

# SUN BLOCKS AND WIND BREAKS

25 attacks on clean energy by the Baillieu and Napthine Governments

August 2014



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## Introduction

**Victoria is already experiencing the negative impacts of climate change. Our daily maximum average temperature has increased by 0.9°C since 1910,<sup>1</sup> and we are increasingly being subjected to costly and dangerous heatwaves, bushfires, floods and storms.**

As Victorian and global greenhouse emissions continue to rise, we have an ever-increasing understanding of the enormous impact that climate change will have on our communities, our environment and our economy. As a society with among the highest per capita emissions on the planet, we have every incentive to reduce our pollution and set an example for other jurisdictions to follow.

Around ninety percent of Victoria's electricity and over fifty percent of our greenhouse gas emissions<sup>2</sup> come from five polluting coal-fired power stations: Hazelwood, Yallourn, Loy Yang A and Loy Yang B in the Latrobe Valley, and the Anglesea Power Station on the Surf Coast.

But cleaning up our energy supply is not just about responding to climate change. Coal may have provided Victoria with cheap electricity through the 20th century, but now we're starting to feel its true costs. These have been best illustrated by the health and financial impacts of the Hazelwood mine fire,<sup>3</sup> but are also found in the ongoing carbon emissions and air pollution from our big power stations.

Any responsible state government must respond to this situation by acting immediately to clean up and diversify Victoria's power generation.

The good news is that pursuing clean energy – renewable energy and energy efficiency – presents one of the most significant opportunities to participate in the one of the fastest growing industries globally. In 2011, global net investment in renewables outstripped investment in fossil fuels for the first time: \$262 billion versus \$223 billion.<sup>4</sup> Clearly the future economy, industries and jobs are in developing and implementing climate change solutions like renewable energy and energy efficiency.

However, since the Coalition state government came into office they have failed to respond to the threat of climate change and failed to seize the opportunity presented by the global clean energy boom. Nearly all of Victoria's policy agenda for a cleaner and more efficient energy mix has been dismantled.

**This report documents 25 attacks on clean and efficient energy by the Baillieu/Napthine Governments since the 2010 election. These include measures which undermine investment and jobs in renewable energy or energy efficiency, or which prop up the incumbent players who have a vested interest in selling more fossil-fuel-generated electricity.**

Few of these attacks on clean energy were flagged ahead of the 2010 election. Indeed, many of the promises for improvements made by the Coalition in the lead-up to that election have been broken.

These attacks stand in stark contrast to both the actions needed to

reduce our emissions and to what Victorians actually want. Polling consistently shows that four out of five Victorians support renewable energy and that energy efficiency measures have almost universal support amongst Victorians.<sup>5</sup>

With less than 100 days remaining before the November state election, it's time for the Coalition and all political parties contesting the state election to commit to undoing the damage caused by these attacks and to start transitioning Victoria's energy supply from polluting coal to clean, renewable and efficient energy.

The extent of this damage is detailed in the pages following.



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## The Baillieu and Napthine Governments' 25 attacks on clean, renewable and efficient energy

1	<b>Making it almost impossible to get approval for a new wind farm<sup>6</sup></b>	In August 2011, the Coalition implemented extremely restrictive planning regulations for wind turbines, including a veto right over an entire project for anyone living within 2km of a turbine. This has brought the development of new wind projects to a standstill with regional jobs and investment going elsewhere. The planning amendment, known as VC82, was responsible for blocking known projects worth 438 MW of clean energy, \$864 million worth of investment, over 400 construction jobs and \$10.5 million worth of regional economic activity. <sup>7</sup> Figures from Bloomberg New Energy Finance estimate the overall effect of VC82 to have lost Victoria \$4.8 billion in missed project investment and thousands of jobs. <sup>8</sup> These anti-wind farm planning restrictions contrast with rules for development of new mines or gas fields, where land-owners have no say over the drilling of wells on their own land, much less on neighbouring land.
2	<b>Walking away from talks to phase out Hazelwood power station<sup>9</sup></b>	In mid-2010, the Brumby government started negotiations with the owners of Hazelwood to secure the early closure of part of the power station. In May 2011, the new Coalition government abandoned these talks, claiming it would be too expensive, despite revelations that the Commonwealth Bank had dramatically written down the value of its shareholdings in Hazelwood. <sup>10</sup> As a consequence, the power station, which is one of the world's dirtiest, continues to emit around 13 percent of Victoria's carbon pollution.
3	<b>Abandoning the Climate Change White Paper and all commitments within it<sup>11</sup></b>	In the lead-up to the 2010 election, the then-Baillieu opposition committed to a number of actions from the Climate Change White Paper. The new government back-flipped on this once in office and by June 2011 had removed all traces of the White Paper from government websites. This left Victoria with a serious policy vacuum on climate change that the Coalition government has continually failed to fill.

One of the Coalition Government's first acts was to make it almost impossible for a new wind farm



4	<b>Removing the 20 percent emissions reduction target from Climate Change Act<sup>12</sup></b>	With the introduction of the Federal carbon price, the Victorian Government was legally required to review of the state's Climate Change Act. This presented the Coalition with an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to action on climate change, including support for the target of 20 percent reduction in emissions by 2020. Prior to the 2010 election, the Coalition had repeatedly signalled its support for the target. However in March 2012, the Coalition opted to abolish the 20 percent target, leaving just the low 5 percent national target and destroying the opportunity for Victoria to become a leader in clean energy.
5	<b>Slashing the premium solar feed-in-tariff from 60c to 25c in September 2011<sup>13</sup></b>	Feed-in tariffs are the rate the electricity company pays rooftop solar owners for the energy they generate from solar panels on their rooves. These payments drove wide-spread residential installations of solar panels, with annual installations rocketing from 8,400 in 2009 to 60,200 in 2011 when the premium feed-in tariff was in place. <sup>14</sup> Solar panels reduce household electricity bills, reduce the demand for coal-fired electricity and reduce the need for further investment in transmission poles and wires and peaking power stations. Further, the cut to the Feed-in Tariff was made without consultation, despite an election promise to engage with the solar industry and communities before making any changes.
6	<b>Restricting household access to the standard solar feed-in tariff<sup>15</sup></b>	In October 2011, just one month after cutting the price paid to solar panel owners under the premium feed-in tariff, the Coalition also restricted access to the "standard" solar feed-in tariff. Where previously anyone could receive the standard tariff, which had no expiry date, the new rules limited this to photovoltaic systems over 5 kW – bigger than a typical residential system. This forced most households onto the "transitional" feed-in tariff that expires after five years, significantly reducing the financial incentive for people to install solar panels.



The Coalition Government has slashed support for families and businesses wanting to go solar

7	<b>Slashing the solar feed-in tariff from 25c to 8c in September 2012<sup>16</sup></b>	Despite the Coalition's strong advocacy for solar feed-in tariffs in Opposition and an election promise in 2010 that feed-in tariffs would be kept at levels that "provide a fair reward and encourage the supply of renewable energy into the grid", the Coalition further cut the feed-in tariff in September 2012 to just 8c. This means owners of residential solar systems pay about three times the price to get electricity from the grid than what they are paid to contribute an equal amount of electricity into the grid. The effect of the cut was to halve the installation of solar panels: from 66,200 in 2012 to just 33,100 in 2013. <sup>17</sup>
8	<b>Opposing the carbon price and overstating its impact on Victoria<sup>18</sup></b>	Economic modelling commissioned by the Coalition Government found that Victoria would be less affected by a Federal carbon price than most other states. However, the Coalition fomented fears about the carbon price by maintaining that Victoria would be the hardest hit state; for example, Treasurer Kim Wells said in September 2011 it would 'devastate Victorian families and businesses', despite the government's own evidence to the contrary.
9	<b>Renewing Alcoa's coal mining lease at Anglesea for 50 years, with no further measures to reduce its pollution<sup>19</sup></b>	In October 2011, the Coalition approved a 50 year extension to Alcoa's coal mining licence at Anglesea, ensuring the state's biggest consumer of electricity, the Alcoa aluminium smelter, would continue to be fed exclusively by a coal-fired power station. The government imposed no additional requirements on Alcoa to source any renewable energy for the smelter, nor to reduce the high levels of toxic sulphur dioxide emitted by the power station, which is only one kilometre from the local primary school. The mine was also allowed to expand by 214 hectares, into important coastal heathlands.
10	<b>Removing climate change and renewable energy from the remit of Sustainability Victoria<sup>20</sup></b>	Many successful and effective programs that supported communities to reduce their emissions and to become more sustainable were run through Sustainability Victoria. Following a review by the Coalition Government, these programs were scrapped, leaving many communities in the lurch: 13 community projects across the state were recommended for grants up to \$50,000 each, but the funding never received final approval. <sup>21</sup>

11	<b>Working to create a brown coal export industry<sup>22</sup></b>	Coal combustion is responsible for half of Victoria's greenhouse pollution. Despite this, the Coalition has been working to start a coal export industry, meaning that Victoria's particularly dirty brown coal would be burned overseas as well as in our own power stations. Coal exports would present a range of problems: new mines and loss of farmland, health risks of coal dust from transport vehicles, damage to protected marine areas near possible port sites, and more CO2 emissions. Since 2012, the Coalition has been testing commercial interest in developing new coal fields in the Latrobe Valley. The potential allocation of up to 33 billion tonnes of coal is equivalent to an additional 268 years of Victoria's emissions at current rates. The then-Energy Minister Michael O'Brien said coal "should play a key role in our energy future". If it does, all Victorians will suffer.
12	<b>Running a taxpayer funded PR campaign to improve the image of coal mining and power generation<sup>23</sup></b>	\$120,000 of public money has been used to run what the government calls "an aggressive and pro-active communications campaign ... that demonstrates the continued relevance of brown coal in a carbon-constrained environment." Surveys have shown that Victorians don't want more coal; they want renewable energy. But the Coalition seems determined to pursue the dreams of the coal industry while ignoring the interests of their constituents.
13	<b>Dropped election commitment to introduce pollution standards for new coal power stations<sup>24</sup></b>	Victoria's brown coal power stations are amongst the most polluting in the world. Greenhouse gas emission standards for new power stations, promised prior to the 2010 election, could have dramatically reduced the pollution associated with our electricity supply. The standards were dumped in March 2012, with the Coalition citing the Federal carbon price as their justification, which has since been repealed.

The Victorian Energy Efficiency Target  
is being cut by the Coalition



14	<b>Failure to deliver any progress towards election commitment on improving residential energy efficiency<sup>25</sup></b>	In the Coalition's 2010 Planning and Water policies they promised to raise the average energy efficiency of Victorian homes to 5 stars. A comprehensive program to address the inefficiency of Victoria's housing stock would massively reduce energy consumption and energy bills, especially amongst low-income households – up to \$600 per year per house. Many of the gains would come from simple retrofits such as weather-proofing, insulation and shading windows from summer sun. It would also save the Government up to \$2.5 billion over 20 years through reduced need for energy concessions to low-income households. <sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, very little progress has been made towards this goal, and the only program that was contributing, the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target, is to be cut by the Coalition, with the result that we burn more coal and gas than we need to, and households burn more money to stay comfortable.
15	<b>Scrapping a \$20 million election pledge to replace energy guzzling street lights with more efficient lighting<sup>27</sup></b>	Installing more energy efficient street lights is “a cost-effective way to take practical action to reduce emissions, help the environment and reduce costs for Victorian families”, according to then-Premier Baillieu. <sup>28</sup> But the initiative was ditched in the 2012 state budget – another example of fine words being trumped by indifference towards real energy solutions.
16	<b>Failure to deliver an election commitment to review subsidies to fossil fuels</b>	Fossil fuel subsidies promote the extraction and burning of fossil fuel, which leads to more pollution. These subsidies can take a range of forms, such as tax incentives, rebates and providing support programs. Over the past 12 months, organisations as diverse as the World Bank, OECD, International Energy Agency and the UN have called for a phase-out of fossil fuel subsidies. In the lead up to the 2010 election, Environment Victoria wrote to all parties asking for commitments to conduct a review of state-based fossil fuel subsidies. A response from Mary Wooldridge, then Shadow Minister for Environment and Climate Change, confirmed that a Coalition Government would conduct this review and deliver “some rebalancing” of subsidies. <sup>29</sup> This review has not taken place.

17	<b>Scrapping the solar hot water rebate<sup>30</sup></b>	Solar hot water can massively reduce residential emissions of greenhouse gases, and can save households up to 75 percent of water heating costs. The rebate was used to support over 38,000 Victorian households since the year 2000, saving up to \$1500 on each installation. Scrapping the rebate in March 2013 has led to fewer installations of energy-saving hot water heaters as well as affecting jobs at solar hot water manufacturers within Victoria, as there is now much less demand for their product.
18	<b>Repealing a cost-effective program helping businesses reduce energy consumption<sup>31</sup></b>	The Environment and Resource Efficiency Plan program run by the EPA was designed to help big users of energy and water implement energy and water efficiency programs. Measures that had a payback period of less than three years were mandatory. Analysis by the EPA found that, even with short pay-off times, many businesses would not have implemented the measures without the involvement and support of the EPA. The scheme led to savings of \$90m per year for Victorian industry, <sup>32</sup> helping to weather tight economic times. It was scrapped by the Minister for Environment and Climate Change Ryan Smith in March 2014.
19	<b>Drastically cutting back loans to government departments to improve energy efficiency<sup>33</sup></b>	The Greener Government Buildings scheme was projected by the Coalition to deliver \$2 billion in savings over 25 years and a 30 percent reduction in emissions from government operations. The scheme was delivering impressive results <sup>34</sup> and even won the Premier's Sustainability Award in 2011. Despite this, it was scrapped in early 2014, foregoing savings in both costs and emissions and costing hundreds of jobs in the energy efficiency industry. <sup>35</sup>

Scrapping the solar hot water rebate will cost families and adversely affect manufacturers



20	<b>Extending the operating licence of the Anglesea Power Station, despite the closure of the Alcoa smelter that consumed all its electricity<sup>36</sup></b>	Until July 2014, all the electricity from Anglesea Power Station was used in the Alcoa aluminium smelter. With the closure of the smelter, the power station is no longer needed - the perfect opportunity to retire a very polluting power station. But the Government still agreed to extend the power station's operating licence, allowing it to sell its electricity to the grid, despite the terrible air quality being suffered by local residents, who were not properly consulted in the licensing process.
21	<b>Providing \$75m in grants to three proposed new coal projects in the Latrobe Valley<sup>37,38</sup></b>	Three projects trialling new technologies for processing brown coal were awarded \$20-30 million each in joint Victorian and Federal funding in May and June 2014. The financial support is much higher than that announced for any individual renewable energy project by the Coalition Government. <sup>39</sup> At least one of the projects is likely to be the starting point for a possible coal export industry, despite the range of problems with coal exports (outlined above). Moreover, continued Government investment in the coal industry fails to recognise the need to diversify the economy of the Latrobe Valley. The Valley's long-term future will not be supported by coal, but the Coalition refuses to take the steps necessary to help transition the local economy away from a dying industry.
22	<b>Phasing out a low-cost and job-creating energy efficiency scheme that saved money for households and small businesses<sup>40</sup></b>	The Victorian Energy Efficiency Target requires electricity retailers to help households and small businesses install energy (and cost) saving devices. The target has helped create 2000 jobs, saved participating homes up to \$70 per year in energy bills, and resulted in lower energy consumption across the state. In May 2014, Energy Minister Russell Northe announced that the Coalition would scrap the target. This will undermine efforts to further reduce energy demand – the less electricity we use, the less we spend on energy and the less pollution we emit. Scrapping VEET will destroy Victoria's flourishing energy efficiency industry and jobs across the state. The big winners from the removal of energy efficiency programs are the owners of the state's big coal-fired power stations.

23	<b>Pushed for reduction of the Federal Renewable Energy Target, and including gas as a “renewable” source of energy<sup>41</sup></b>	The Federal Renewable Energy Target is designed to ensure that 20 percent of Australia’s electricity comes from renewable energy, which will significantly reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. In its submission to the RET review panel June 2014, the Napthine Government pushed for the inclusion of gas in the target. Burning gas leads to somewhat lower emissions than burning coal, but those marginal emissions savings are not enough. Zero emissions renewables are needed, fast. Any effort to delay the uptake of clean renewable energy is not in the best interests of Australians.
24	<b>Supporting electricity retailer Simply Energy’s decision to charge customers an extra \$51 per year for having solar panels<sup>42</sup></b>	The decision by Simply Energy to set a higher daily tariff for homes with solar panels discriminates against solar customers. Rather than being concerned by this discrimination against those who have taken up emissions-reducing technology and moving to ban such discrimination, the Government has effectively endorsed the retailer’s decision to charge solar customers more than those who draw all their power from the grid.
25	<b>Cancelling requirement for government agencies to purchase green power<sup>43</sup></b>	Government departments had been required to source a percentage of their electricity from accredited GreenPower, helping to drive the transition of our electricity supply by guaranteeing demand for renewable energy. GreenPower consumption in government buildings peaked at 26 percent in 2010-11, but since the requirement was removed GreenPower has fallen to just 6 percent. <sup>44</sup>

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## Opportunities lost and opportunities gained

### **The 25 attacks on clean, efficient energy mean that Victoria's energy industry is now lagging behind other states.**

Victoria has missed out on billions of dollars of investment, thousands of jobs in the construction, maintenance and operation of clean energy facilities and the chance to clean up our power supply.

The Government's apparent hostility towards renewable energy is leading these industries to focus their attention elsewhere. For instance South Australia is embracing renewable energy: 43 percent of the state's electricity needs for the entire month of July were met with wind power and another seven percent came from solar power.<sup>45</sup> In NSW, the Coalition Government has developed a Renewable Energy Action Plan.<sup>46</sup> The plan is designed to attract investment to the state, remove barriers to the roll-out of renewable energy, build community support and establish NSW as a leader in renewable energy research and innovation. There is nothing to prevent Victoria matching or exceeding NSW's goals and achievements – in fact Victoria has better renewable energy resources than NSW so could even achieve more.

Cuts to a number of highly effective energy efficiency schemes will increasingly result in job losses amongst providers and installers, and is a missed opportunity to reduce our overall electricity consumption. And Victorians will miss out on the health and environmental benefits of burning less coal.

The Coalition repeatedly used the Federal carbon price as a justification

for many of its attacks, despite opposing its introduction. Backwards steps were taken on the grounds that the carbon price was supposed to provide the necessary market signal to reduce pollution.

Now that the Federal carbon price has been repealed, can we expect to see the Coalition seeking to reinstate the initiatives they had dropped?

The most recent available figures for greenhouse gas emissions demonstrate that there is still a problem that needs fixing. In 2011-12, Victoria's total emissions were 124 million tonnes of CO2 equivalents<sup>47</sup> – still higher than 2007 levels and with no clear trend towards decreasing pollution.

A recent report from the Australian Energy Market Operator revealed that Victoria could close 2000 MW of electricity generation immediately without affecting consumers.<sup>48</sup> That's more than all the output of Hazelwood or Yallourn, plus Anglesea Power Station. With the agency that controls the electricity grid effectively saying this electricity is unnecessary, approximately 14 percent of the state's entire greenhouse gas emissions could be avoided. This represents an incredible opportunity to begin the transition away from polluting coal.

Likewise, the opportunity to make the most of Victoria's abundant renewable energy resources is ripe for picking. Regardless of what happens at the Federal level, there are many avenues through which the next Victorian Government can lead a drive to maintain its economic edge, protect jobs and deliver a safe climate for future generations.



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## Priorities for the 2014 State Election

**Environment Victoria has developed a comprehensive policy agenda for the 2014 state election, and we encourage all parties and candidates to include this in their own platforms.<sup>49</sup> Within this comprehensive agenda is a set of key policies and initiatives that can put Victoria firmly on the path to a clean energy transition.**

1. Strengthen Victoria's Climate Change Act by reinstating scientifically-based emissions reduction targets and empowering the Environmental Protection Authority to regulate carbon emissions.
2. Develop a renewable energy investment and jobs plan to make Victoria the national leader in renewable energy. This should include fast-tracking the development of solar and wind power, removing the 2km exclusion zone for new wind power and increasing current solar feed-in tariffs.<sup>50</sup>
3. Phase-out the state's most polluting power stations like Hazelwood, Yallourn and Anglesea and protect communities from coal mining risks like the Hazelwood fire via the immediate rehabilitation of non-working parts of existing coal mines and a review of rehabilitation bonds for all mines.
4. Categorically rule out any plans for new coal mines or a coal export industry and maintain the moratorium on coal seam gas extraction.
5. Improve the energy efficiency of the average Victorian house to a five star average standard by 2025, and implement and resource a

comprehensive retrofit program for low income households.

6. Lock in the recent savings in Victorian electricity demand with new energy efficiency programs, including extending the successful Victorian Energy Efficiency Target scheme for the next five years and broadening the program to include new products like insulation. Increase support for solar water heating including through reinstating the solar hot water rebate.

This transition can be well underway by the end of the next term of Government. It will save households and businesses money by reducing their electricity bills; it will create thousands of new jobs and lead to billions of dollars of investment in emerging industries across the state; it will decrease the health burden created by burning fossil fuels; and it will dramatically reduce our carbon pollution and Victoria's disproportionately large contribution to severe climate impacts.

We invite all parties and candidates to commit to implementing all aspects of this blueprint for Victoria's energy transition.

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50. With the future of the Federal Renewable Energy Target also in doubt, there is potentially an additional opportunity for the Victorian Renewable Energy Target to be reinstated.



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