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DELIVERING A HIGH ENERGY AUSTRALIA

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Stronger Regions for a Stronger Australia

PAGE
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Contents

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Executive Summary

Australia's net zero strategy is failing.
It is making energy more expensive, the economy less productive, and it is doing visible harm to our natural environment and farmland. This report argues that Australia should focus on delivering a *High Energy Australia* and restore affordability, strengthen sovereignty, and renew the covenant between people and land.

Key Findings: Net Zero Is Failing Australians

Australia's current energy and climate policies are failing.

They are driving up costs, damaging industry, degrading our environment, and exposing the nation to strategic risk.

- **Energy prices are soaring:** Since Australia adopted net zero, household electricity prices have risen by **39%**, despite government promises of $275 bill reductions. The default market offer set by the Australian Energy Regulator shows average power bills up **$576–$806 per household**.
- **Industry is in retreat:** Australia has lost over **7,000 direct jobs in heavy industry** since 2020, with over 73,000 jobs at risk and dependent on government subsidies to survive. Major employers such as Qenos, Incitec Pivot, and BHP Nickel West have closed or entered care and maintenance.
- **Fiscal exposure is ballooning:** Between the Capacity Investment Scheme, Rewiring the Nation, hydrogen subsidies, and state-based SuperGrid programs, the combined public exposure to net-zero-aligned spending exceeds **$120–140 billion**.
- **Environmental outcomes are perverse: 95% of Australia's emissions reductions** since 2005 have come not from cleaner technology, but from land-use restrictions and changes — limiting farmers' ability to use their own land. Meanwhile, vast areas of bushland and farmland are being cleared for renewable energy zones, threatening biodiversity and regional livelihoods.
- **Australia is acting ahead of the rest of the world**. Australia is delivering reductions at nearly twice the pace of comparable economies and four times the pace of global averages.
- **Strategic vulnerability is rising.** Energy-intensive industries — from refining and fertiliser to defence logistics — face higher costs and policy uncertainty even as regional tensions escalate. Australia now imports almost all refined fuels and key manufacturing inputs.

In short, **net zero is not working for Australia**. It is raising costs, hollowing out our industrial base, and degrading the environment it claims to protect.

The Alternative: A High Energy Australia

Australia needs an energy and climate policy that lowers costs, strengthens our economy, and protects our environment.

This paper proposes a set of guiding principles for a better path forward:

1. **Lower energy prices first:** Energy policy should prioritise reducing prices for households and businesses rather than chasing arbitrary emissions targets. Net zero should not be a goal of our climate policy because it puts achieving an emissions goal ahead of improving the living standards of Australians.
2. **Do our fair share:** Australia produces just **1%** of the world's emissions. We should reduce emissions in line with comparable nations, not ahead of them.
3. **Share the burden equally:** The cost of emissions reduction should be distributed evenly, not concentrated on regional industries or low-income households.
4. **Empower local action**: Local communities should be able to lead initiatives such as waterway protection, land restoration, soil carbon and carbon capture projects to deliver jobs and stewardship across Australia.

5. **Back innovation and support all technologies:** A commonsense approach to renewables must be the priority. This means using solar panels where they make economic and practical sense, such as in commercial and industrial precincts and not across our pristine landscapes or prime agricultural land. It also means embracing new technologies, including nuclear energy and advanced coal and gas power stations.
6. **Protect our security and prosperity:** There can be no compromise on our quality of life, regional jobs and industries and national security and defence.

A New Vision for Environmental Stewardship

The wellbeing and strength of Australia's natural environment depend on the active care and creativity of those who live and work closest to it.

Regional Australians already embody this ethic. Farmers, fishers, and foresters walk their fencelines, manage weeds and feral species, regenerate soils, and invest in the health of the landscapes that sustain both nature and nation. This lived stewardship, grounded in local knowledge and practical care, is the foundation of true conservation.

A new environmental vision should seek **harmony between conservation and national purpose**. That balance means:

- **Driving economic growth** through responsible land and resource management that sustains livelihoods while protecting ecosystems.
- **Conserving and recovering native species** and restoring ecological health through locally led, science-based action.
- **Empowering landholders** to manage their land flexibly, rewarding regeneration and innovation rather than punishing use.
- **Restoring the damage caused by poorly planned renewable energy projects**, ensuring that the drive for decarbonisation does not destroy the landscapes, habitats, and biodiversity it claims to save.
- **Responsible reductions in carbon emissions**. While net zero is not the right approach, Australia needs a plan based on common sense to lower emissions.
- **Expanding access to public lands and waters**. Common sense approaches to the use of public lands for recreation, hunting, and fishing will strengthen the human connection to nature that underpins long-term stewardship.

Instead of treating nature as something to be locked away, Australia should embrace an environmentalism that is participatory and recognises that **prosperity and conservation go hand in hand**.

A Blueprint for Reform

This discussion paper presents a practical pathway for replacing net zero with a national framework grounded in realism, fairness, and confidence. The proposals that follow are elaborated throughout the report and summarised in full at its conclusion *(see Summary of Recommendations, page 33).*

Core policy directions include:

1. **Affordability and Reliability**
   Reform the National Electricity Rules so AEMO's primary duty is to deliver the lowest possible prices while maintaining reliability. Replace the Capacity Investment Scheme with a genuinely technology-neutral framework that allows all generation sources – including nuclear, coal, and gas – to compete on a level playing field.
2. **A Fair and Realistic Emissions Framework**
   Repeal the Climate Change Act 2022 and remove "net zero" as Australia's formal target under the Paris Agreement. Adopt a practical emissions trajectory of 2–9 Mt CO_2-e reductions per year, and restore the Emissions Reduction Fund as the central, transparent mechanism for abatement. Remove hidden carbon pricing and compliance costs, including the Safeguard Mechanism, New Vehicle Efficiency Standard, and climate-disclosure rules, that raise prices without delivering measurable environmental gains.
3. **Strategic and Industrial Sovereignty**
   Designate fuel refining, fertiliser, metals, data infrastructure, and defence manufacturing as strategic industries vital to national resilience. Provide these sectors with targeted exemptions and fast-tracked approvals under joint oversight by Industry and the National Security Committee of Cabinet. Establish an *Industrial Sovereignty Fund* to co-invest in critical value-adding capacity and secure Australian control of essential assets.

4. **Defence and National Resilience**
   Suspend the *Defence Net Zero Strategy* and redirect resources toward core capabilities, fuel security, and logistics readiness. Defence energy policy should strengthen operational resilience, not impose civilian emissions constraints on military readiness.
5. **Stewardship and Environmental Renewal**
   Replace the *Nature Positive* agenda with a *Stewardship and Renewal Act* that empowers landholders and Traditional Owners to lead practical conservation. Upgrade National Parks and recreation infrastructure to improve accessibility, amenity, and environmental protection. Audit and rehabilitate renewable-energy sites, re-establish the National Soils Advocate, expand Indigenous Ranger programs, and launch coordinated feral-animal and carp-control initiatives to restore ecological health and regional prosperity.

This paper is intended not as a final word, but as the start of a **national conversation**.

It invites policymakers, researchers, industry leaders, and regional Australians to provide feedback, challenge assumptions, and propose additional pathways toward a **High Energy Australia**.

By engaging with these ideas, Australians can help design a framework that puts our people, our regions, and our security first.

1. Introduction

Net Zero is failing the Australian people and is raising energy prices, destroying industries, damaging the environment, and weakening national security.

Australia needs a new energy and climate framework that restores affordability, reliability, and national strength: A High Energy Australia.

The Labor Government's narrow focus on achieving net zero emissions at any cost is imposing significant economic and strategic impacts on the Australian people.

Since Australia committed to its net zero target, **electricity and gas prices have increased by around 40%**, major industries have curtailed or ceased production, and Australia's **strategic resilience has declined** as we have become more dependent on foreign supply chains for critical materials, energy inputs, and manufactured goods.

Energy is the foundation of every modern economy. Energy heats homes, powers industry, drives transport, and keeps hospitals running. It is key to wellbeing. When energy is affordable and reliable, living standards rise and societies prosper. When it becomes expensive or unstable, productivity falls, investment slows, and families struggle.

Lower-income Australian households already spend **nearly four times the share of their income on energy** compared to higher-income households, making affordability a question not only of economics but of equity.[1]

Energy is also the principal channel through which Australia's emissions targets are pursued. **More than three-quarters of Australia's emissions arise from energy use**, with a further five per cent linked to industrial processes that depend heavily on energy inputs.[2]

Energy has a substantial impact on the cost base of almost every part of the economy. The performance of our energy system will determine whether decarbonisation strengthens the nation or weakens it.

When Australia adopted its net zero commitment in 2021, it did so under the guiding principle of using **"technology, not taxes"** to achieve emissions reductions.[3]

Since Labor took government in 2022, that principle has been eroded. The current approach relies increasingly on taxes, regulatory mandates, and subsidies that raise costs for households and industry alike. Rather than being technology-neutral, this policy mix has concentrated the burden on regional Australia and the communities that power and feed the nation.

The global context has also shifted. Most of the world's major emitting nations have now slowed or reversed their decarbonisation efforts as the costs of the transition become clearer, the trade-offs sharper, and the risks to competitiveness and national security more visible.

This discussion paper concludes that **a net zero commitment no longer serves the interests of the Australian people**. The paper seeks feedback on alternative ways that Australia can reduce its emissions and protect our environment without crippling our economy.

1.1 The flawed assumptions underpinning the transition

Power bills are up 40%, 7,000 manufacturing jobs have disappeared, and Australia has lost entire industries — yet our emissions represent just 1% of globe's.

Over the past decade, Australia's transition policies were promoted as a pathway to cheaper energy, new jobs in advanced industries, and stronger environmental outcomes. However, the lived experience now tells a different story.

The Albanese government promised that power bills would fall by $275.[4] Instead, average household electricity bills have risen by up to **$800** since 2022.[5]

Political rhetoric expounded more jobs in hydrogen and critical minerals. Instead, all major hydrogen projects have failed,[6] the nickel refining and smelting industry has collapsed,[7] and more than 7,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost (see Table 1, page 10). Another 8,000 workers are in **industries that survive only through taxpayer support**. Losing out on critical minerals has made Australia (and our allies) more dependent on supply chains dominated by China.

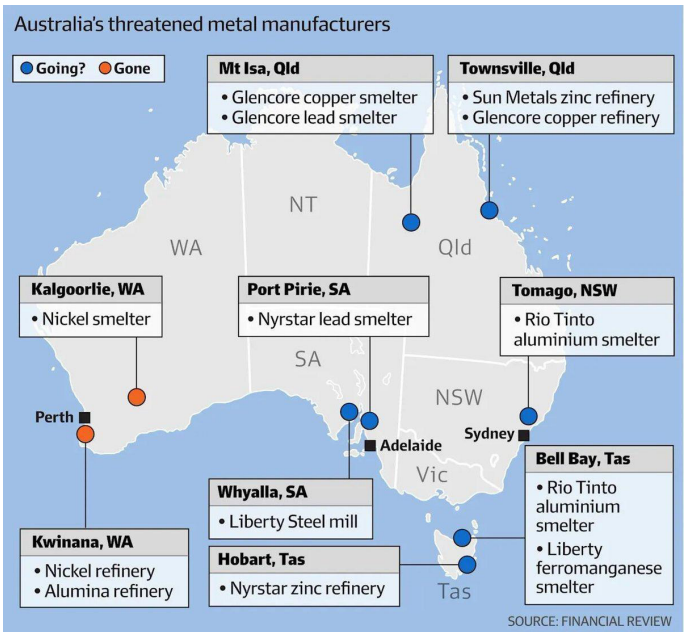


Figure a) Source: AFR[8]

This burden has not been shared globally. Australia is cutting its emissions at *twice* the rate of other advanced economies. The Government's current plan would force emissions reductions on Australians of 6 to 8 per cent per year[9] - at least six times faster than the 1% annual, historical pace of comparable, developed nations.[10]

Australians have been told that key assumptions underpinning the net zero transition include the benefits to our natural environment. Instead, large-scale wind and solar projects are clearing native vegetation, fragmenting habitats, and displacing farmland in key food-producing regions. Since 2005, **95% of Australia's emissions reductions** have come not from technological change or energy substitution, but from **land-use restrictions**, including the conversion of farmland to forest.[11] This has eroded the economic base of many regional communities.

Under current plans, achieving further emissions reductions would require converting or industrialising an amount of land **three times the size of Tasmania**.

Independent modelling by academic and private institutions supportive of the net zero objective estimate total costs of between **$7 and $9 trillion by 2060**.[12] This is equivalent to **$250,000 per Australian**.

Despite this, the Commonwealth has declined to publish whole-of-economy costings or conduct a transparent assessment of alternatives.

Net zero is failing on its own terms. It is raising energy prices, destroying industries, damaging the environment, and weakening our competitiveness. Continuing down this path will only increase costs as emissions cuts accelerate.

Australians deserve honesty about the trade-offs as well as a credible alternative that restores energy abundance, national strength, and economic security.

2. The costs of Labor's net zero approach

Labor's net zero agenda is driving up energy costs, hollowing out industry, damaging the environment, and weakening our economic and national security.

Australia's *Net Zero by 2050* commitment and interim targets, including a **43% reduction (below 2005 levels) by 2030**, are now enshrined in the **Climate Change Act 2022**.[13] In September 2025, the Government went further, announcing a **2035 target of 62–70% below 2005 levels**.[14]

These are among the steepest emissions cuts in the developed world. They will shape every major decision in energy, industry, agriculture, and transport for the next two decades, yet they were made without a national conversation about their social and economic cost.

To meet these goals, the Labor Government will need to layer multiple mechanisms including the **Safeguard Mechanism**, subsidies, capacity schemes, and restrictions on traditional energy production. Implicit in these is a *shadow carbon price* borne across sectors of the economy. Every household and business now pays it, whether or not they realise it.

The Labor Government promised that these targets and the associated taxes and regulations would lower energy prices and create new jobs for Australians. More than three years later, it is evident that both of these promises have been broken.

2.1 Economic Consequences of High-Cost Energy

Energy drives every aspect of modern life and when it becomes unaffordable, whole societies falter.

Affordable, reliable energy is the foundation of every modern economy. When it becomes expensive or unstable, the effects cascade through every sector. Businesses defer investment, households cut consumption, and supply chains contract. Over time, productivity slows, competitiveness erodes, and living standards fall.

Although the downstream impact of high energy prices is universal, the immediate effects are felt most acutely in regional industries like mining, manufacturing, and agriculture, leading to declines in employment, population, and skills.

Energy cost and availability are not the only factors behind Australia's recent productivity slowdown, but they are decisive ones.

2.1.1 Rising prices

Since 2022, household electricity prices have risen by up to 40%, and Australian manufacturers now pay among the highest industrial power prices in the developed world.

Since Australia adopted net zero, household electricity prices have risen by roughly **39%**.[15] Temporary relief measures such as the national Energy Bill Relief credit have masked the full impact; however, the underlying cost of producing and delivering power continues to climb.

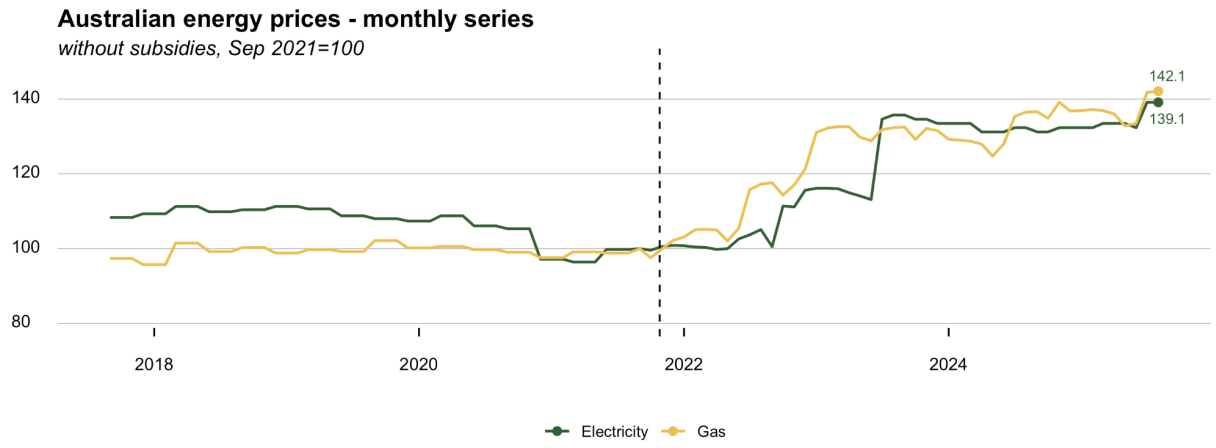


Figure b) Source: ABS CPI[16]

The Australian Energy Regulator sets a "default market offer" which effectively sets a ceiling for the household energy bills of Australians. The latest regulation shows that the average electricity bill for an Australian household has increased by between $576 and $806 since we adopted net zero.[17]

The Labor Government had promised that its net zero plans would reduce power bills by $275 per year, but with households paying up to $800 more, Labor's promises have been missed by around $1000 per Australian household per year.[18] Following the announcement of its new 2035 emissions targets, the Labor Government has refused to promise any reduction in energy bills.

2.1.2 Impact on households and everyday Australians

High energy prices drive inflation and disproportionately impact those on lower incomes.

Higher energy costs also flow through to the cost of everyday goods. Previous analysis by the Page Research Centre shows that Australian businesses use four times the amount of electricity that Australian households do.[19] Those higher input costs flow through to the prices of food, construction materials and other essentials, contributing to **persistent domestic inflation**.

Over time, the compounding effect has been profound. Since mid-2007, higher energy costs have driven at least a **2.4% fall in real living standards** equivalent to around **$3,400 per household.**[20]

Surging energy prices also take a heavier toll on Australia's most vulnerable households. Data from Energy Consumers Australia indicate that households earning under $40,000 annually allocate upwards of 6% of their income to energy expenses. In contrast, those earning over $150,000 spend less than 2%.[21]

Such disparities highlight the regressive nature of energy inflation, which disproportionately affects those least equipped to absorb it.

2.1.3 Volatility and industrial risk

Higher renewable penetration leads to greater price volatility – and greater risk for heavy industry.

As the penetration of renewables into the grid increases, so too does price volatility.

In the **June Quarter 2025**, the Australian Energy Regulator recorded **66 separate high-price events** in which wholesale 30-minute prices exceeded **$5,000 per megawatt-hour**.[22] These extreme intervals are no longer rare. They now occur with regularity across every National Electricity Market (NEM) region.[23] Higher volatility increases risks for manufacturing businesses that need a constant supply of electricity and have little ability to reduce their demand even during extremely high prices.

2.1.4 The honeymoon Is over

The early phase of Australia's renewable transition when costs fell and investment surged has ended. As renewables exceed 30% of supply, costs are now rising sharply, reliability risks are increasing, and private investment is slowing.

The early stages of Australia's renewable energy rollout were deceptively easy. Falling global technology costs, strong investor appetite, and generous subsidies gave the impression that the transition would be smooth and self-reinforcing. However, as the Centre for Independent Studies' 2025 report *The Renewable Energy Honeymoon: Starting Is Easy — The Rest Is Hard* finds, that early optimism has faded.[24]

Once variable renewables exceed roughly **30%** of total generation, the technical and financial challenges multiply. The simple phase of adding wind and solar has passed; the complex phase of balancing them has begun.

- **Costs now rise, not fall, with scale.** International evidence shows electricity prices increase sharply once renewables exceed one-third of supply, as grid integration, storage and transmission costs surge.
- **Reliability pressures intensify.** At higher penetration levels, operators must deal with oversupply ("curtailment") in daylight hours and sharp shortfalls after sunset, forcing expensive backup generation and battery storage.
- **Investment signals weaken.** As capture prices for wind and solar fall and curtailment grows, private capital is retreating from large-scale renewables projects.
- **Australia has reached this inflection point.** With renewables now providing about 30% of national generation, the system is already experiencing rising volatility, higher wholesale prices and delayed coal-plant closures to maintain stability.

The first 20 years of easy renewable expansion are behind us; the next phase will be harder, slower and costlier.

This pattern has borne out globally. International data reveals a strong correlation between higher shares of wind and solar generation and rising electricity prices.

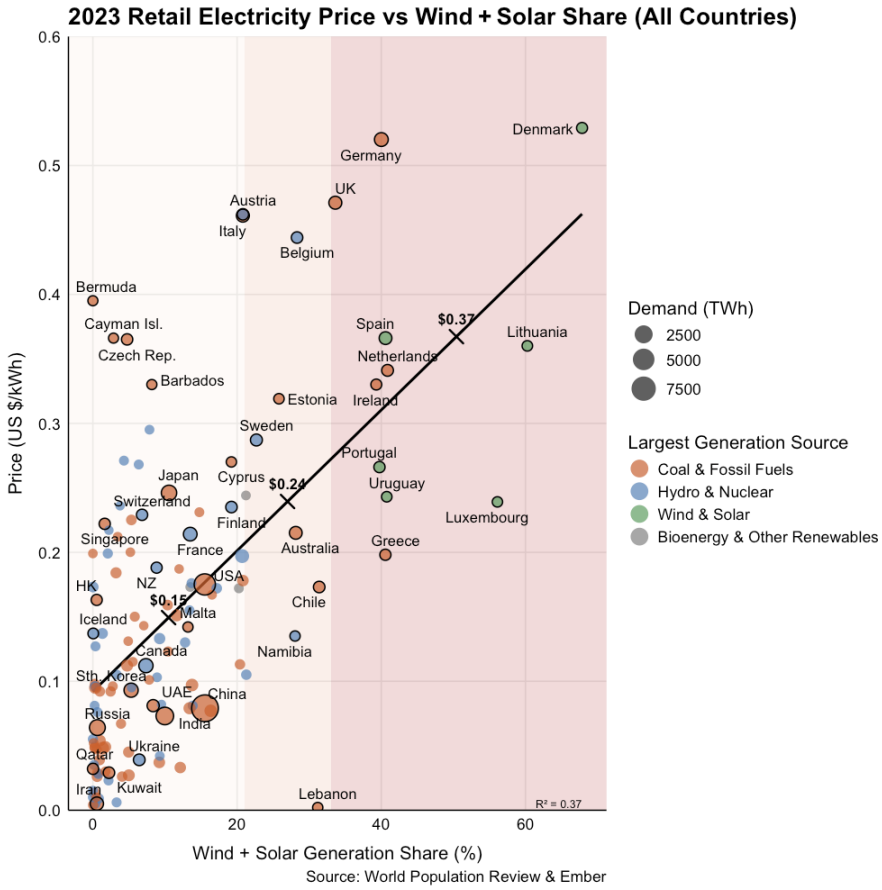


Figure c) Source: CIS[25]

Policymakers can no longer assume that simply building more wind and solar will reduce costs. Integration, firming, and transmission dominate the next chapter, and each requires enormous capital, long lead times, and strong community consent.

For Australia, this means confronting a new reality: **renewables at scale no longer drive down prices; they drive up system complexity.** Managing that complexity demands honesty about costs and a recalibration of policy toward energy reliability and affordability rather than symbolic capacity targets.

2.1.5 Technology is not yet a release valve

Batteries and other emerging technologies cannot replace the reliability and dispatchability of coal and gas.

New technologies have not provided relief. Battery assets are setting the marginal price more frequently, and at higher levels. The share of time batteries set the price ranged between 17.1% (Queensland) and 23.1% (South Australia). Despite this high frequency, battery generation in that quarter accounted for only around 1% of total NEM generation.[26] Wholesale prices have continued to stay high even as batteries play a greater role in setting prices.

2.1.6 A global disadvantage

Australian manufacturers now pay 60% more for electricity than their United States counterparts and 140% more than producers in China.

Australian industry faced an average electricity price in 2024 of US$0.24 (A$0.36) per kilowatt hour, placing it among the highest in the developed world (see figure d).

Only a handful of European markets, such as Germany and Italy, record comparable levels, while most peers in Asia and North America pay significantly less.

Compared with the OECD industrial average (USD 0.20 /kWh), Australian firms face an approximate 20% cost premium.[27] The gap widens sharply against major manufacturing competitors: the United States (-60%), South Korea (-100%), and especially China (-140%) and Indonesia (-243%).

Even Japanese industry faces lower industrial electricity prices than Australia, despite Australia supplying 30% of Japan's energy needs through our coal and gas exports. France, with its nuclear-powered grid, enjoys prices around 26.3% lower than those in Australia.

Electricity typically accounts for 20% to 40% of variable costs in energy-intensive industries such as aluminium, cement, fertiliser and critical minerals processing. A sustained 20% to 60% disadvantage in input power prices effectively deters investment, limits export competitiveness, and erodes Australia's ability to onshore value-added manufacturing.

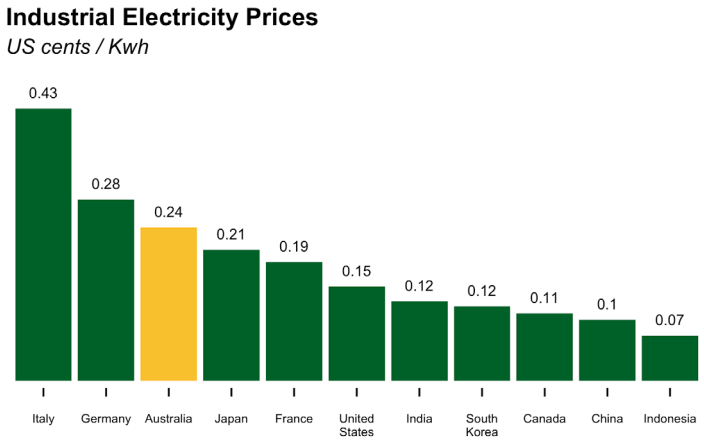


Figure d) Source: GPP[28]

The heat map below shows the price of electricity for industrial use per kWh as collected in 2025 Q1. Not only does Australia have the most expensive industrial prices in our region, but these are among the most expensive globally.

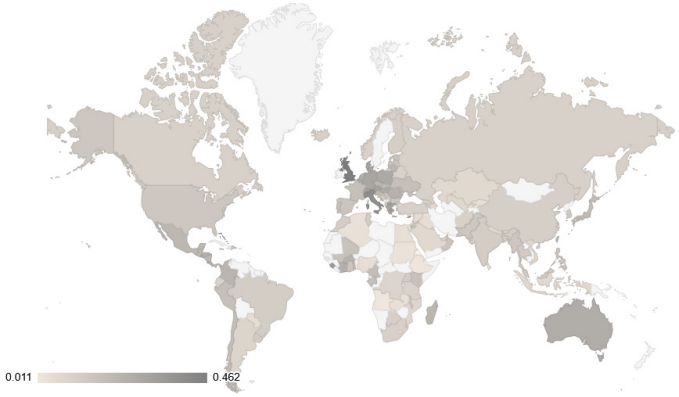


Figure e) Source GPP[29]

2.2 Net zero has cost us industries and jobs

Rising energy costs are reshaping the industrial base of the country and eroding the productive capacity that once underpinned Australia's prosperity. This is particularly pronounced in our regional communities where most heavy industry is located.

2.2.1 An economy in decline

The combination of rising energy costs and climate regulation has created an industrial recession.

There were 10,268 insolvency or external-administration appointments in the first half of FY 2025, a 53% increase year-on-year.[30] The spike reflects a sharp contraction in the nation's productive economy, particularly in energy-intensive sectors.

In the same period, manufacturing's share of GDP fell to a record low of 5.1%, down from around 8.9% two decades ago.[31] Australia now manufactures less, invests less, and imports more of what it once made for itself.

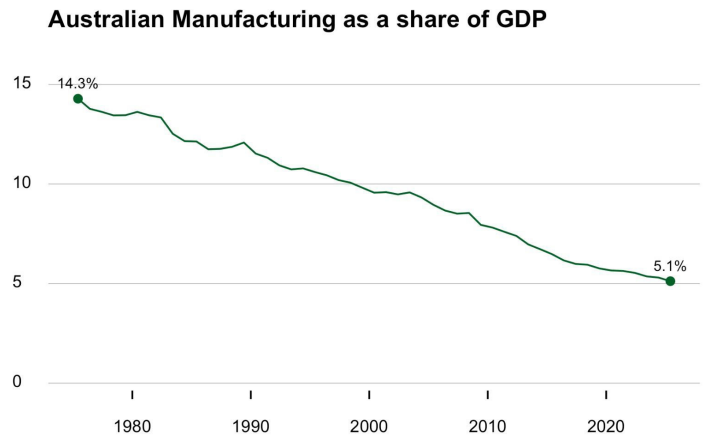


Figure f) Source: ABS[32]

2.2.2 Closures across energy-reliant industries

Since 2020, several major industrial facilities have closed or curtailed operations due to high energy costs and regulatory pressure, costing more than 7,000 direct jobs and thousands more indirectly.

The pattern of closures is unmistakable: plants that depend on affordable, continuous energy are closing or curtailing production. Rising input costs, compliance burdens, and uncertainty about long-term energy supply have created an increasingly hostile investment environment.

A small sample of these closures is included below.

Year / Date	Facility / Company	Sector	Location	What ceased	Estimated job losses	Primary energy exposure
Oct 2020 – 2021	**BP – Kwinana Refinery**[33]	Oil refining	Kwinana, WA	Refining ceased – import terminal	**≈ 600**	**Thermal-fuel (oil/ gas)** – large onsite boilers, process heat
Feb 2021	**ExxonMobil – Altona Refinery**[34]	Oil refining	Altona, VIC	Refining ceased – import terminal	**≈ 350**	**Thermal-fuel (oil/ gas)**
Dec 2022	**Incitec Pivot – Gibson Island**[35]	Ammonia / fertiliser	Brisbane, QLD	Manufacturing ceased	**≈ 170**	**Gas-intensive** – feedstock & heat source
Feb 2023	**Opal (Nippon)– Maryvale Mill**[36]	Pulp & paper	Latrobe Valley, VIC	End of white-paper production	**≈ 400**	**Electricity + biothermal (steam)**
Sep 2023	**Molycop – Waratah Steelworks**[37]	Steel / metals	Newcastle, NSW	Steelmaking suspended; site on care & maintenance	**≈ 250**	**Electricity + coke/ thermal coal**
Apr 2024 – 2025	**Qenos – Altona & Botany**[38]	Petrochemicals (ethylene / PE)	VIC & NSW	Manufacturing shutdown across both sites	**≈ 700**	**Gas + electricity + feedstock (multi-energy)**
Jun–Jul 2024	**Indorama – Botany (EO & Derivatives)**[39]	Chemicals	Botany, NSW	Plant decommissioned; production ceased	**≈ 110**	**Gas + electricity**
Oct – Nov 2024	**BHP Nickel West**[40]	Metals manufacturing	Kambalda, WA and Kwinana, WA	Smelter, refinery and mines put in to care and maintenance	**~ 3300**	**Gas + electricity**
Nov 2024 (ann.) – 2025	**Incitec Pivot – GeelongSSP Plant**[41]	Fertiliser (single superphosphate)	Geelong, VIC	Plant to close; shift to imports	**≈ 80 (40 direct + 40 contractors)**	**Thermal fuel + electricity**
Feb–Mar 2025	**Oceania Glass – Dandenong**[42]	Flat / architectural glass	Dandenong, VIC	Factory closed after administration	**≈ 150**	**Electricity + gas (furnace process)**
Sep–Oct 2025	**Alcoa – Kwinana Alumina Refinery**[43][44]	Alumina refining	Kwinana, WA	Permanent closure	**≈ 1050**	**Electricity + gas (multi-energy, high-temp calcination)**

Table 1) Summary of recent major manufacturing and refining closures, suspensions, and job losses

In addition to this sample, nearly all midstream (Processing/Refining) and downstream (Manufacturing/Advanced Processing) metals processing in Australia is now under threat. Every major smelter or refinery in the country is either **subsidised, curtailed, or under review**, putting over 73,000 jobs at risk.[45]

The Australian Government has committed over $5 billion in taxpayer support at time of publication, with more support likely required.[46]

Each closure removes not only direct jobs but also the networks of suppliers, contractors and service industries that sustain regional towns. The losses accumulate: **fewer exports, weaker supply chains, lower tax revenues**, and communities hollowed out by economic attrition.

2.2.3 A de facto carbon tax on production

The Safeguard Mechanism now functions as a stealth carbon tax.

Australia may not have an explicit carbon tax, but a network of overlapping regulations now imposes the same effect in practice, steadily raising the cost of producing, transporting, and financing almost everything made in this country.

Under the Safeguard Mechanism, big emitters have a *baseline* (a maximum allowed emissions level). If they exceed it, they must **buy carbon credits** (called Australian Carbon Credit Units or ACCUs), make their own cuts to emissions (which generate Safeguard Mechanism Credits, SMCs) or pay under a cost-containment mechanism.[47]

In July 2023, the Albanese Government overhauled Australia's Safeguard Mechanism to accelerate emissions reductions. Under the reforms, each facility's baseline now declines automatically by around 4.9% a year to 2030, forcing big emitters to either cut emissions or buy ACCUs to stay under their caps. Some businesses can receive special relief.

The new "declining baseline" system effectively tightens the cap each year, meaning that even if a company's emissions stay the same, the portion it must offset, and thus its carbon costs, will keep rising.

According to the Institute of Public Affairs, compliance with the Safeguard Mechanism will cost Australian businesses around **$1.7 billion per year by 2030**.[48] These costs are not evenly shared: **Queensland and Western Australia bear roughly 67% of the burden despite making up only 30% of the population**.[49]

This mechanism is now the main driver of a rising shadow carbon price across Australian heavy industry.

Sector	Typical carbon intensity	Carbon cost at $50/tCO$_2$	Share of product cost
Aluminium smelting	~13.5 t CO_2 / t Al[50]	**$675 per tonne Al**	~23.5 % of value[51]
Fertiliser / ammonia	~2.1 t CO_2 / t NH_3[52]	**$105 per tonne NH_3**	~11–28 %[53]
Crude Steel	~1.5 t CO_2 / t steel[54]	**$75 per tonne steel**	17–18 %[55]
Cement	~0.7 t CO_2 / t cement[56]	**$35 per tonne cement**	~24–28 %[57]
Glass manufacturing	~0.7–0.8 t CO / t glass[58] [59]	**$35–40 per tonne glass**	15–20 %[60]
Oil refining	~0.35 t CO_2 / kL fuel[61]	**$17.50 per kL** (~1.75¢/L)	~8–33 % of refining margin[62]

Table 2) Indicative carbon intensity and cost impacts across key energy-intensive industries

2.2.4 Additional stealth carbon taxes

Australians now face a maze of overlapping rules and hidden 'green' schemes, each adding financial burdens and complexity to families and businesses.

The Safeguard Mechanism is only one part of a growing web of implicit carbon charges.

Implicit Carbon Value. Agencies such as the Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC) and the Australian Energy Regulator (AER) now explicitly assign a "carbon value" in their cost-benefit assessments when evaluating grid investments, reliability standards, and transmission projects. This means that every major electricity market decision, from new power line approvals to dispatch modelling, is weighted against an assumed carbon price of around **$75 per tonne** of CO_2.[63] This carbon price increases annually to **$105 in 2030** and **$420 by 2050**.

In effect, this acts as a built-in shadow carbon tax within the regulatory system, favouring projects that reduce emissions and disadvantaging those that don't, regardless of the end price for the consumer.

New Vehicle Efficiency Standard (NVES). From 2025, the Labor Government will penalise car manufacturers for each utility or light-commercial vehicle sold above a CO_2 threshold. While marketed as an incentive for electric-vehicle uptake, the scheme functions as a carbon tax on work vehicles. Modelling by the **Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries** shows that by 2030 this could **add more than $10,000 to the price of Australia's most popular utes**, a cost ultimately borne by tradesmen, farmers, and small businesses that cannot substitute electric alternatives.[64] Despite repeated requests, the Government has refused to release its internal modelling of these price impacts.

Climate-Related Financial Disclosure Rules. Almost all Australian businesses will soon be caught in a new compliance net. Although formal obligations fall on large, listed entities and financial institutions, these organisations must gather emissions data from their entire supply chains. According to the Treasury, the direct cost of establishing and maintaining this reporting regime will exceed **$1 billion**, cascading down to tens of thousands of small suppliers, family farms, and regional contractors forced to compile carbon data they lack the resources to track.[65]

Renewable-certificate schemes (LGCs and STCs). Renewable certificate schemes (LGCs and STCs), environmental permitting, and emissions constraints act as further hidden taxes and levies that raise the effective cost of bills for consumers. LGCs traded between **$35–$50/MWh** in 2024–25, and although retailers, not generators, are formally liable, the cost is passed through to consumers and reflected in higher electricity prices.[66]

Combined, these policies embed an effective carbon price signal well above the market price of ACCUs (currently ~$35/ tCO_2), driving up the cost of carbon-intensive power and passing those costs on to industrial and household users.

2.3 Net zero is hurting our budget

Australia's net zero programs now expose taxpayers to $120–140 billion in public liabilities – roughly ten times the cost of extending every major coal plant for two more decades.

Government intervention in Australia's energy transition has expanded dramatically since 2022. What began as a suite of targeted clean-energy programs has evolved into a network of **contracts, concessional loans, tax credits and direct grants** that now define the industrial and fiscal architecture of net zero.

Across Commonwealth and state governments, the combined **public exposure to "net-zero-aligned" programs is conservatively estimated at $120–140 billion**, once contingent liabilities, hydrogen incentives and state investment pipelines are included.

2.3.1 Commonwealth Exposure

The Commonwealth alone has underwritten $90–100 billion in direct and contingent exposure through hydrogen subsidies, transmission finance, and green-industry programs.

The Commonwealth alone has underwritten **$90–100 billion** in direct and contingent exposure through hydrogen subsidies, transmission finance, and green-industry programs over the next decade.

Direct Hydrogen Programs — ≈ $12 billion

Commonwealth hydrogen commitments total roughly **$12 billion.**[67] Key components include:

- **Hydrogen Headstart Rounds 1 & 2** Competitive production support grants valued at **$3.25 billion** to underwrite the first commercial hydrogen project
- **Hydrogen Production Tax Incentive** A refundable credit of up to **$2/kg** for renewable hydrogen production, worth **$6.7 billion** over ten years
- **ARENA / CEFC Hydrogen Facilities** Around **$2 billion** in concessional funding for early-stage hydrogen infrastructure, electrolysers, and hub development

Transmission and System Infrastructure — ≈ $20 billion

Rewiring the Nation (RTN)[68] provides **$20 billion** in concessional finance through the CEFC for high-voltage transmission, interconnectors and grid-scale storage, including:

- **$2.25 billion** for Victoria's VNI West, and
- **$3 billion** for Western Australia's grid rebuild.

Industrial and Clean-Manufacturing Policy — ≈ $38 billion

A large share of fiscal exposure arises from programs designed to build sovereign capability in clean industry, critical minerals, and advanced manufacturing. These include:

- **Future Made in Australia (FMIA)**[69] — A **$22.7 billion** ten-year package of production tax credits and industry incentives. Excluding the Hydrogen Tax Incentive already counted above, net exposure is **≈ $16 billion**
- **National Reconstruction Fund (NRF)**[70] — A **$15 billion** financing facility supporting strategic manufacturing; about **two-thirds (~$10 billion)** is energy-transition-aligned
- **Critical Minerals Facility** — **$4 billion** in loans administered by Export Finance Australia to de-risk strategic mining

and processing projects (Hyresource identifies this facility as "hydrogen-eligible" for hydrogen tech as well as minerals required for EVs and renewables)[71]

- **Battery Breakthrough Initiative** — **$0.5 billion** in grants to scale domestic battery manufacturing[72]
- **Solar Sunshot Program** — **$1 billion** in support for onshore solar-panel manufacturing[73]
- **Powering the Regions Fund (PRF)** — **$1.9 billion** to help emissions-intensive, trade-exposed industries decarbonise under the Safeguard Mechanism[74]
- **CEFC / ARENA Recapitalisations and Innovation Grants** — Around **$3–4 billion** in additional concessional finance and R&D support across clean-tech sectors[75]

Market Underwriting and Contingent Schemes — ≈ $20–30 billion

The **Capacity Investment Scheme (CIS)** uses long-term contracts to underwrite roughly **40 GW** of new generation and firming capacity. Depending on market outcomes, we have estimated the Commonwealth's **contingent exposure** to at least **$20–30 billion.**[76] [77]

2.3.2 State Exposure

States add a further $30–40 billion.

- **NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap** — Underwriting up to **$32 billion** of private investment through Renewable Energy Zones and long-term energy-service agreements[78]
- **Victoria State Electricity Commission (SEC)** — **$1 billion** public equity commitment for 4.5 GW of renewables and storage[79]
- **State hydrogen programs** — Combined **$4.43 billion** in hydrogen-specific commitments across Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia, NSW and Victoria[80]

2.3.3 Estimating the true cost of the transition

Full decarbonisation could cost $7–9 trillion to 2060.

Between the Commonwealth and the states, more than **$100 billion** has been pledged to decarbonisation programs – roughly ten times the cost of extending the life of every major coal plant in the National Electricity Market for another two decades.

This is just a fraction of the investment that will be required to meet Australia's emission targets by 2050. The Net Zero Australia project, led by the University of Melbourne, University of Queensland, Princeton University, and Nous Group, modelled multiple pathways to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. Drawing on Princeton's Net-Zero America framework and detailed Australian energy system data, the consortium estimated that **$7–9 trillion** in cumulative capital investment will be required to fully decarbonise Australia's domestic economy and export sectors by 2060, with **$1.2–1.5 trillion needed by 2030** between government and private sources**.**[81]

Instead of directing that capital toward firm, low-cost generation, governments have chosen to construct an entirely new energy system, one that depends on transmission sprawl, subsidised renewables, and taxpayer-backed firming contracts.

The transition's financing model ensures that the costs of energy policy are paid twice – once through higher electricity prices, and again through higher taxes and public debt.

The cumulative exposure represents a structural burden that will outlast any election cycle and constrain future budgets for decades.

2.4 Net zero is hurting the environment

Ninety-five per cent of Australia's emissions cuts since 2005 have come not from cleaner technology, but from restricting farmers and re-engineering land use.

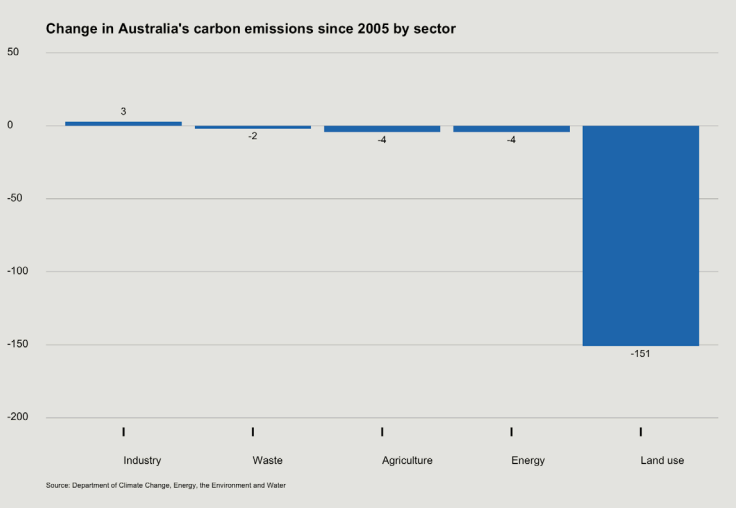
Australia's reductions in emissions so far have not primarily come from behavioural changes or even from the roll-out of renewable electricity. Almost all of Australia's emissions reductions have come from changing our landscape and altering our environment.

2.4.1 Emissions cuts from farmland

The Government's net-zero plan would need 5–15 million hectares of new forest — up to 2.5 times the size of Tasmania.

Australia has reduced its net carbon emissions by 158 million tonnes since 2005, as measured by Australia's carbon inventory lodged with the United Nations.[82] However, 151 million tonnes of these reductions have been due to changes in land use under the Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) category (see figure g). Across *all* other sectors of the Australian economy, there has been just 7 million tonnes reduction in Australia's carbon emissions. In other words, 95% of Australia's emissions reductions have come from restricting what our farmers can do with their land.

Figure g) Source:DCCEEW[83]



The LULUCF category measures the changes in land use which can change the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. For example, the conversion of forests to grazing lands counts as an addition to carbon emissions because fewer trees reduce the amount of carbon dioxide absorbed. Conversely, the re-forestation of land decreases carbon emissions because the additional trees act as a carbon "sink".

In effect, Australia's carbon emissions targets have only been met through the reduction of non-forested land, most of it agricultural land. Such a reduction hurts the economic viability of many small farming towns because less farmland means there are fewer farming jobs and hence less money spent in the local community.

These reductions have largely occurred through the imposition of new rules and regulations on farmers, especially in the form of more stringent native vegetation laws introduced by State Governments. These laws remove the right of farmers to develop their own land, and they have done so without any compensation.

The removal of farmers' rights with no compensation has been criticised by the Productivity Commission:

The Commission has concluded that the current heavy reliance on regulating the clearance of native vegetation on private rural land, typically without compensating landholders, has imposed substantial costs on many landholders who have retained native vegetation on their properties. Nor does regulation appear to have been particularly effective in achieving environmental goals — in some situations, it seems to have been counter-productive.[84]

Since 2005, 7.2 million hectares of Australian land has been converted to forest.[85] Today this generates a net reduction in our emissions of around 50 million tonnes per year.[86]

The Government's net zero plan seeks to generate an additional 107 million tonnes per year of carbon offsets by 2050 using reforestation from "*new* sequestration projects".[87] Despite questioning in the Senate, the Government claims that it has not estimated how much land will be needed to convert to forest to achieve this outcome. However, ABARES did admit that the maximum carbon abatement rate is 21 tonnes per hectare.[88] The historical record indicates that the actual carbon abatement rates are around 7 tonnes per hectare.

This means that the Government's net zero plan would require an additional 5 to 15 million hectares of land to be converted to forest. Tasmania is 6.3 million hectares in size. So, the Government's net zero plan requires an area of land of at least

80% of Tasmania and up to 2.5 times the size of Tasmania.

Some suggest that this is not a problem because reforestation can occur in Australia's vast arid landscape. However, such arid parts of the country are not suitable as a carbon sink because the lack of fertility neither supports sufficient growth of trees nor enables an adequate reduction in carbon emissions.

The conversion of Australian land to forests has hitherto been focused in our traditional food growing areas of the Murray-Darling, the southwest wheatbelt in Western Australia and other food growing districts (see figure h).

These figures are confirmed by work undertaken for Net Zero Australia, a consortium of experts from the University of Queensland, the University of Melbourne, Princeton University and the Nous Group. This work concluded that to reach net zero, an addition 5.1 million hectares of land would have to be converted to forest. Net Zero Australia concluded that "This will be very difficult" and that most of this reforestation would occur in Australia's food growing districts.[89]

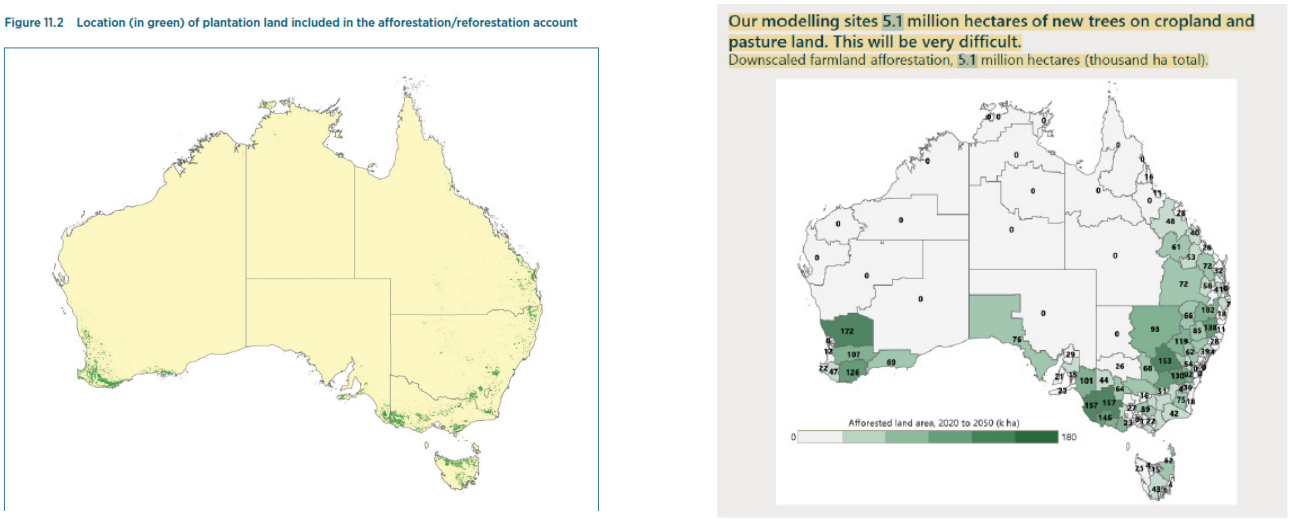


Figure h) Source: Net Zero Australia[90]

Notwithstanding this reduction in food growing potential, the Government's net zero plan does nothing to estimate its impact on Australia's food security. The Government has not sought to estimate where carbon sequestration will occur let alone restrict them lest they damage Australia's food security.

2.4.2 Renewable Expansion Consuming the Landscape

Meeting our net-zero targets through wind and solar would require 12–27 million hectares of land — three to six times the size of Tasmania.

In addition to reforestation, the Government's net zero plan requires an enormous expansion of large scale wind and solar power. These projects are almost exclusively concentrated in regional areas. The Government has not provided any estimates about how much land will be devoted to wind and solar in its net zero plans.

Compared to nuclear power, solar takes up 60 times more land, and wind around 300

times more land to produce the same amount of electricity. Even coal power (without carbon capture and storage) has a smaller footprint than large scale onshore wind and solar.[91]

Environmental advocates, including *Rainforest Reserves Australia*, have warned of severe biodiversity impacts across Queensland's Renewable Energy Zones (REZs).[92] Thousands of hectares of remnant vegetation are being cleared for wind turbines, roads, and transmission corridors, which fragments rainforests and threatens endangered species such as koalas and greater gliders.

Projects like the **Kaban Green Power Hub** and **Upper Burdekin Wind Farm** have already disrupted critical wildlife corridors, altered fire regimes, and introduced invasive species and pollutants into previously intact ecosystems.

Building on these concerns, environmental photographer **Steve Nowakowski** launched *The Truth Map* in October 2025, an interactive national database mapping **1,126 renewable projects** from operational to proposed. It reveals the extraordinary scale of the rollout: over **31,000 wind turbines**, **28,000 km of transmission lines**, **44,000 km of haulage roads**, and more than **350 million solar panels.**[93]

Official modelling reinforces this picture. The **Australian Energy Market Operator's (AEMO) 2024 Integrated System Plan** projects a **10,000–20,000 km² footprint** across Renewable Energy Zones and **10,000 km** of new high-voltage transmission under its Step Change scenario.[94]

The **Net Zero Australia** modelling extends further, incorporating export pathways and electrification targets that could see up to **3 terawatts (TW)** of variable renewable energy (VRE) capacity by 2060, covering **110,000–120,000 km²** (around **1.6% of Australia's landmass**).[95]

This includes roughly **2.7 TW of solar** (≈ 27,000 km²) and widespread onshore wind development. Their report states,

Land use change will impact communities and habitats across Australia. First Nations, farmers, and biodiversity face significant changes. E+ estimates the area, of land use change at 120,179 km², equivalent to over half the area of Victoria.[96]

Other assessments suggest even larger impacts. The **Institute of Public Affairs (IPA)** estimates that replacing Australia's hydrocarbon energy (including exports) entirely with renewables could require **57–181 million hectares** (**7–23% of Australia's landmass**) depending on technology mix and energy demand growth.[97] Their modelling assumes annual energy demand growth of **4.25%** to 2050, broadly consistent with IMF projections of **4.6% Asia-Pacific economic growth** if Australia were to act as a clean-energy supplier to its trading partners.[98]

2.4.3 Destroying the Environment to Protect the Climate

Projects built to "save the environment" are now clearing hundreds of thousands of hectares of habitat and fragmenting ecosystems across Queensland and beyond.

For regional communities, the consequences are immediate. Productive farmland is being converted into subsidised energy estates; property values are falling near high-voltage transmission lines; and neighbours are often divided by compensation schemes that favour corporate developers over local stewardship.

Farmers face new restrictions on aerial spraying, irrigation, and machinery use near transmission easements, while wildlife corridors and water catchments once managed under coherent state planning are being re-zoned piecemeal for energy projects, with minimal environmental oversight.

Renewables also generate a growing physical and waste legacy: millions of panels, turbine blades, and batteries will require disposal or recycling solutions Australia does not yet possess.

The result is a striking paradox: policies designed to "save the environment" are eroding the very landscapes they claim to protect.

3. Australia's Disproportionate Contribution to Global Emissions Reduction

3.1 Australia's Performance in Global Context

Since 2005, Australia has reduced emissions by 24%, while global emissions have risen 33% and OECD emissions have fallen just 14%, based on World Bank data.[99]

Australia is therefore delivering reductions at nearly twice the pace of comparable economies.

For two decades, advanced economies in Europe and North America have invested trillions of dollars in the energy transition, yet global emissions continue to rise. The underlying reason is structural: energy demand growth in developing nations has exceeded the reductions achieved elsewhere.

Asia now accounts for more than half of global CO_2 emissions[100] and more than half of the world's manufacturing output.[101]

3.2 Carbon Leakage and the Offshoring of Emissions

Global emissions have not fallen; they have moved. Heavy industry has shifted to countries with weaker standards and cheaper power.

Much of what is presented as "global progress" on climate policy reflects **carbon leakage** — the shifting of emissions-intensive industries from high-standard jurisdictions to those with lower costs and weaker governance.

As mining, refining, and manufacturing relocate offshore, emissions are not eliminated but merely displaced.

The effect is to make **Australia poorer without making the world cleaner**. Our energy policies have accelerated the erosion of domestic industry and regional employment while increasing dependence on imports produced using higher-emission energy systems.

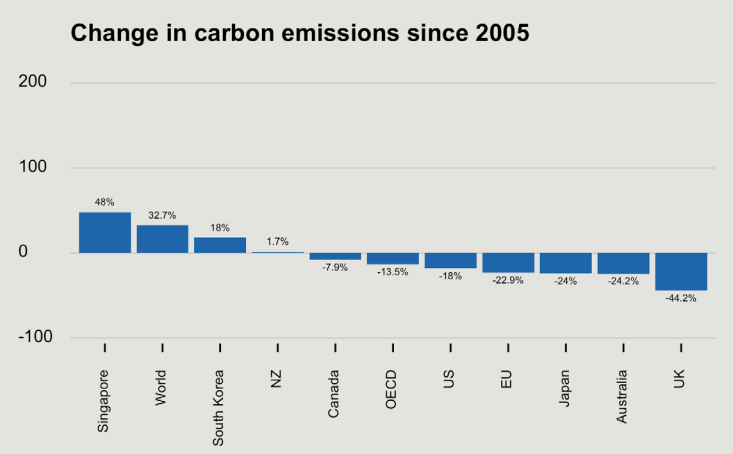


Figure i) Source: World Bank[102]

3.3 Historical Record of Compliance and Over-Performance

Australia is one of the few nations to fully comply with its Kyoto and Paris commitments. Most major economies never met their targets.

The Labor Government's Net Zero Plan repeatedly claims that "around 80% of global GDP is covered by national net zero commitments, including Australia's major trading partners such as China, Japan and the Republic of Korea".[103] Little evidence is provided that countries have infact acted rather than just promised to act. It makes more sense to take note of what people do, not what they say they will do.

The historical record shows that Australia is one of a few countries that complied with the original Kyoto agreement to reduce global emissions in 1997.

That original agreement only imposed commitments on so-called "Annex 1 countries", largely developed nations and "economies in transition" from the former Eastern Bloc. The Eastern Bloc countries were not required to make emissions cuts because they had only to keep their emissions below 1990 levels which were artificially elevated before the fall of the Soviet Union.[104]

Of the developed nations, only the EU (then as a bloc of 15 nations), Australia, New Zealand, Norway and Switzerland met their targets.[105] The US never ratified the agreement. Canada missed their targets by a long way and eventually pulled out of the agreement. Japan met their first period targets (2008 to 2012) but pulled out of the second period (2013 to 2020) after the Fukushima incident. South Korea and China had no targets imposed on them.[106]

So, far from the Government's "80 per cent of world GDP" figure, countries representing just 20 per cent of world GDP have made the emissions cuts they promised under the Kyoto agreement. None of Australia's major trading partners (except New Zealand) or global competitors met Kyoto emissions reduction targets.

3.4 Comparative Reductions Since the Paris Agreement

Since the 2015 Paris Agreement, Australia's emissions have fallen by 17%, compared to just 7% across the OECD — over double the pace of other advanced economies.

The trend has intensified since the **2015 Paris Agreement**.

- Across the OECD, emissions have fallen by **7%**.[107]
- In Australia, they have fallen by **17%** — **more than double** the OECD average.[108] [109]

Since the Paris Agreement developed economies have reduced emissions by roughly **1% per year**,[110] while Australia's rate has been closer to **2%**.[111]

If we had simply matched the OECD's average pace, current annual reductions would total around **4.5 million tonnes**.[112]

Under the Labor Government's **2035 target**, Australians are being asked to deliver cuts exceeding **200 million tonnes** over the next decade[113] — an annual rate of **21 million tonnes**, four times faster than our peers. This rate is more than double the emissions reductions Australia has achieved over the past two decades of 9 million tonnes per year.[114]

Australia's over-achievement on emissions reductions has so far exceeded that of the rest of the world that we could pause our emissions until 2030 and still be at the same proportionate reduction as other advanced economies. Furthermore, this even assumes that advanced economies continue to reduce their emissions in accordance with their promises under the Paris agreement, or in line with their historical reductions if they have not updated their promises.

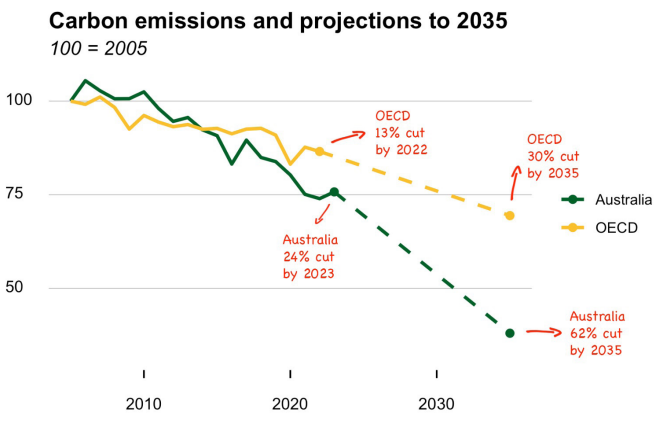


Figure j) Source: World Bank[115]

3.5 Comparison of 2035 Targets Among Developed Economies

Of the OECD's 38 members, only eight have 2035 targets — and Australia's is the second most severe after the United Kingdom.

The Labor Government's official emissions reductions targets for 2035 are much greater than those of almost all other countries. Australia has announced a cut of 62% to 70% on 2005 levels by 2035.[116]

Australia is one of just 8 OECD countries that have announced 2035 targets.

Of these countries, only the UK has announced more severe reductions than Australia, and Switzerland has announced cuts within Australia's range.

The European Union has failed to agree on 2035 targets to date. The EU Environment Council has released a non-binding, proposed indicative range of 66.25% to 72.5%.[117]

Announced 2035 targets under the Paris Agreement

Country	Target	Base year
Australia	62% to 70%[118]	below 2005 levels
Japan	60%[119]	below 2013 financial year levels
New Zealand	51% to 55%[120]	below 2005 levels
Canada	45% to 50%[121]	below 2005 levels
United Kingdom	81%[122]	below 1990 levels
Switzerland	>65%[123]	below 1990 levels
Iceland	50% to 55%[124]	below 2005 levels
Colombia	161mtCo2e cap[125]	equivalent to a 33% to 35% cut on 2005 levels

Table 3) Announced 2035 targets under the Paris Agreement

The gap between Australia's cuts and those in the developed world is likely to grow wider in the future. By 2035, Australia could achieve a level of emissions reduction double that of the rest of the world. Assuming all OECD countries meet at least their minimum Paris targets, and that those without 2035 targets continue to decrease their emissions in line with historical reductions, OECD nations will reduce their emissions by 31 per cent. This is just half Labor's minimum 62 per cent cut.

For a nation responsible for just **1% of global emissions**, Labor's 2035 targets represents a **disproportionate and economically costly commitment**.

It also places Australia on a decarbonisation trajectory significantly faster than that of its major trading partners — many of which continue to expand fossil-fuel use or provide targeted subsidies to protect local industries.

3.6 Equity Considerations

Australians deserve a more equitable approach.

Current legislation does not require the **Climate Change Authority** or the **Net Zero Plan** to assess how Australia's trajectory compares with the *actual performance* of other nations. This omission has left Australia pursuing one of the world's most aggressive emissions-reduction paths without reference to fairness, competitiveness, or national interest.

A more balanced approach would align Australia's targets with the real-world pace of global change — recognising that **doing more than our fair share comes at the direct cost of Australian households, workers, and industries**.

4. Delivering a High Energy Australia

4.1 The Case for a New Direction

Australia can cut emissions responsibly while restoring affordable, reliable, secure energy.

Australia's current approach to net zero is imposing heavy economic, social, and strategic costs. Energy prices are rising, manufacturing is contracting, and national security risks are growing. This burden falls hardest on regional communities.

A sustainable pathway forward must recognise that carbon reduction is only one of many legitimate national objectives. **Energy affordability, industrial strength, environmental protection, and national security must be held in balance.**

We propose that we replace the rigid pursuit of net zero with an approach that restores Australia's economic competitiveness while continuing responsible emissions reduction.

4.2 Guiding Principles for Reform

Australia's future climate and energy policy should be guided by clear principles that put the national interest first:

1. **Lower energy prices first:** Energy policy should prioritise reducing prices for households and businesses, not chasing arbitrary emissions targets.
2. **Do our fair share:** Australia should reduce emissions in line with comparable nations, not ahead of them.
3. **Equal Burden-Sharing:** The cost of emissions reduction should be distributed evenly, not concentrated on regional industries or low-income households.
4. **Empower local action:** Local communities should lead initiatives such as waterway protection, land restoration, soil carbon and carbon capture projects to deliver jobs and stewardship across Australia.
5. **Back innovation and support all technologies:** No energy source should be excluded from the mix if it can deliver low-cost, reliable supply
6. **Protect our security and prosperity:** Projects critical to national defence or economic resilience should not be constrained by emissions caps.

4.3 Re-Establishing Affordability as the Core Objective

The first duty of energy policy is to reduce costs for Australian households and businesses.

The intrinsic link between **energy and human potential** cannot be overstated. Nations that guarantee abundant, affordable, and reliable energy provide the best possible conditions for **education, enterprise, and innovation**, the foundations of prosperity.

Conversely, energy insecurity erodes opportunity and entrenches inequality. When power becomes unaffordable, it weakens families, limits business investment, and strains the social contract that underpins national cohesion. This is why it is essential that we re-restablish affordability as the core objective of our energy policy.

For much of Australia's modern history, **cheap and reliable energy** has been a comparative advantage and a key ingredient in national progress and regional development.

Australia, endowed with some of the **richest energy resources on Earth**, should have among the lowest electricity prices in the world. Instead, we now face some of the highest. This paradox is not inevitable; it is the product of a policy architecture that plans the energy system around **emissions targets**, not **human welfare**.

Australia's electricity system is designed to meet arbitrary renewable and emissions targets, not to minimise the cost of energy. The Integrated System Plan (ISP), developed by the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO), is the primary strategy for coordinating the construction of electricity infrastructure to maintain a reliable supply of electricity to consumers.

Many senior Australian policymakers remain under the misapprehension that the ISP generates a plan to produce electricity at the "least cost". For example, Matt Kean, the Chair of the Climate Change Authority, told Senate estimates recently that:

The Integrated System Plan has looked at how we replace the NEM or effectively replace the existing sources of generation that provide electricity to the nation and the cheapest pathway for doing that.[126]

Under the National Electricity Rules, the AEMO "must consider the emissions reduction targets stated in the targets statement" when preparing the ISP.[127]

In practice, AEMO has interpreted this provision to mean that it *only* considers scenarios consistent with a net zero target, an 82% renewables target and other Federal and State Government emissions targets. This heavily constrains the options that AEMO investigates and means that the ISP does not show the "cheapest way" of replacing electricity generation in Australia. Instead, the ISP shows the cheapest way to get to net zero, as well as other related emissions and renewable energy targets.

As AEMO itself made clear to the Senate last year:

Senator CANAVAN: So, in no way can the ISP be characterised as any cost-benefit analysis of the decision to impose certain carbon budgets, net zero targets, renewable energy targets or any other energy policy settings that are an input to your modelling?

Ms York [Executive General Manager of System Design, AEMO]: No, we're only permitted, within the framework that we have as set out in the rules, to take those policies as set out in the target statement as an input and then to work out what is the lowest cost way to get to net zero by 2050, which every state has included in the target statement, and the other range of policies that are included—what's the lowest cost pathway given those parameters.[128]

Given the importance of low energy prices for economic prosperity and social justice, it is unacceptable that our energy planning processes do not calculate how we could have the lowest electricity prices**.** This approach must change. The **National Electricity Rules** should be amended so that AEMO's overriding objective is to **deliver the lowest-possible energy prices for Australian households and businesses while maintaining reliability**.

Every other policy setting, from market regulation to investment approval, should align with this simple goal: **abundant, affordable energy as the cornerstone of national prosperity**.

4.4 Aligning Australia's Targets with the Global Reality

Australia should not move faster than the world — or punish its citizens for meeting the targets earlier.

A confident and prosperous nation contributes to global challenges in a way that strengthens, not weakens, its own foundations.

Australia should play its part in reducing global emissions, but it should do so **proportionately**, ensuring that the costs we bear do not exceed the benefits we deliver. Real leadership is measured not by how fast we move, but by whether our actions make both **moral and practical sense**.

Australia accounts for just **1% of global emissions**, yet we have already reduced them faster than almost any comparable nation.[129] Since 2005, our emissions have fallen by **24%,** compared with **14%** across the OECD.[130] If the current trend continues, Australia could pause its reductions for a decade and still remain ahead of most advanced economies by 2035.

That achievement should be recognised as Australia taking on more than its fair share, not dismissed as insufficient ambition.

Climate action can only succeed through **collective endeavour**. Treating it as a race guarantees that the "winners" are those who make themselves poorer first. A balanced approach ensures that environmental progress is not bought at the expense of jobs, productivity, or national security.

To secure that balance, Australia's **emissions targets should be calibrated to global reality**.

The *Climate Change Authority Act* should be amended to require the Authority to consider how much other countries have *actually achieved* before advising on new targets. Our goals should be based on what nations *do*, not what they *say they will do*.

Looking ahead, we suggest that a sensible range for Australia's future reductions lies between **2 and 8 million tonnes per year** to 2035, depending on the pace of change in other advanced economies:

- Matching the OECD's long-run performance (≈1% annual cuts) would imply reductions of **4–5 million tonnes per year**;
- A more moderate alignment, which would let other advanced countries "catch up" to Australia's rate of emissions reduction, would mean **2 million tonnes per year**;
- Continuing our own historical rate of progress (≈2% annually) would deliver **9 million tonnes per year**.

Emissions reductions of these amounts would see Australia reduce its emissions by 30% to 40%, of 2005 levels, by 2035.

Each of these pathways represents a **responsible, achievable, and fair contribution** to global efforts far more realistic than Labor's proposed cuts of **21 million tonnes per year**, a pace **four times faster than what comparable nations have been doing**.

That approach risks undermining the very prosperity and capability that make meaningful environmental action possible.

Australia's goal should be simple and noble: to be a nation that **acts with integrity, contributes with purpose, and safeguards the wellbeing of its own people**.

4.5 A Fair and Effective Way to Reduce Emissions

A fair approach sharing the burden equitably

Australia's path to lower emissions must also be a path to **greater fairness and national cohesion**.

Climate policy that concentrates burdens on regional communities, industries, or households divides the nation. Policy built on **shared responsibility and transparent contribution** strengthens it.

Australia has already shown how this can be done. Between 2014 and 2023, the **Emissions Reduction Fund (ERF)** provided a practical, nation-building model for how to cut emissions while keeping faith with economic reality.[131]

Through competitive "reverse auctions," the government directly purchased low-cost abatement from farmers, landholders, and innovators who could deliver measurable results. By 2024, the ERF had secured **81 million tonnes of emissions reductions**[132] at an average cost of roughly **$12 per tonne**,[133] [134] proving that smart incentives can achieve far more than blunt regulations.

Independent reviews by both the **ERF's 2020 review panel**[135] and the **Australian National Audit Office**[136] found the scheme was effective and well-managed. It succeeded because it treated Australians as **partners in progress**, not subjects of control, rewarding initiative, innovation, and stewardship.

This **"carrots, not sticks"** model should again be at the heart of Australia's climate policy. A renewed Emissions Reduction Fund could deliver between **2 and 9 million** tonnes of annual abatement, at a cost of **less than $500 million per year,** even assuming higher carbon prices.

That's a fraction of the $9 billion currently spent on complex subsidies, regulatory programs, and bureaucratic overheads tied to net-zero initiatives.[137]

Labor's current approach to reaching net zero has become a confusing array of overlapping carbon prices, regulations and restrictions.[138]

For example, under the Safeguard Mechanism, over 200 Australian businesses face requirements to reduce their emissions by around 5% per year to reach net zero goals. Such reductions will come at a cost either through investments to directly reduce emissions in their business or to purchase carbon credits. The Climate Change Authority concluded that somewhere between 58% and 68% of emissions reductions from the Safeguard Mechanism will come through the purchase of carbon credits until 2030.[139] In effect, the Safeguard Mechanism is a stealth carbon tax.

The Institute of Public Affairs has estimated that the annual cost of meeting the Safeguard Mechanism will be $1.7 billion per year by 2030.[140] These costs do not apply equally across Australia. Queensland and Western Australian businesses account for 67% of the costs of the Safeguard Mechanism despite making up just 30% of Australia's population.

Further, this is a carbon tax that does not treat Australian businesses equally. Businesses that produce just over 100,000 tonnes of direct emissions (so-called scope 1 emissions) face this carbon tax. Businesses with emissions under 100,000 face no tax or restrictions. In addition, electricity use does not contribute to the emissions of a business (which comes under scope 2 emissions). As a result, businesses in remote areas are unfairly penalised. For example, an off-grid refinery in a remote area, which must produce its own electricity (from a diesel generator, for example), has to account for these emissions. An equivalent smelter that is on the grid (and may rely on coal fired power) does not have to account for those same types of emissions.

The Labor Government has also imposed a New Vehicle Efficiency Standard, which imposes penalties on the sales of utility vehicles and vans (up to 3.5 tonnes) over a carbon dioxide threshold. Notionally, this policy intends to force Australian consumers to buy electric vehicles. However, some businesses have no choice but to use cars that will exceed these thresholds and thus placing another stealth carbon tax on them that is not faced by other Australians. Modelling by the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries showed that the cost of this carbon tax could add over $10,000 to the purchase price of Australia's most popular utes by 2030[141]. Notably, the Labor Government has refused to release its modelling of the cost impact.

Finally, almost all Australian businesses are being subjected to new Climate-Related Financial Disclosure Rules. While these rules only place direct obligations on large businesses and financial institutions, these businesses will be required to collect information from their consumers and suppliers about the carbon emissions of their supply chain. This means that even small businesses and farmers will be swept up in new reams of carbon red tape. According to the Treasury the cost of complying with this system will be over $1 billion.[142]

This array of inconsistent rules, regulations and taxes imposes a hidden cost on the Australian economy and has a direct impact on our productivity performance. The Safeguard Mechanism, the New Vehicle Efficiency Standard and the new Climate-related Financial Disclosure rules should be scrapped.

This approach would not only cut emissions more efficiently, but it would also do so **honestly and equitably**. Every taxpayer would contribute transparently through the national budget, rather than through hidden costs embedded in electricity bills or compliance regimes that quietly erode productivity.

In this model, **Australians work together**, sharing both the cost and the credit for environmental progress. It reclaims the spirit of practical reform: that we can protect our land and atmosphere without sacrificing prosperity, dignity, or common purpose.

By empowering innovation instead of punishing production, a revitalised Emissions Reduction Fund would demonstrate that **responsible stewardship and economic strength are not competing goals – they are the same goal**.

4.6 Innovation and Adaptation: Supporting Low-Emissions Technologies That Strengthen Productivity and Environmental Performance

The goal is not just cleaner energy, it is better energy: reliable, affordable, and abundant.

Australia's future prosperity depends on technologies that enhance both our **economic strength and environmental stewardship**. This paper is trying to bring a better balance between sometimes competing interests to improve living standards, defend our nation and care for our environment. But *within* environmental policy it is also important to strike a balance between different objectives.

While climate change is an environmental challenge that deserves a response, there are other pressing environmental challenges too. Air pollution kills millions of people and animals every year. Most of this pollution arises from the burning of low-quality fuel in low-quality stoves, furnaces and boilers. Around 730 million people in the world do not have access to electricity. The proven way to reduce air pollution is to build modern power plants (including the use of fossil fuels) that provide electricity or efficient heating options that capture any pollutants and remove smog from the sky. Any climate policy that restricts access to affordable and reliable energy entrenches poverty and ultimately kills people by preventing them from using cleaner forms of energy.

4.6.1 From mitigation to adaptation

There is a need for a more practical and proactive approach to climate adaptation

A univariate fixation on climate change takes the focus away from other environmental priorities that deserve equal attention. We see that directly in the roll-out of renewable energy projects that destroy valuable environments. Indirect costs are a real problem if resources are unevenly distributed to climate priorities and away from other environmental needs.

For example, in 2023 the Australian Government ended the role of the Nationals Soils Advocate.[143] While the Government plans to continue to fund the National Soils Action Plan to 2028, it is now without a leader or direction. The $56 million investment seems paltry compared to the billions splashed at climate change action. We should re-establish the role of the Nationals Soils Advocate and look to properly fund the improvement of our soils, a strategy which by itself can help reduce emissions and increase farm productivity.

In addition, the Labor Government's climate policies remain too focused on mitigation (reducing emissions) rather than adaptation. Many of the policies that the Government has announced as part of its climate adaptation plan were happening anyway, such as the Future Drought Fund, the Cyclone Reinsurance Pool and Green Bonds.

Practical and proactive approaches to climate adaptation are essential. For example, if Australia is at risk of increased bushfire risk, more should be done to prepare by way of cool-weather burnoffs, thinning forests, establishing fire trails and easing restrictions on landowners to clear areas that increase fire risk. Instead, some state governments are placing more restrictions on such preparations. In addition, if rainfall is set to become more variable in parts of Australia, we should build more dams in order to manage such variability. The current Government scrapped Australia's National Water Grid Fund on coming to power.

The Australian Government should develop a new climate adaptation plan that is dedicated to responding to the real risks of climate change on Australians.

4.6.2 Embracing emerging energy technologies

Nuclear power stands out as the technology most capable of delivering affordable and reliable energy, with low emissions and a low environmental footprint protecting farmland and biodiversity

Australia's energy future must be built on innovation, not ideology. The current federal moratorium on nuclear energy was introduced at a time of political compromise and public fear, and the position must be reconsidered with all available scientific evidence and environmental realities. The moratorium is a barrier to innovation and progress which prevents Australia from even considering one of the world's most effective zero-emissions technologies. Modern nuclear energy offers high-capacity, zero-emission, dispatchable power that complements renewables and strengthens grid reliability.[144]

Lifting the moratorium would not commit Australia to building reactors tomorrow; it would simply allow us to explore and assess the full range of technologies available. By amending the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* and the *Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Act 1998*, we can give Australian scientists, engineers and investors the freedom to study and trial new options, from small modular reactors to advanced clean-fuel systems and next-generation renewables.

This reform would also open the door to international collaboration. More than 30 countries have already included nuclear energy in their net zero plans, recognising its value in stabilising renewable heavy grids and protecting national sovereignty over energy supply.[145] Australia should not be left behind.

Our energy system should not force a choice between productivity and sustainability. It should deliver both. Among the emerging solutions, **nuclear power** stands out as the technology most capable of achieving that balance.

From an environmental standpoint, nuclear energy offers **clean power with a light footprint**. It produces near-zero emissions and requires a fraction of the land used by large-scale wind or solar installations, protecting farmland and biodiversity. If we are serious about reducing emissions without scarring the landscape, nuclear energy must be part of the national conversation.

The economics are equally compelling. When viewed across its full life cycle, from construction to decommissioning, **nuclear is among the most cost-competitive sources of baseload power**. It provides predictable pricing, insulation from fuel volatility, and the long-term certainty needed for investment in heavy industry.

Australia's uranium endowment gives us a natural advantage few nations enjoy. We hold **nearly 30% of the world's known reserves**, enough to power our economy for centuries.[146] A domestic nuclear industry would reduce dependence on imported energy infrastructure, strengthen sovereign capability, and create high-skilled regional employment.

Australia should remove its outdated ban on nuclear power.

A **High Energy Australia** is one that trusts its people, its scientists and its natural wealth to deliver clean, abundant, affordable power for generations to come.

4.7 Energy Freedom: Ending Prohibitions and Restoring Choice

Australia cannot have low prices without the plentiful supply of energy and cannot have plentiful supply while banning what works.

Australia's prosperity depends on the freedom to use every tool at our disposal. For generations, affordable and reliable energy powered our industries, sustained regional towns, and gave every Australian household the confidence that the lights would turn on and stay on. That confidence is now at serious risk.

Since 2015, the NEM has only added about 2,150 MW of new dispatchable generation. Yet this modest increase has been overshadowed by the retirement of several key coal-fired power plants, whose production adds up to around 4,550 MW.

These closures have resulted in a **net loss of around 2,400 MW** in dispatchable capacity.

Battery Storage and Gas Turbines have made up the majority of the dispatchable capacity that has been added to the grid. These technologies have their shortcomings when compared to the coal fired power stations they replaced. Batteries, which now make up 60% of this new capacity, offer only limited energy storage (typically 2 to 4 hours) compared to coal's 24/7 capability.[147]

The result is a grid that is less stable, more expensive, and among the most volatile in the developed world.

Australia now faces the enormous task of building a mammoth amount of reliable electricity just to keep the lights on. In 2022, the Energy Security Board found that to reach net zero:

> *The new capacity required over the next 28 years is more than seven times that built over a similar time frame since the NEM commenced 24 years ago and around fifty times the amount built by the Snowy Hydroelectric Scheme.*[148]

Such scale is not credible, nor is it necessary. The Board's own recommendation was clear: Australia needs a **technology-neutral capacity mechanism** - one that supports *all* forms of power generation, from thermal to renewable, old and new, competing on merit and reliability.

> *The proposed capacity mechanism design will be technology-neutral. The ESB intends that all capacity types (e.g. thermal, renewable, storage, demand response), as well as both new and existing capacity will be eligible to participate in the mechanism, and compete on their merits in auctions for capacity payments …*[149]

That pragmatic vision has been replaced by a scheme that picks winners and punishes reliability. Under the current Capacity Investment Scheme, coal and gas are excluded, while projects that provide only **four hours of firm power** qualify as "reliable".[150]

Australia now has a *de facto* ban on coal and gas (through the "rigged" Capacity Investment Scheme, the Safeguard Mechanism and shadow carbon price) and a real ban on nuclear power through federal legislation.

To restore balance, Australia should **remove all prohibitions on energy types**. Coal, gas, hydro, nuclear, solar, and wind should each be free to compete on performance, cost, and contribution to reliability.

Evidence supports this commonsense approach. The CSIRO's GenCost report shows that even under conservative assumptions, new coal-fired generation remains one of the cheapest firm sources of power.[151] Independent modelling by Arche Energy found that an ultra-supercritical coal plant could supply electricity for around **$82 per megawatt hour**, compared to **$145 per megawatt hour** for solar, wind and battery combinations.[152] [153] Even nuclear energy, long banned by federal law, could deliver firm, emissions-free energy at **$121 per megawatt hour**, well below the cost of a renewables-only system.

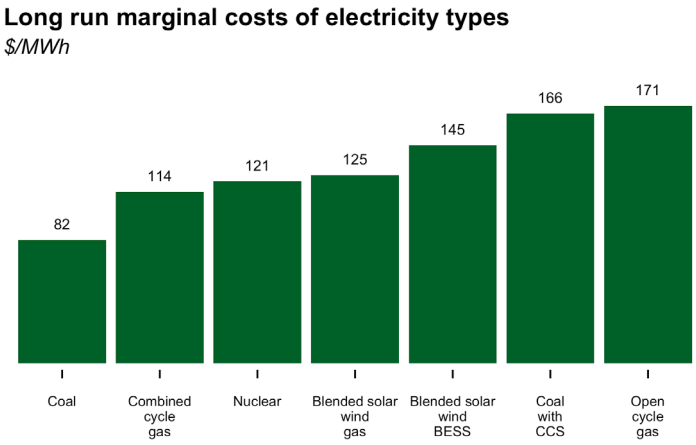


Figure k) Source: Arche Energy[154][155]

The principle is universal and enduring: **when energy is abundant, nations thrive; when it is scarce, societies strain**. Every restriction we place on energy supply is a restriction on our own potential. By lifting bans and restoring technological freedom, Australia can once again become a nation of builders.

4.8 Strategic Exemptions

National security must be our first priority.

In getting the balance right between environmental ambition and national resilience, **our security imperatives must carry the highest weight**. Australia's energy and emissions policies must be shaped by the realities of an increasingly contested world, one where supply chains are weaponised, energy is used as leverage, and the assertiveness of authoritarian powers, particularly China, demands a deliberate strengthening of our national resilience.

4.8.1 Supply Chain Security

In an era of unprecedented geopolitical turmoil, ensuring supply chain security is paramount.

Australia cannot afford to treat all industries as equal when it comes to emissions policy. Some sectors are not merely economic contributors; they are the backbone of national strength, supply-chain resilience, and strategic security.

The recent crisis in the **nickel industry** should serve as a warning. Once a cornerstone of Australia's critical minerals advantage, the sector has been brought to the brink by global price distortions, high energy costs, and regulatory headwinds.

Dozens of operations have been mothballed or closed, shedding thousands of regional jobs. By applying uniform emissions and regulatory burdens to industries that underpin energy security, manufacturing, and defence, Australia is eroding the foundations of its own resilience.

Strategic exemptions should be extended to industries vital to **national survival and industrial continuity**, including:

- **Critical minerals** (such as nickel, lithium, rare earths, copper)
- **Refining and fuels** (oil, gas, diesel, jet fuel)
- **Fertilisers and agricultural chemicals**
- **Plastics, steel, and heavy manufacturing**
- Maritime and shipping infrastructure

These industries are the arteries of national life. They keep our farms producing, our factories running, and our defence forces operational. Energy security, food security, and national security are interlinked; the failure of one weakens the others.

To secure these sectors, **strategic projects of national significance** should be granted streamlined approval pathways including:

- **Fast-tracked Commonwealth approval processes**, limiting delays to a fixed period.
- **Protection from "double jeopardy"** under duplicative state and federal environmental challenges
- **Exemption from vexatious litigation** ("green lawfare") for projects certified as critical to energy or supply-chain security.
- **Federal override powers** to prevent state governments from blocking nationally significant developments in mining, refining, or infrastructure.

4.8.2 Positioning Australia for the AI Revolution

Establishing data centres provides both an economic opportunity and a necessary strategic investment in our future.

Artificial intelligence is driving an unprecedented surge in global energy demand. The data centres that power this technology have become the new heavy industry of the modern world, consuming **415 TWh of electricity in 2024**, or around **1.5% of global demand**[156]. By 2030, their consumption is expected to **more than double to 945 TWh**, nearly **3% of global use**, matching the **entire current electricity consumption of Japan**[157] .

Energy use by data centres has grown **12% annually** over the past five years, with a demand growing **four times faster** than total global demand across all other sectors.

In the United States, data centres are set to consume more power than the combined output of the **steel, aluminium, cement, and chemical industries** by decade's end. Southeast Asia will see similar expansion as Singapore and southern Malaysia consolidate their roles as regional digital hubs.

Each new generation of AI models requires exponentially greater computing power, and therefore exponentially greater electricity. The nations that can deliver abundant, reliable, low-cost energy will have a decisive advantage in the emerging intelligence economy.

Australia is well placed to compete. With vast energy resources, advanced research capabilities, and geographic proximity to fast-growing digital markets, Australia could become a **secure, sovereign AI and data-infrastructure hub for the Indo-Pacific**. This potential can only be realised if energy policy and regulatory settings evolve to match the scale of the opportunity.

Establishing data centres is not just an economic opportunity. Failure to do so could leave us dangerously exposed to the growing threat of cyber warfare. AI-enabled cyberattacks on utilities have **tripled over the past four years**, making cybersecurity a critical pillar of energy strategy. Building domestic capacity in AI-based defence, energy management, and threat detection requires **onshore infrastructure** supported by **dispatchable, high-availability power**.

To seize this opportunity, we should:

- **Recognise AI and data infrastructure as strategic industries**, eligible for targeted exemptions and incentives within energy and climate frameworks
- **Guarantee dispatchable power** for data and defence computing precincts through inclusion in national capacity mechanisms
- **Co-locate AI infrastructure** with regional industrial and energy precincts to drive investment and skilled jobs outside capital cities
- **Restrict foreign control** over critical AI and cloud infrastructure to trusted partners, safeguarding Australia's data sovereignty.

4.8.3 Defence: Preparedness First

Defence should be focused on one thing – defence.

In an increasingly hostile geostrategic environment, Defence has one job: to be a lethal and ready force, capable of deterring and defeating aggression against Australia and our allies.

Every decision, every investment, and every policy affecting Defence must be judged against that singular purpose.

The Department of Defence's *Net Zero Strategy* states:

> *"As the Australian Government's largest landholder and highest energy user, Defence has a responsibility to take action to minimise the effects of climate change. This is part of a global transition to clean energy and will enhance our national and Defence resilience by strengthening energy security and reducing our reliance on fossil fuels."*[158]

The ADF is already operating under persistent funding pressure; every dollar and hour must be spent on the most effective means of delivering military power - on munitions, training, maintenance, intelligence, and the platforms that make us lethal. Policies that force trade-offs between emissions accounting and combat effectiveness risk weakening the very institutions charged with Australia's defence.

5. A New Vision for our Environment

Prosperity and conservation go hand in hand.

Nature is not a museum piece to be admired from behind a rope. It is living, dynamic, and deeply tied to the story of this continent. From Aboriginal fire management to the bullock teams that broke the scrub, the Australian landscape has always been shaped by human hands and imagination. It bears the marks not just of nature's forces, but of generations who worked the soil, tended stock, and built a life from the land itself.

Modern expressions of environmentalism have too often been built on guilt rather than gratitude. Australians have been told that to care for the planet, they must do less, build less, and become less.

The Labor Government's "Nature Positive" agenda, in particular, risks turning environmental protection into a bureaucratic exercise in prohibition. Rather than empowering those who live closest to the land, it centralises control in Canberra and treats working landscapes as threats to be managed, not assets to be nurtured.

By layering new environmental markets, regulatory triggers, and offset schemes over existing laws, the policy blurs responsibility while discouraging private investment and regional initiative.

Instead of making nature "positive," these measures risk locking regional Australians out of the very landscapes they sustain. Farmers are told to fence off paddocks they've regenerated, foresters are denied permits to thin fire-prone regrowth, and communities are paralysed by red tape while weeds and feral pests spread unchecked.

Conservation is not about keeping people out of nature; it is about ensuring people understand and accept their stake in caring for it.

Nowhere is that ethic stronger than in regional Australia. Farmers, fishers, foresters, and land managers understand the rhythms of their land better than anyone. Their livelihoods depend on careful stewardship of their environment.

They walk their fencelines, manage pests, nurture soils, and invest in the health of the landscapes that sustain us all. Our farmers plant shelterbelts, regenerate native vegetation, and build up the carbon and fertility of their soils. Our fishers safeguard breeding grounds and monitor stocks for the next season, knowing that good catches tomorrow depend on restraint today. Our foresters tend regrowth forests that serve both nature and nation, combining harvest and renewal in a continuous cycle of care.

Australia's next environmental chapter must be grounded in this **active stewardship**, not guilt and disconnected metropolitan control.

5.1 A blueprint for true conservation

We have the opportunity and the responsibility to steward the natural environment that we have inherited

A *High Energy Australia* does not mean walking away from environmental responsibility. It restores it to where it belongs: in the hands of those who live and work with the land.

The "Make America Beautiful" initiative[159] provides inspiration for an agenda that Australia could adopt that could transform our relationship between our natural world and the strength and health of our nation. Some of these policies could include:

1. Responsible stewardship of natural resources while driving economic growth

Commonwealth land-management agencies including the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF), the Murray–Darling Basin Authority (MDBA), and the Department of Industry, Science and Resources (DISR) should, *to the extent practicable*, ensure their policies promote responsible stewardship of natural resources while driving economic growth.

2. Expand access to public lands and waters for recreation, hunting and fishing

Australians should have equitable and responsible access to public lands and waters for a wide range of recreational activities, including fishing, hunting, hiking, camping, cycling, and other outdoor pursuits. Policies should support the sustainable use and enjoyment of these areas by improving access infrastructure, ensuring environmental safeguards, and recognising the social, cultural, and economic value of outdoor recreation to regional and rural communities.

Selected State Parks could be reclassified as multi-use recreation reserves to enable regulated access for camping, four-wheel driving and trail riding under strict environmental management plans. This would stimulate regional tourism, improve pest control and foster a stronger sense of public ownership and participation in conservation.

3. Encourage responsible, voluntary conservation efforts

Programs such as Landcare, Bush Heritage and Greening Australia demonstrate the success of locally led environmental projects. Policy should look to increase funding to community-based stewardship programs and prioritise those that deliver measurable outcomes in erosion control, soil regeneration, weed management and biodiversity recovery.

4. Cut bureaucratic delays that hinder effective environmental management

Environmental policy and land-use regulation should be efficient, transparent, and outcome-focused. Streamlining assessment and approval processes while maintaining robust environmental safeguards enables timely delivery of conservation, infrastructure, and land-management projects. Reducing duplication between Commonwealth and state frameworks will ensure that resources are directed toward on-ground results rather than administrative complexity.

5. Recover native species and restore ecological health through collaborative conservation.

The recovery of Australia's native plants and animals should be driven by coordinated, science-based, community-led action. Governments, landholders, Traditional Owners, industry, and conservation organisations all have a role in restoring habitats, controlling invasive species, and improving landscape connectivity. Collaborative partnerships built on shared stewardship will deliver more resilient ecosystems and stronger outcomes for biodiversity protection.

6. Prioritise the conservation and restoration of Australia's lands and waters.

National policy should focus on protecting and rehabilitating the landscapes, waterways, and marine environments that underpin Australia's environmental, cultural, and economic wellbeing. Priority must be given to restoring habitats already being degraded or destroyed by poorly planned renewable energy and transmission developments, ensuring that environmental objectives are not undermined by projects claiming to advance them. Conservation efforts should safeguard high-value ecosystems, rehabilitate disturbed areas, and integrate restoration goals with productive land use. These actions must recognise the importance of regional livelihoods and the interdependence between healthy ecosystems and national prosperity.

Regional Australia already embodies many of these principles and the ethic of stewardship. It holds the key to reconciling economic strength with environmental care.

A new environmental vision can unite city and country, science and tradition, economy and ecology in service of one shared goal: **a living landscape that sustains both nature and nation.**

5.2 Practical Environmental Action

There are practical steps currently neglected that we can take to achieve real environmental outcomes

We must ensure we fund tangible projects that strengthen biodiversity and make our shared environment cleaner, safer and more productive.

Feral animal control and incentive programs

Feral animals are one of the most destructive forces in Australia's ecosystems.[160] Wild pigs, cats, deer, foxes, and camels devastate crops, native species, and water systems, costing farmers and taxpayers hundreds of millions each year.[161]

We suggest establishing a National Feral Control Initiative to coordinate humane culling and management efforts across States and Territories. This should include investigating schemes where private property landholders could be issued bounty or tag allocations for the culling of feral animals on their own land, with an option for these to be sold to registered hunters to enable legal, supervised culling while generating local income and reducing public cost. This would mirror elements of existing programs in the United States[162] and Canada[163] to balance wildlife populations.

Restoration of inland waterways and carp biomass cull

Invasive carp make up as much as 80% of the total fish biomass in many Murray-Darling Basin systems, destroying habitat, increasing turbidity and threatening native fish recovery.[164]

A carp biomass cull coordinated through the existing fisheries and biosecurity frameworks would deliver immediate ecological benefits and create new opportunities for local processing industries, such as fertiliser or pet food production.[165] Restoring natural water quality and fish stocks is essential to rebuilding the environmental and economic health of inland communities.

Expanding Indigenous Ranger programs

Indigenous Rangers play a vital role in fire management, invasive species control and the protection of sacred and natural heritage sites. Increased investment in the Indigenous Ranger Program would strengthen traditional knowledge systems and create hundreds of skilled jobs in regional and remote areas, while expanding the footprint of active land management across Northern and Central Australia.[166]

Additional Environmental Restoration Priorities

Beyond these initiatives, a practical environmental agenda could include:

- Working with local councils and catchment groups to restore riverbank and wetland restoration projects
- Rehabilitating mine and energy sites to ensure former industrial areas are remediated for productive or recreational use
- Replanting trees and shelterbelts for soil regeneration and stock protection focusing on native species that provide ecological and agricultural benefits
- Supporting community fire management programs that help with planned burns, training and fire infrastructure upgrades to protect biodiversity and people.

6. Summary of Recommendations

This section consolidates the policy recommendations outlined throughout *Delivering a High Energy Australia*.

They represent a coherent framework for restoring national strength through abundant, affordable energy, revitalising Australia's industrial base, and re-establishing an environmental ethic of stewardship rather than prohibition.

Together, these proposals form a practical blueprint for policymakers, industry leaders, and citizens who seek a more resilient and prosperous nation.

1. Prioritise Affordability and Reliability

1.1 Amend the National Electricity Rules so that AEMO's primary objective is to deliver *the lowest possible energy prices* for households and businesses, while maintaining reliability.

1.2 Reform the Capacity Investment Scheme (CIS) to make it fully *technology-neutral* — allowing coal, gas, hydro, nuclear, and renewables to compete equally based on reliability, cost, and system need.

1.3 Remove the current four-hour reliability threshold and replace it with a *24/7 dispatchable standard*.

1.4 Lift the moratorium on nuclear energy by amending the EPBC Act (1999) and ARPANSA Act (1998) to permit research, assessment, and investment in nuclear reactors and utilise commonwealth powers to lift state moratoria on new coal generation or upgrades.

1.5 Introduce a *Reliability Reserve* managed by AEMO, guaranteeing capacity credits for dispatchable generation to stabilise the National Electricity Market.

1.6 Reinstate a national fuel reserve equivalent to 90 days of consumption, compliant with IEA standards, to strengthen energy security.

2. Pursue a Fair, Realistic Emissions Framework

2.1 Repeal the Climate Change Act 2022 and remove "net zero" as Australia's formal target under the Paris Agreement.

2.2 Amend the *Climate Change Authority Act 2011* to require the Authority to benchmark Australia's emissions targets against the *actual performance* of comparable OECD nations, not their stated intentions.

2.3 Establish an emissions-reduction rate of 2–9 million tonnes per year through to 2035, aligning with historical OECD averages rather than the current 21 Mt per year trajectory.

2.4 Reinstate and expand the Emissions Reduction Fund (ERF) as the central mechanism for abatement, funded transparently through the Budget (~$450 million per year).

2.5 Require all future national targets to be justified in terms of *cost, benefit, and international parity* before adoption.

2.6 Abolish stealth carbon taxes including: the Safeguard Mechanism, the New Vehicle Efficiency Standard and the Climate-Related Financial Disclosure rules, which will cost over $1 billion and burden small suppliers.

2.7 End implicit carbon pricing in regulatory modelling and planning (AER, AEMC, etc.), removing the assumed "carbon value" of $75–$105/t CO_2 from infrastructure assessments.

3. Restore Strategic and Industrial Sovereignty

3.1 Grant full or partial *strategic emissions exemptions* to industries essential for national resilience, including:

- Fuel refining and storage
- Fertiliser and ammonia production
- Steel, aluminium, and critical minerals refining
- Data Infrastructure
- Defence manufacturing, logistics, and shipbuilding

3.2 Provide these industries with a fast-track approval process under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* (EPBC), administered jointly by the Department of Industry and the National Security Committee of Cabinet.

3.3 Use Commonwealth override powers to prevent "double jeopardy" where state and federal jurisdictions impose duplicative environmental challenges or allow vexatious *green lawfare* against nationally significant projects.

3.4 Require an annual *Strategic Supply Chain Report* from the Department of Industry and Defence to Parliament identifying vulnerabilities in energy, fuels, fertiliser, plastics, and manufacturing inputs.

3.5 Guarantee dispatchable power for data and defence computing precincts through inclusion in national capacity mechanisms, ensuring 24/7 reliability.

3.7 Co-locate AI and computing facilities with regional energy and industrial precincts to drive skilled jobs and investment outside capital cities.

3.8 Restrict foreign control over critical AI, cloud, and data assets to *trusted partners*, safeguarding Australia's data sovereignty and digital independence.

4. Refocus Defence Policy on Lethality and Readiness

4.1 Repeal the *Defence Net Zero Strategy* and associated decarbonisation targets that divert resources from capability.

4.2 Ensure all Defence spending directly contributes to combat effectiveness or supply-chain resilience with no funds allocated to symbolic emissions offsets.

4.3 Prioritise domestic production of critical inputs such as fuel, explosives, and metals essential for sustained operations.

4.4 Mandate that Defence procurement decisions favour strategic durability and availability over environmental credentials.

4.5 Commission an Independent Review of Defence Energy Security, assessing whether current fuel reserves, logistics chains, and power systems can sustain a 90-day national emergency.

5. Reset Australia's Environmental Policy Framework

5.1 Replace the Labor Government's *Nature Positive* package with a **Stewardship and Renewal Act** that:

- Empowers landholders, Traditional Owners, and local communities to lead voluntary conservation projects;
- Integrates biodiversity goals with regional development planning;
- Establishes clear metrics for environmental outcomes rather than compliance processes

5.2 Audit all existing and proposed renewable energy zones (REZs) for environmental damage, habitat fragmentation, and community impact.

5.3 Establish a Renewables Rehabilitation Fund to restore land degraded by large-scale wind and solar projects and associated transmission infrastructure.

5.4 Ensure that future land-use approvals include food-security tests where agricultural land is proposed for reforestation or renewables development.

5.5 Expand public access to national parks and waterways for recreation, hunting, and sustainable use, recognising the cultural and economic value of human engagement with nature.

5.6 Direct Commonwealth land-management agencies (DCCEEW, DAFF, MDBA) to embed economic growth and community wellbeing within all conservation programs.

5.7 Re-establish the National Soils Advocate and expand the National Soils Action Plan with proper funding to improve soil health, carbon retention, and farm productivity.

5.8 Shift adaptation policy toward practical risk reduction, including hazard reduction burns, reforestation of degraded areas, and water-infrastructure projects through a renewed National Water Grid Fund.

5.9 Expand access to public lands and waters for responsible recreation, hunting, and fishing to rebuild Australians' connection to nature.

6. Practical Environmental Action

National Programs

6.1 Establish a National Feral Control Initiative coordinating humane culling across States and Territories, enabling bounty/tag systems tradable to licensed hunters.

6.2 Conduct a National Carp-Biomass Cull to restore inland waterways and support new regional processing industries (fertiliser, pet food).

6.3 Expand Indigenous Ranger programs to create skilled jobs in remote areas and embed traditional knowledge in land management.

6.4 Increase funding for community-based stewardship programs (Landcare, Bush Heritage, Greening Australia) focused on erosion control, soil regeneration, and weed management.

6.5 Upgrade National Parks and recreation infrastructure to improve accessibility, amenity, and environmental protection.

6.6 Convert selected State Parks into multi-use recreation reserves under strict management plans, enhancing tourism and pest control.

Local and Regional Priorities

6.7 Partner with councils and catchment groups to restore rivers, wetlands, and eroded landscapes.

6.8 Require rehabilitation of disused mine and energy sites for productive or recreational use.

6.9 Fund replanting of shelterbelts and windbreaks with native species supporting both ecology and agriculture.

6.10 Support community fire-management programs including planned burns, training, and infrastructure upgrades.

7. A Vision for National Renewal

7.1 Build a *High Energy Australia* — an economy powered by abundance, not scarcity.

7.2 Measure success not in tonnes of CO_2 avoided, but in **jobs created, industries retained, and families strengthened**.

7.3 Reframe environmental stewardship as a shared national mission, where economic growth and ecological renewal advance together.

7.4 Establish an annual State of the Nation Energy and Environment Report, bringing transparency to the costs, benefits, and trade-offs of Australia's transition policies.

Next Steps: A National Conversation

This discussion paper marks the beginning, not the end, of the debate.

The Page Research Centre and the authors of *Delivering a High Energy Australia* invite policymakers, industry, and citizens to contribute ideas for credible, evidence-based pathways beyond net zero — pathways that restore balance between energy security, environmental care, and national strength.

The task before us is to design a future that serves people, land, and nation alike.

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