

## Australia's major parties' climate policies side-by-side

Written by Kate Dooley, Research fellow, Climate and Energy College, University of Melbourne

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The majority of Australians see climate change as the [number one threat to national interests](#). However in 2018 Australia was ranked 55th out of 60 countries in a [Climate Change Performance Index](#).

Research from the University of Melbourne found if all countries' climate action was as inadequate as Australia's, the world would be on track for [4&deg;C warming](#).

With an election on Saturday, lets dig into the major parties' climate policies, and see how they track against Australia's Paris commitments.

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### Liberal

The Liberal Party introduced the [Climate Solutions Package](#) in February 2019. The package includes a range of measures, but most notably a continuation of the Emissions Reduction Fund (ERF), which remains the coalition's key climate policy.

The Climate Solutions Fund includes another \$2 billion to be used for ERF auctions until 2030. The package does not include any plan to increase renewables beyond the current 23.5% 2020 target.

The package also retains Australia's current emissions reduction target of 26%-28% below 2005 levels by 2030. This target falls far short of what is required to meet the Paris climate agreement goals.

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### Labor

Labor has released a [Climate Change Action Plan](#) that leads with a renewable energy target of 50% electricity generation by 2030, household rebates for solar batteries, and investment in

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energy efficiency.

Labor will extend the existing “safeguard mechanism” to function as a pollution cap for industry, while the agriculture sector will participate in a revived Carbon Farming Initiative.

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**Read more:** [Fixing the gap between Labor's greenhouse gas goals and their policies](#)

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Labor's climate target will commit Australia to emission reductions of 45% on 2005 levels by 2030, and to reach net zero emissions by 2050.

Labor's policy document states this target is informed by advice from the independent Climate Change Authority (CCA), yet the CCA's [2015 targets review](#) concluded Australia's fair share of a global target for 2°C was an emissions reduction of between 40-60% below 2000 levels by 2030.

The CCA review pre-dated the adoption of the Paris Agreement in December 2015, which raised global ambition to keep warming “well below 2°C” and ideally below 1.5°C. The CCA 2015 targets review can therefore be considered out of date, so Australia's fair contribution to the Paris climate agreement would have to sit at the upper end of (if not above) the 40-60% range.

Labor's target is still inadequate from a global perspective and would not put Australia on track to meet its Paris commitments. But it is a big step forward from our current targets, and would at least bring Australia in line with the inadequate action pledged by the rest of the world – current global pledges put the world [on track for 3&deg;C warming](#) .

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### Greens

The Greens are the only political party in Australia with climate policies that put forward targets that would enable us to meet our international obligations according to the science.

They have an emissions reduction target of 63-82% by 2030 and a trajectory to get emissions to net-zero by 2040. The [Greens manifesto calls for a total transition away from fossil fuels](#) .

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### Cost of climate (in)action

The Liberals claim their climate policies meet our climate commitments “ [without wrecking the economy](#) ” and have released [economic modelling](#) suggesting Labor's 45% target will cost the economy billions.

This modelling has been [widely debunked](#) , and [Labor's budget costings](#) show climate policies to have a cost of around \$800 million to 2023.

Labor in its manifesto emphasises the “ [devastating costs](#) ” climate change will have for the Australian economy over the long term, and points out that the cost of not acting on climate change must also be factored in. Research in 2018 estimated the [global cost of 4°C warming](#) would eventually reach US\$23 trillion per year, costing Australia A\$159 billion every year.

In light of the [IPCC report on the urgency of limiting warming to 1.5°C](#) , this may be a more salient point than the year on year costs of implementation of any near-term climate policy.

### What are other countries doing?

Far greater ambition is required from all nations, including Australia, for the world to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement. The UN has invited Paris Agreement signatories to submit

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revised national targets in 2020.

Several countries are raising their national climate commitments. The [UK Parliament has just declared a climate emergency](#) and has been advised by its independent [Committee on Climate Change](#) to adopt a target of net-zero emissions by 2050.

The European Union has set an emission reductions target of [55% by 2030](#) and the EU Parliament has endorsed a [net-zero climate target for 2050](#).

Nearer to home, on Wednesday the New Zealand prime minister introduced the [Zero Carbon Bill](#), which calls for net-zero carbon-dioxide emissions by 2050, and creates a legal obligation to plan for supporting New Zealand towns and cities, business and farmers to adapt to increasingly severe storms, floods, fires and droughts caused by climate change.

While all of these actions are far more ambitious than Australia's targets, [the IPCC](#) found net-zero emissions will need to be reached earlier than 2050 for a chance of limiting warming to 1.5°C without overshoot (overshoot risks potentially irreversible ecosystem loss).

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**Read more:** [Keeping warming below 1.5°C; is possible - but we can't rely on removing carbon from the atmosphere](#)

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So far no developed nation is taking seriously the [equity considerations of the Paris Agreement](#), which require financial and technology support to help developing countries both reduce emissions and adapt to the already severe consequences of climate change.

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Limiting warming to well below 2°C and aiming for 1.5°C as required by the Paris Agreement will indeed require that fossil fuel use declines to zero over the next few decades. This is a trajectory that governments around the world – the UK, the EU, NZ and others – are beginning to acknowledge.

If Australia sees more of the same in terms of climate policy we will inevitably continue our dismal track record of inaction – with devastating consequences.

*Kate Dooley does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.*

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