

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pursue efforts to limit warming to 1.5°C, compared to pre-industrial levels.

The IPCC's [Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C](#), released in 2018, warned that allowing the planet to warm by more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels would have catastrophic consequences, such as rising sea levels, increased inhospitable environments, and severe weather events. Consequently, COP26 is one of the most important climate events of the decade. However, its outcome will only be as strong as the commitments world leaders will bring to the table. The IPCC also released a [report](#) in August 2021, which 'provides new estimates of the chances of crossing the global warming level of 1.5°C in the next decades, and finds that unless there are immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, limiting warming to close to 1.5°C or even 2°C will be beyond reach'.

3. What Can We Expect from Australia at COP26?

Presently, Australia is the only country attending COP26 without a clear vision. Mapping out what we can expect from Australia at COP26 by way of emissions reduction targets is hamstrung by the current political stalemate that exists within the Federal Coalition.

Without going into an in-depth discussion on the political battles that have occurred over the past decade on climate change policy – which has drawn blood from the major parties alike – it is important to discuss the concerns that exist within the Federal Nationals Party. Ultimately, concern rests with the prospect of major job losses in the regions and the introduction of a 'carbon tax' that cripples industry performance in Australia's energy industry if Australia is to agree to net zero by 2050.

Nevertheless, Australia's Long-term Emissions Reduction Strategy, which will be taken to COP26, as well as official statements from Prime Minister Scott Morrison, can offer guidance. What we can expect from Australia at COP26 then is an enduring commitment to its technology-led solution to emissions reduction. We may also anticipate that Australia will either vacillate on committing to a more ambitious 2030 target, or abstain from this commitment for now.

However, this does not mean we cannot achieve the 2050 target, given the state, territory and industry led solutions and targets in Australia, which is explored later in this Brief. When the Prime Minister Scott Morrison addressed the National Press Club in February 2020, he declared: "our goal is to reach net zero emissions as soon as possible, and *preferably* by 2050".

Since then, Morrison has said that Australia is determined to play its part in "meeting the global challenge of climate change, as the world makes the transition to a net-zero global energy economy – a new energy economy". He has also promised that the Government will release a Long Term Emissions Reduction Strategy ahead of COP26, which will be underpinned by low emissions technologies such as:

- clean hydrogen;
- large-scale energy storage;
- carbon capture and storage; and
- new vehicle technologies (such as electric vehicles).

Despite the technology-driven solution which offers a roadmap for emissions reduction, fractures within the Federal Coalition Government between the Liberal and National parties have hamstrung attempts to arrive at a solid commitment around net zero. Indeed, Pprime Minister Morrison's attendance at COP26 has only

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recently been confirmed in light of the political stalemate. It was not until after [Prince Charles](#) referred to COP26 as a “last-chance saloon” and [Queen Elizabeth](#) expressed her “irritation” on climate change inaction that the Prime Minister said he will attend the Conference. However, the Coalition is now getting closer to arriving at a solid agreement on net zero by 2050, but it has not raised its ambitions to boost a reduction in emissions by 2030.

On Sunday 17 October 2021 the Nationals Members of Parliament and Senators gathered for four hours for a special party room meeting where they were briefed on the Government’s net zero proposal by Energy and Emissions Reduction Minister Angus Taylor. Deputy Nationals leader and Agriculture Minister David Littleproud confirmed the party had been unable to come to a final position on net zero, as there were “[still some more questions](#)” that needed to be answered.

On Sunday 24 October 2021 at a second meeting, the Nationals MPs agreed to sign up to a net zero emissions target by 2050, despite the opposition of leader [Barnaby Joyce](#), in exchange for a regional transition package and an extra cabinet position. The details of the package are yet to be disclosed.

It is our view that there is no doubt Australia is more than capable of achieving net zero when it comes to the energy sector, and our regional farmers are equally capable of achieving these objectives. The National Farmers Federation, the peak national body representing farmers and the agriculture sector, supports the net zero emission target by 2050.

As for the 2030 target, the Government will be reluctant to commit to anything more ambitious than 26-28 per cent at this stage. However, as the average targets among states and territories within Australia is 35 per cent, we can safely assume Australia will be performing better than what the Federal Government is prepared to present at COP26.

4. States are Leading the Way to Net Zero

While attention has largely been centred on the Australian Government’s emissions reduction strategy, our states, territories, and industries alike have made promising headway over recent years. This progress can and should be replicated at a federal level where practicable, and it is recommended the Federal Government show clear support for these initiatives whilst at COP26, as this will also secure the interests of regional Australia.

Each of Australia’s states and territories has, at a minimum, committed to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. Tasmania’s Liberal Government is in the midst of legislating an ambitious ‘nation-leading’ target of net zero carbon emissions from 2030, with Premier Mr Gutwein stating this move would provide a \$475 million boost to the economy by 2050 and create in excess of 1200 jobs. Impressively, Tasmania is now [100 per cent self-sufficient](#) in renewable energy and is the first Australian state to achieve this goal.

Under the leadership of the Hon. Matt Kean, Minister for Energy and Environment, and the support of former Nationals Deputy Leader the Hon. John Barilaro, New South Wales has also developed an impressive ‘[Net Zero Plan](#)’ to deliver a 50 percent cut in emissions by 2030 compared to 2005 levels. Similarly, the Marshall Liberal Government in South Australia has committed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50 per cent by 2030. The McGowan Labor Government in Western Australia has also shown its clear commitment to emissions reduction, particularly when it created a \$750 million Climate Action Fund in the [2021-22 State Budget](#).

In October this year, the Business Council of Australia (BCA) released its blueprint for ‘[Achieving a Net Zero Economy](#)’. Should the Federal Government adopt this plan, the BCA claims Australia will be positioned to gain an

While attention has largely been centred on the Australian Government’s emissions reduction strategy, our states, territories, and industries alike have made promising headway over recent years.

economic dividend of \$890 billion and 195,000 jobs over the next 50 years. The proposed pathway includes a formal commitment to the net zero target by 2050, an introduction of 10-year national carbon budgets with five year reviews, and lifting the 2030 interim emissions reduction target from its current level of 26-28 per cent against 2005 levels to 46-50 percent against 2005 levels. Similar to the national plan, the BCA understands Australia's transition will be underpinned by technology change and innovation, which entails commercialising low and zero emissions technologies.

5. Industry Leadership

Turning to industry projects, there are major and significant projects across Australia that will enhance our ability to reach net zero by 2050. Star of the South, which is Australia's first offshore wind project, is proposed to be located off the

(WWF), titled 'Renewable Energy Industrial Precincts', has indicated that green-powered industrial hubs in Gladstone and the New South Wales Hunter Valley could add \$13 billion to the nation's economy and create 45,000 jobs. Moreover, regions with coal-fired power have access to energy workers, the energy grid, ports, gas pipelines and huge renewable resources. The Blue Economy Cooperative Research Centre report identifies huge offshore wind and solar opportunities in Gladstone, Hunter and Latrobe Valley in particular.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) both found there were already more than 26,000 jobs in renewable energy in 2018. UTS found the figure would grow to 46,000 by 2025 if Australian policy matched Paris agreement commitments.

For perspective, coal-fired power generation employs 10,000 Australians including both the

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south coast of Gippsland in Victoria. The project has the potential to supply up to 20 percent of Victoria's electricity needs. It also has a partnership with coal station, Yallourn Energy, to employ 1000 construction workers, in light of the station's upcoming closure and concerns over prospective job losses.

In the Gladstone region of Queensland, one of the world's largest hydrogen equipment manufacturing facilities has been planned by Fortescue Future Industries. Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk has said that as a result of the partnership between Fortescue Future Industries and the Queensland Government, Gladstone would become a world leading hub for the manufacture of electrolyzers, which are vital to the production of renewable hydrogen.

A recent report authored by Beyond Zero Emissions and the World Wide Fund for Nature

mining of that coal and the generation itself. Those figures do not include the mining for renewables material, manufacturing jobs in hydrogen or renewables parts, the retail and hospitality jobs supported downstream, nor jobs created by low emissions industries such as sustainable fertilisers and stock feeds, technology and research jobs, sustainable clothing, modern packaging, low emissions manufacturing and small to medium businesses serving the sustainable economy.

6. Action in the Farming Sector

With regard to farming, a recent report from the consultancy firm EY, titled 'Can We Really Make Net Zero 2050 a Reality?', says agriculture could reach net zero by 2040 through diversifying into drought resilient carbon and biodiversity crops, electrifying transport, reforesting 0.9 percent of farmland (mostly on unproductive land), whilst

increasing productivity – without shrinking the beef herd or sheep flock.

So, the direction among Australia’s industries is clear: renewables, green manufacturing and agriculture will lead us to net zero by 2050 whilst propping up our economy. Policymakers should support the regions in this transition and not fear a target. By developing the right market signals, such as setting clear targets and creating credits for environmental improvements which are robust and investable, we can reduce barriers to investment and unlock new income opportunities for the regions and for the farmers as we transition to a greener, more resilient future.

What’s more, these commitments and investments signal that the Australian community, including the regions, wants to be part of the global climate solution. Prime Minister Scott Morrison should see this then as an opportunity to deliver on what the vast majority of Australians are calling for and secure our position in the race toward net zero by 2050.

7. Conclusion

If the Paris Agreement may be considered the ‘what’, the negotiated outcome of COP26 will be the ‘how’, and this will require nothing short of Australia coming to the table with a commitment to net zero by 2050 as well as a more ambitious 2030 target. We can confidently say that the Australian Government is pivoting to a new position which is about leaning into a clean energy technology revolution, building jobs – specifically in the regions – and moving away from fossil fuels.

Although Australia will bring with it to COP26 a clear commitment to net zero emissions by 2050, it should also seek to review its 2030 target. States have paved the way for the Prime Minister to boost the 2030 climate target. Analysts said state investments and policies to develop renewable energy zones and tap private investment into wind and solar farms would be enough to beef up Australia’s current emissions target by almost 10 percentage points.

Swapping coal-fired power with clean solar and wind would remove enough carbon pollution over the next decade to cut Australia’s emissions 35 per cent by 2030. Australia has committed to cutting emissions by at least 26 per cent by 2030, based on 2005 levels, but is under international pressure to lift that target.

As Australia’s former chief scientist [Alan Finkel](#) has said: “We must reduce emissions while simultaneously achieving economic growth and prosperity. We have a crystal-clear opportunity to be a major player in a future new energy economy.” In the same breath, the way forward is not just about targets, but also about serious plans, which industries across Australia have ambitiously forged.

The negotiated outcome of COP26 will require nothing short of Australia coming to the table with a commitment to net zero by 2050 as well as a more ambitious 2030 target. As Australia’s former chief scientist Alan Finkel has said: “We must reduce emissions while simultaneously achieving economic growth and prosperity. We have a crystal-clear opportunity to be a major player in a future new energy economy.”

Creating Jobs in the Transition to Net Zero

Research indicates that the transition to Net Zero can create more jobs than it costs. The Australian Bureau of Statistics ('ABS') and the University of Technology Sydney ('UTS') both found there were already more than 26,000 jobs in renewable energy in 2018. UTS found the figure would grow to 46,000 by 2025 if Australian policy matched Paris agreement commitments. The Business Council of Australia (BCA)'s blueprint for 'Achieving a Net Zero Economy' claims Australia can position itself to gain an economic dividend of \$890 billion and 195,000 jobs over the next 50 years. For perspective, coal-fired power generation employs 10,000 Australians including both the mining of that coal and the generation itself.



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Note: A variety of references in this text are provided as hyperlinks within the text. This references section lists all texts in alphabetical order.

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COP26: Resources

Find out more about the COP26 United Nations Climate Change Conference, hosted by Italy and the UK in Glasgow from 31 October–12 November 2021 at the following websites:

Official website

<https://ukcop26.org/>

Pursuit-University of Melbourne

The Pursuit platform at the University of Melbourne provides cutting-edge research and insightful commentary by world-leading experts, including a special section on COP26:

<https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/topics/cop26>

Melbourne Climate Futures

Melbourne Climate Futures at the University of Melbourne brings researchers together to contribute to greater action on climate change. See their explainers and analysis of COP26:

<https://law.unimelb.edu.au/centres/mcf#cop26>



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Governing After Glasgow is a mini-series focused on the climate crisis summit in Glasgow (31 October - 12 November 2021) under the Governing During Crises research theme established by the School of Government at the University of Melbourne. The series seeks to develop our understanding of governing in the face of different types of crisis, at a time when Australia has recently faced the bushfire crisis, is currently addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, and faces even larger and longer-term challenges including climate change.

This Policy Brief series aims to distil academic research into policy analysis and clear recommendations, drawing on the cutting-edge research taking place at the School of Government and the University of Melbourne more broadly, as well as the School of Government's extensive global networks. Selected briefs will be produced in collaboration with the COVID-DEM project (www.democratic-decay.org), which examines how the pandemic is affecting democracy in Australia and worldwide.



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