

Australian fossil fuel exports underscore Labor's climate change fraud

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A report by Climate Analytics, a non-profit policy institute, has found that the exports of the Australian fossil fuel industry generate more than three times as many CO2 emissions as those produced domestically.

The report does not explicitly name the current Labor government. Nonetheless, the results point to the pivotal role it is playing in facilitating the climate crisis, which endangers the health and lives of billions of people around the world, primarily the poor and working class.

Titled “Australia’s global fossil fuel carbon footprint,” the report was funded by the Australian Human Rights Institute of the University of New South Wales. Its primary aim was to determine the true climate impact of Australian fossil fuel production.

The report concluded that Australia is the third largest exporter of fossil fuels in the world, behind only Russia and the United States. The emissions from these exports—primarily coal and liquified natural gas (LNG)—released a collective 1.2 billion tonnes of CO2 into the atmosphere in 2023. This is approximately 78 percent of total CO2 emissions attributable to fossils fuels produced by corporations in Australia, with the other 22 percent occurring from domestic burning of those fuels.

The CO2 emissions released after those fuels are burned in other countries actually meant that Australia ranked second in terms of climate change damage from fossil fuel exports. Australia trailed only Russia, a country with over five times the number of inhabitants.

This is largely due to the fact that coal, a particularly emissions-intensive fuel, is the primary export from Australia. Coal makes up 65 percent of the country’s total energy exports (with 29 percent from LNG, and the remaining 6 percent a mix of petroleum coke, crude oil, and liquefied petroleum gas).

This toxic record has lasted for decades. The report states: “From 1961 to 2023 Australia’s fossil fuel exports have been responsible for emitting 30 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere.”

Far from decreasing, however, the emissions are growing. The report projected that current government policies, which continue these exports, would result in a further 15 billion tonnes of emissions by 2035. To put that another way, the study estimates that the next 11-year period will result in half as many CO2 emissions from fossil fuel exports as the previous 63-year period.

These emissions will increasingly eat into what climate scientists call the “carbon budget”—the remaining amount of CO2 that can be emitted worldwide, while still keeping global temperatures from going above 1.5°C of warming compared to pre-industrial levels.

This is an important climate target necessary to stave off the worst impacts of global warming. The study found that when fossil fuel exports are combined with those fuels that are burned domestically, the Australian emissions from 2024–2035 would consume around 9.1 percent of the remaining global carbon budget.

As the report states: “The emissions that would arise from the government’s projected fossil fuel exports, in terms of both domestic production and end-use emissions, are clearly not consistent with a global 1.5°C compatible trajectory.”

The Labor government’s policies therefore represent a grave danger to the environment and the lives of billions of people. In the words of the study’s lead author Hannah Grant: “The government is intent on a deliberate strategy that will see its gas exports soar, exporting billions of tonnes of emissions, inconsistent with achieving net zero, and completely inconsistent

with the science.”

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese’s government is set to increase the amount of exports leaving the country. For example, as stated in the report: “Despite a clear need to phase out fossil fuels from the global energy system, Australia is doubling down on fossil gas production and LNG exports, sanctioning several largescale projects in 2021 and 2022.

“These include the massive Scarborough development and linked Pluto LNG plant expansion (Woodside), Crux LNG (Shell), Barossa backfill to Darwin LNG (Santos), and Jansz-Io backfill to Gorgon LNG (Chevron).”

Most recently, Labor announced in July that it would award permits to companies such as Woodside and Chevron to begin exploration of new gas reserves off Australia’s west and southeastern coasts.

This latest action is in line with Labor’s May 2024 “Future Gas Strategy,” which outlined a commitment to increase extraction of natural gas until “2050 and beyond,” in the words of Resources Minister Madeleine King. That “strategy” is in stark contrast to the warnings of scientists that gas cannot be used as a “transitional fuel” but must be phased out immediately, along with all other greenhouse-gas producing fuels.

Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek has green-lit the construction of at least four new coal mines and a gas fracking project since 2022. She has also allowed existing fossil fuel projects to continue for decades, such as the Gregory Crinum Coal Mine in the Bowen Basin, which she approved to keep running until 2073.

This is despite years of warnings by scientists that there must be no new fossil fuel developments if global temperatures are to remain less than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

The overall outcome of the Albanese government’s supposed “ambitious action on climate change” is that it will be responsible for producing seven times as much coal and gas emissions than it has pledged to cut by 2030.

Furthermore, the government continues to line the pockets of large conglomerates and their investors, “providing \$14.5 billion worth of spending and tax breaks in 2023–24” to the fossil fuel industry, as noted by the Climate Analytics report.

The report warns that in order to keep global warming below 1.5°C, Australia would have to reduce its

domestic emissions by 67 percent below 2005 levels by 2030. This further confirms the total inadequacy of Labor’s 2022 climate targets, which pledged only to reduce emissions by 43 percent in that same timespan.

The report has not been mentioned at the time of writing by either Labor or the Greens, who backed Labor’s 2022 targets. Even if their targets were met, which is unlikely given the fossil fuel expansion, these parties do not present any way forward to address the grave environmental issues humanity faces.

That is because the Greens, no less than Labor, are completely wedded to the capitalist corporate profit system that is responsible for creating the climate crisis. As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote recently, “climate change cannot be attributed primarily to the short-sightedness and corruption of individual politicians, parties, or even governments at large. The root cause of climate change is the capitalist mode of production, which subordinates all social needs to private profit and divides the world into rival nation-states.”



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