

The Economics of Climate & Energy with Chris Bowen

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SPEAKERS

Richie Merzian, Ebony Bennett, Chris Bowen

Ebony Bennett 00:02

Hello, everyone, I'm Ebony Bennett, I'm Deputy Director at the Australia Institute and welcome to our webinar series and to Australia Institute TV. I'd like to start by acknowledging that Canberra is Ngunnawal Country and pay my respects to the traditional owners and to elders past and present. Sovereignty was never ceded. And this always was and always will be Aboriginal land. The same as last year, the Australia Institute is doing these webinars at least weekly, but days and times do vary. So please check out our website at australiainstitute.org.au. And you can find all the latest details for our upcoming webinars and register for free to attend all of those. And just a few tips before we begin today to help make sure that things run smoothly. If you hover over the bottom of your zoom screen, you should be able to see a Q&A function where you can ask questions of our guests today. And you should also be able to upvote questions from other people as well and make comments. Please keep things civil and on topic in the chat or we'll have to boot you out. We don't like doing it but we will if we have to. And lastly, a reminder that this discussion is being recorded and it will be posted up on our website and emailed to you after this discussion. So unfortunately, Chris Bowen is having a bit of technical difficulties at the moment so I'm going to hand it over to Richie Merzian, the Director of the Australia Institute's Climate and Energy Program, to kick us off and get things started and I'm just going to hop offline and make sure that everything is going okay for Chris Bowen's office and hopefully get him with us very shortly. So Richie, I'll hand over to you. I'll duck out and we'll come back as soon as we can hopefully. Thanks for bearing with us, everyone.

Richie Merzian 01:51

Thanks, Ebony and good morning to everyone who has joined us here on the call and good afternoon as well if you're joining us from further afield. Today, we have the opportunity to dive deep into the climate and energy space and it seems like a timely occasion to do so. Next week, President Biden will host his Climate Leaders Summit. That will be the first occasion for the United States to take a forward-leaning public position on where it will take its climate targets and its climate policies. That will be an

exciting opportunity for the world to hear from the second largest emitter, but also to see how that impacts other major emitters as well. So alongside President Biden, on Earth Day the 22nd of April, he's invited 39 other world leaders. That includes Prime Minister Scott Morrison, as Australia is invited by virtue of the size of its emissions, not by the quality of its climate policies, because it is a top 20 greenhouse gas emitter. And the format for the meeting will follow a format that President Obama started a while ago, the Major Economies Forum, or what we used to call the major emitters forum, where the largest emitters in the world - they represent the majority of global emissions - all meet and discuss key climate diplomatic policies ahead of the big UN Climate Summit. So President Biden is reviving this format, and that will take place within 100 days of him taking power, as I said, on the 22nd of April. Scott Morrison will be attending as will many other leaders. In addition to the large emitters, though, we have a number of other world leaders invited from climate leaders like the Nordic countries, to those who are most vulnerable to climate impacts and are pushing for the most ambitious action, like the Marshall Islands. On the agenda will be, not just long term climate targets - and there's obviously a lot of talk around net zero by 2050 as the target of choice for most countries and setting that long term ambition - but the real focus, the real opportunity will be what we need to do in the short term. John Kerry, who is President Biden's special Climate Envoy, has basically set the tone. So at a summit two weeks ago, he said that we can't be willy nilly with what we need to do over the next decade. What we do over the next 10 years will shape our ability to hit that long term target, will shape our ability to keep global warming under two degrees and ideally 1.5 degrees. And so that 10 year period, the next 10 years, is what's really most crucial. And that scenario we're going to dive into when we do have Chris Bowen on our webinar later.

Ebony Bennett 04:44

And I might give a quick update on that. So he's just had a bit of trouble with the link coming in but we've sent a different one and his office is endeavoring to get him on here. So hopefully he will be with here with us very shortly. So I can see we've got about 640 people on the line with us here today. Thank you very much. We appreciate you coming along. Unfortunately, if you're just joining us, we are having some technical difficulties that we're trying to sort out. I might have to jump quickly off again. But Richie was just noticing that some of the remarks that Chris will be sharing with us here shortly, are in the Sydney Morning Herald today. So people might want to go online and check those out. But he will be with us here shortly. I have been in touch with his office and he is trying to join us. So, please bear with us. He shouldn't be too long. We've sent him a new invitation and hopefully he'll be here shortly. But Richie, I missed that last bit. Were you kind of foreshadowing the Biden Climate Summit coming up?

Richie Merzian 05:48

Yeah, that's right. And the real opportunity is basically what we can do in the next 10 years. Now Australia's climate target is reducing emissions by 26% from the 2005 baseline by 2030. That's a weak target. It's not in line with the Paris Agreement goals. And it's certainly not ambitious along the lines of what developed countries should be doing. And so really, the question will be asked is whether Australia can increase that, why it's not increasing that. And so, ideally, the Federal Government is doing its homework, but part of that picture is seeing what other opportunities will come to bear on putting pressure on the Australian Government. And so I'm aware that the Sydney Morning Herald

covered some of Chris Bowen's comments this morning, and hopefully we'll be getting more this week, which will go to what we can expect on the international side, too.

Ebony Bennett 06:42

Excellent. So I can see that we've nearly got Chris Bowen with us. I can see that he's logged in here so it won't be too long now. That might be someone from his office there. We can see you, thanks very much for joining us. We might... just let them keep getting set up. So Richie, there's a huge focus there on, from the global community, because of the Biden summit coming up, and obviously you're talking about how that's going to put huge pressure on the Australian Government. Do we see any signs of them responding to that pressure?

Richie Merzian 07:21

Slowly, like a block of ice melting bit by bit. So what we saw is that at the end of last year, the government agreed that it won't be using these dodgy Kyoto credits. And so that's a first step. It was basically going to use these leftover carryover credits from the Kyoto Protocol to avoid reducing any emissions over the next 10 years. So it's something that was legally baseless, it was morally outrageous, and ultimately, the Federal government, seeing the writing on the wall, decided not to use it in December. They've also flagged a preference for Net Zero by 2050, as soon as possible, but a preference for Net Zero by 2050. That's not locked in. It's not legislation. It's not like what the UK has locked in. And so really, we need to be seeing a lot more there. And they haven't flagged any more ambitious ambition in the short term. Instead, they've used lines around technology, not taxes, basically, cherry picking a few technologies to give funding to nothing, nothing that would really give you confidence.

Ebony Bennett 08:23

Yeah, Chris Bowen's office, if you can hear me there, he's on the side. So if you can put the camera right ways there, and we'll join you very shortly. So we'll come back to Chris Bowen, very shortly, just getting his office sorted there. I think they've had to do a bit of jury rigging to get on today. So Richie, we're really not seeing much movement from the government so far, but that pressure is only going to intensify and of course we're heading to an election very shortly.

Richie Merzian 08:59

Yeah, that's exactly right. And we're seeing this pressure come to bear. We already saw this really soft piece in The Sydney Morning Herald as well this morning from Australia's Ambassador in Washington, DC Arthur Sinodinis, saying, Oh, you know, this Summit could be an opportunity to fix Australia's poor reputation on climate. But unless Australia is willing to do more in the short term and to actually have a target on the table, it's hard to see how it will repair a decade of damaging climate diplomacy.

Ebony Bennett 09:28

Yeah, and we're also seeing a lot more active climate diplomacy internationally with things like carbon border adjustments and other things coming down the line that the government's going to have to deal with.

Richie Merzian 09:41

That's right. It's not all carrots in terms of Australia doing more. The European Parliament agreed that it would consider a proposal for border adjustments to tax carbon-heavy goods that come into the European customs area. That will have an impact on Australian goods there. Other countries are looking at what the EU is doing as a potential test case, including major trading partners like Japan. That will have an impact. We're starting to look at sticks being put on the table, not just carrots, and hopefully that will get the government...yeah, put them in a position at least to rally the loudest and the most difficult members of their backbench into actually doing more, which is what so many others are expecting.

Ebony Bennett 10:24

And I can see that Chris Bowen's nearly ready to join us there. We do apologize for the technical difficulties that we're having this morning, unanticipated, but that had to happen sometime. Unfortunately, it's today. Thank you so much for joining us though. I can see we've got more than 700 people on the line. Richie, next week we're going to have a webinar that does look really specifically at the Biden Summit coming up. Can you just tell us a little bit about who's joining us and then I think Chris Bowen will be nearly ready to chat to us.

Richie Merzian 10:58

Yep. So next week, we have an American climate expert, Alden Meyer, who headed up the Union of Concerned Scientists' policy work in DC for a number of decades, and is now with another Think Tank called E3G. So he'll be joining us and he has had a lot of lot of engagement with numerous us administration's testified before Congress being involved in energy panels. And he'll be coming to us straight from the US East Coast, with what the Biden administration and planning in the White House. And then we'll also have Cheryl Jackson, who is a journalist. She's usually based out of Samoa but is currently in the United States. And she'll be providing a lot of insights from a more broader international and regional perspective around what the world was considering coming to come the climate summit.

Ebony Bennett 11:48

Excellent. I believe we have Chris Bowen with us now. Chris, can you hear us?

11:53

I can hear you. Can you hear me?

Ebony Bennett 11:54

Excellent. We can hear you. I think we might have someone just holding the camera there for you. But you're the right way up at least?

Chris Bowen 12:02

Yeah, apologies. We've had the parliament introduced a new operating system. And I didn't like the zoom link. So we've had to do some some last minute scrambling to get the zoom link working properly. So I'm creative technology here.

Ebony Bennett 12:15

Um, are you okay? Do you want to get

12:20

started? I'm ready to go and apologies for

Ebony Bennett 12:22

the lead. Well, I might just do an extremely quick introduction, then. So basically, as you've heard from Richie Moravian, already, you know, Australia is already dealing with the impacts of climate change here and now. And there's huge international pressure coming to bear on the government. But basically, since the coalition abolish the Gilad government's carbon price, which really effectively reduced emissions. While both jobs and the economy grew, the coalition government has really not had a climate change policy. And of course, as Australia heads towards the next federal election, many are really keen to hear Labour's vision for achieving a safe climate if it's elected. So to that end, I am delighted to welcome Chris Bowen, the Shadow Minister of climate change and energy and the member for McMahon. He's new to this role as Shadow Minister, but climate change and energy is obviously not an issue that he's stranger to welcome Chris Bowen. Thanks for joining us.

Chris Bowen 13:19

Well, thanks very much. And again, apologies for the technical issues when we were starting, but I want to let you know that I'm joining you from our elected office, which is on the Gabriel land at the Derek PayPal and pay my respects to elder's past president emerging and thank them for their stewardship of this land over the millennia. Thanks to you to the Australia Institute for inviting me to participate in this webinar, which I say is a very important opportunity. And thanks to Ben and Richie, and all of you for the very strong contribution you make to the climate change debate in Australia. Today, I really want to leave you with two key messages which inform my approach as Shadow Minister for climate change in energy, and inform the approach that labour will take to climate change policy in the lead up to the next election. Firstly, while the moral case for action on climate change is very strong, winning the domestic argument is key in relation to jobs. And we have to win the argument that good climate policy is good jobs policy. And secondly, while our opponents claim that dealing with climate change is somehow not standing up for our national interest against negative globalism, so called negative globalism effect, this approach is a sell out of our national interest. Now the US climate change will be held this time next week. And it's an important stepping stone to COP 26 in November, and Australia is already under pressure from our most important ally to show a longer commitment. Now political opponents like to pretend that somehow this international situation and pressure doesn't apply to us that what's happening overseas doesn't affect Australian jobs. But of course in these coming weeks, that's just a reminder that that we will need to point to the need for Australia to do its bidding. The international context and important to point to the economic cost to Australia are being left behind as we are currently being. Australia's now operating and I are in trading in a mid century netzero environment with over 120 countries and 70% of our trading partners committed. That is just a fact. Australia as you know, is the only developed country in the world not committed to net zero by 2050. I should say more accurately, we're the only country with a government not committed to net zero by 2050. States and territories our local government is the business community is all we're lacking is national leadership from the very people made to provide it so decarbonisation has begun at the hands of global capital and our trading partners. Now we can allow workers and communities to be decimated, as that ramps up over the future decades with no policy framework here. That's the government's approach. Or we

can recognize that the globe's climate emergency is Australia's jobs opportunity. Now, as you know, Deloitte estimates that over 250,000 Australian jobs can be created. In my view, the jobs opportunity as we and move as we in the world move to next era is really three pronged energy generation, resources and manufacturing. And again, our opponents like to pay good climate change policy as some sort of austerity measure. They paint it as a picture of a trade off between climate action and economic growth. Nothing could be further from the truth, I believe passionately in economic growth, it lifts people out of poverty, it turns aspiration into reality, we don't need less economic growth, we need more, what we do need to do is cut the cord between economic growth and emissions. As we decarbonize our economy, we're going to need to generate a lot more electricity, not less, we need to electrify our passenger transport and basically anything else capable essentially essentially being transferred to electric power. As we move our electricity generation to renewables, there's a massive task to create that electricity stored and transmitted to where it's needed, through very significant upgrades in electricity grid. And the good news is that the very areas that are provided Australia with cheap, reliable energy are the same regions that are best placed to capitalize on the need for more electricity. These are the areas with the access to the ports, the railway lines and the pipelines. The infrastructure the space necessary for renewable energy generation, these are central and North Queensland, the Illawarra, the Hunter, the Latrobe Valley, Calli Bhambril in Lalla, and just west Australia, currently exports materials for energy generation. With the right policy settings, we'll be exploiting clean energy. Now we have 58 million petajoules of solar radiation beaming down on us every year 10,000 times more than our total energy generation, and some of the best wind resources in the world. The sun cable project in the Northern Territory and the Asian renewable energy hub in Western Australia are just two excellent examples of the opportunities for renewable energy export. Germany, Japan, South Korea and other countries already expressing great interest in the potential for Australian renewable energy stored through hydrogen. Of course, skeptics and opponents think they're clever in pointing out the wind doesn't always blow and the sun doesn't always shine. And of course, renewable energy does need to be stored. But again, the need to expand our storage and, and transmission represents jobs opportunities, take batteries. Australia produces nine out of the 10 minerals necessary to make lithium ion batteries. And we're the world's largest exporter of lithium. But we're not producing batteries anywhere near as much in Australia as we can and should do. This is a great opportunity. What we need to do is take that, that raw material, that great advantage that we have, and turn it into value adding we can do that we have the resources to do it. What we're not doing is seeing that transition. Now we have a number of plans to help that become the case. We announced a couple of weeks ago, our manufacturing family, our jobs, co investment with renewable energy manufacturing as one of the key priority areas. What we can't do is just extract those minerals and see it exported without value adding. We've also announced our community batteries plan and our electric vehicles plan all these plans which reduce emissions and with the right policy settings crowd jobs as well as our rewriting the nation policy another vital step, as we partner with the private sector to upgrade the grid and get renewable energy where we needed. creating jobs in the process. rewiring the nation is crucial for our economy to broaden access to affordable renewable energy and households and reduce energy costs for the business. And we've just announced 200 million investment in 400. Community batteries Now I mentioned just before around the country, as well as providing tax cuts to incentivize electric vehicles and the commitment to develop Australia's first electric vehicle strategy. Those are our first commitments. But of course, they won't be our last. This is just a fraction of the economic opportunities. And I'll just talk quickly about the economic risks as well. The Climate Summit next week will reiterate the global imperative for action on

climate change. Scott Morrison and city won't be dictated to by other countries. Michael McCormick has said that he's not worried about something that might have been in 30 years time. Now, to me that come up that that comment sums up the unspeakable negligence of the Morrison government not thinking about the implications and in 30 years time, this is a pourraient. Their policy of inaction is consigning Australians to the risks and shows at the international economy decarbonizing with no proactive plan from the government. To help communities and families impacted by that decarbonisation. Morrison talks with negative globalism, it's hard to think of anything more negative than destructive negligence, which is his policy. And climate change is at the top of the diplomatic agenda for many of our key allies in Asia and Europe, as well as in the US and UK. They're not only allies, but large export markets for Australia. Now, I'd like to see climate change much higher on our diplomatic agenda as well. But we won't be able to do so unless we get our domestic policy, householder, there'd be no point in doing this because we come to the diplomatic table with very little credibility indeed. But despite the Deputy Prime Minister not caring about what happens in 30 years time, the economic cost of inaction is real, both in the short term and the longer term. We know that the European Parliament is developing a carbon border adjustment mechanism to start in the next two years, and that'll impact on Australian exports and Australian jobs. That's not to mention the immense risk of unchecked climate change itself on Australia, the light pegs this at nearly 900,000 jobs and a \$3.4 trillion hit to the economy over coming decades. So yes, acting on climate change is imperative in the global interest, that's important. We'll hear a lot about that in coming weeks. But because it's in the global interest does not mean it's not necessarily in our own. We need to defend against that fallacy. Getting the energy policy grog and acting on climate change is squarely in our national interest and pretending it's not we'll put a handbrake on our economy and cost Australian jobs. Now part of my job will be ensuring that it's in the interests of our regions as well, more jobs and new industries in the regions that have helped build Australia. We owe it to those regions, we can't do it without them. These economic opportunities are talked about what just happened by accident. We need a jobs focus Climate and Energy agenda. We need consistent national energy policy framework that lowers emissions and doesn't scare off private investment. We need a Labour government to ensure that workers don't get left behind. And we need a government that can deliver on our promises. that's interested in the outcomes now in the future, not glib announcements and spin which is really company by delivery, and that government will be an Albanese Labour government. So thanks again for the opportunity today, I'm really looking forward to taking some questions. And again, apologies for the technical issue as we started.

Ebony Bennett 23:06

Thanks, we really appreciate you. Joining us through all the technical difficulties. I know how rough that can be. And we've got about 760 people on the line with us today. But Richie, I'll go to you for the first question. And we'll come very shortly to questions from the audience. Thanks, Richie.

Richie Merzian 23:25

Thanks, everybody. And thanks, Chris, for joining us and persevering through all this. It's great having you on here and an opportunity to chat, I guess front of mind for everyone this week, following the four corners on Monday, this gas fired recovery plan that the federal government is still championing that this is to basically invest in new gas basins, new gas power stations, to use gas as the main driving force for our economic recovery. But at the same time, we seem to be recovering. And that's without

gas. And when we look closely at his plan, which we've done at the Australians to NASA admission to the gas fired recovery last month, there's no report, there's no criteria for how funding will be delivered. This used to be very little under the hood. What is what what do you think we need a gas fired recovery? And how do you respond to this push by the government?

Chris Bowen 24:16

Well, it's a fraud. It's a slogan, it's not a policy. It's simply a fraud. There's not been one job created, and there won't be a job created. I love this alleged gas fired recovery. Now, my view about gas is this and not everybody necessarily will agree with this gas will continue to play a role in firming and peaking our grid as we transition to renewable energy. We need to massively increase the storage in our grid through batteries pumped hydro and hydrogen, which at various levels of development. But that's going to take time. And there's varying views are around about how long that will take or indeed what role gas will play as we do that, but that is the role of gas That is the principle is to peak and firm the market as we transitioned to more renewables. And as we get more storage up and running, it's just a fallacy. It's a slogan in search of a policy. There is no policy underpinning it. Now in relation to publicly funded guests, again, the problem is, even if you did believe in, in, in a gas fired recovery, every time the government talks about public funding of gas, they turn off private investors. Now, this is a complete fallacy. It's a an excuse for an action, they've known the door was closing since 2015, they're still talking about gas fired power stations replaced a deal, which has been sheduled for closure since 2015. This is all just an excuse for inaction.

Richie Merzian 25:49

I mean, on that we might be even expecting later this month for the federal government through snowy hybrid to be announcing public funding for new gas fired power stations, which doesn't seem to work with what you've just said. But is there ever an occasion for the federal government to subsidize gas power stations or opening up new gas basins?

Chris Bowen 26:12

Well, I'd need to be very convinced about the case for public subsidies. public subsidies are really where the market has failed, and where it's absolutely necessary to inch to assist the transition towards renewables. And again, as I said, if the government really believed in investing in gas, they'd get out of the way, let the private sector get on it on with it. But you can imagine if you're on a board of an energy company, and every time you think about investing in gas, and the government says, you know, we might invest in gas, too, that's just a chilled to investment. So on multiple levels, their policy makes no sense.

Richie Merzian 26:51

Moving on to electric vehicles, which you mentioned in your opening remarks, Chris. When it comes to transport, it's the one sector that has just increased the most of any, in the last two or three decades since we sign up to the UN Convention on Climate, the majority that is line vehicles, and yet were what probably the back of the pack in the OECD when it comes to zero emissions uptake in Australia. Like what your labor just announced initial policies to assist in lowering that sticker price. We know lowering the sticker price of DVDs is the number one way to get them in the hands of everyday Australians. What more can can we expect to help bring about this transition?

Chris Bowen 27:34

Yeah, thanks, Richie. And yes, that is an important announcement on our behalf to reduce the sticker price as you'd say it has two mechanisms for those who didn't follow the detailed announcement reducing or abolishing tariff on electric vehicles below the luxury car tax threshold around 77,000. So abolishing the tariff on a V's plug in hybrids and hydrogen cars, and also providing the same fringe benefits tax concession that companies get for providing a huge or a panel van to their workers providing that to a V's. Now you put those two things together, that's a powerful driver, the tariff really for for consumer purchases, and the fbt for fleet purchases, which is half our purchases, and the fbt concession can make a difference of many 1000s of dollars for companies deciding what cars to buy their staff, and that will help drive the market. Now. That's our cost offering. But I I'm very clear in recognizing that that's not enough. There are other elements that we are considering. Really, if you look at the three, the three, I think handbrakes on a visa in Australia are the cost, range anxiety, and then encouraging manufacturers to take Australia seriously. There's a three challenges that we have the announcements we've made deal with cost, I have announced also we will have an electric vehicle strategy of which those two cost offerings will be part. But there's more to come when it comes to electric vehicle strategy for us to announce.

Ebony Bennett 28:58

I might just follow up on that, if I can. We've seen in places like the ICT really good policies to encourage the uptake of V's but in Victoria, the State Treasurer is proposing attacks just on electric vehicles, which would be I think, a world first correct me if I'm wrong, and seems to go counter to that rural drive to try and accelerate uptake? Why do you think there's such a split between state and territory governments and the federal level and and what else can we be doing to kind of promote that uptake?

Chris Bowen 29:33

Well, look, I understand I'm gonna just say I understand where State Treasurer is, and not just Victoria, others have started move down this road are concerned because they're concerned about the eventual diminution of of revenue to government's broadly including the federal government, from petrol tax and that needs to be considered, it would be better if that was considered in my view, in a holistic national fashion. So but Really every government's got to do their job. In the federal government, I see our job as reducing the sticker price of the booze. As you said, Richie, we are way behind the pack 0.7% of sales, compared not only to world's best practice, but compared to average way way behind the pack. In my experience, consumers are up for electric vehicles, or at least considering them if they can overcome those obstacles, including the upfront sticker price, because electric vehicles are more expensive up front, this will help this will help with that. Of course, as we know, the cost of electric vehicles will come down over time and eventually reached parity with internal combustion engines, just as the cost of solar panels has fallen 90%, I think we can expect reductions in the cost of electric vehicles cost but we need to help that process we need to get the critical mass. Because once there's a critical mass of electric vehicles in Australia, then the range anxiety sort of the market responds to that as well. And people just see electric vehicles around them all the time, and they become a lot more acceptable.

Ebony Bennett 31:02

We've probably got time for just two more questions. So Richie, I'll go to you. And then I've got one question before we get to questions from the audience.

Richie Merzian 31:10

I'm definitely keen to jump into the international side of things. Chris, as you mentioned, next week is a big deal you have you know, the US which really does carry a lot of moral as well as economic weight, when it takes a big position and its big position on climate is reversing a trend that it had. And we'll hopefully have an impact on reversing trends elsewhere as well. The focus from the Special Envoy, John Kerry has been on the next 10 years, saying, you know, we can't be willy nilly with what we do in the next 10 because that will ultimately set the pathway for the next 30. And if you look at where the science is going, you know, the urgency just increases every year, especially with the reports around where we are out with 1.5 degrees of global warming recently. And so if the US is going to be pushing forward with say anything, you know, close to 50% emissions reductions having its emission reductions by 2030. Australia, its current target is 26%. It should be doing more, that would be the fair thing to do that's aligned with what all the research we've done. Others have done. What pressure can we expect from a Labour government for the Australian Government to be doing more in the short term?

Chris Bowen 32:23

Well, I do think whatever we say from President Biden, next week will be important in the international debate, including the Australian domestic political debate, and I'll be participating that and I'll be pointing out, you know that Australia is missing out, as I said in my opening remarks, not only on our international obligations, but on the opportunities, economic opportunities that go with that. Now, in terms of the pressure labor will apply, and the approach that we will take, as you know, we're committed to net zero by 2050. That shouldn't be remarkable. It should be the basis. But you know, the basic starting point, but alas, it is a point of significant difference between us and the government that we are committed and they are not. But I'd say this, I agree with you, you can't just have net zero by 2050, without a strong roadmap to get there. And you can't start that in 2048. It's going to start now. And indeed, you know, we have had a lost decade in the Australian context of action on climate change. Since 2013, in particular, and also around the world, it's been stopped start, and particularly with the last four years of the Trump administration. So the best time to start with action on climate change was 30 years ago, the second best time is today. And, you know, we will need a strong roadmap to 2050. And what I'll be outlining is that roadmap to get there, including updates at various points about what we expect for our missions, and but importantly, to the policy levers to get there. I mean, I could announce, you know, wonderful targets for 2030. But unless we have outlined policies underneath it to get there, it's going to be pretty meaningless. So we need to be doing the roadmap, the strong roadmap, and I am committed to providing that to Australian people before the next election, as well as the policy levers which underpin that roadmap. And I do think that'll put pressure on the government to answer your question.

Ebony Bennett 34:13

Thank you. Well, I'll just got one more question and then we'll go to questions from the audience. But I kind of wanted to stay in the international kind of context. But look at Australia's domestic exports of

fossil fuels were one of the top three exporters in the world. However, the majority of our gas and coal goes to countries like Japan and South Korea that do have net zero targets. Meaning eventually, obviously, that demand will decline. We've got an easy the Australian Institute released research a couple of weeks ago showing that in New South Wales, there's something like 23 proposals for new coal mines. And we've seen some strong support for a moratorium on new approvals of coal mines in the hunter. But I guess my question for you is how can Australia seriously transition its economy and transition the communities that engaging in that type of industry if we're still growing the problem?

Chris Bowen 35:14

Well, I mean, let's just tackle coal exports head on. Now you're right. And I've been very clear about the fact 70% of our trading partners, including big recipients of our thermal coal are committed to net zero. And one of the first things I did as shadow climate change minister say, this is going to put pressure on coal based communities, thermal coal based communities, and we need to be having that conversation with those communities now, where regardless of what domestic policies Australia has, that is going to put pressure on those communities. Now I know some people say, Well, we should shut down all coal mines. Today, I am more more than happy to and coal exports, I'm more than happy to go into communities and talk to them about the challenges and opportunities of the future. As you move to net zero, what I'm not happy to do is go in and say we're going to cut your exports. And by the way, that's not going to reduce emissions by one one shot because they're just going to replace by coal mines from elsewhere around the world. So you're going to give up your job, or no reductions in emissions, because those coal fired power stations elsewhere around the world are going to continue to just kind of get a call elsewhere. I'm not prepared to do that. That's not a sustainable way of bringing the Australian people, including in regional communities with you. What we are prepared to do is very much say that Australia will transition its energy generation to renewable and we can become an export powerhouse of renewable energy, those same communities as the rest of the world transition away from coal as Japan, Korea, China reached a net zero emissions targets. And as they change their energy generation, we can play a part of that by exporting through hydrogen I mentioned in my opening remarks, sun cable, the Asia renewable energy hub in Broome or in the Pilbara, I should say, these are great. These are just two examples of the energy export opportunities for Australia. But two examples which come from areas which have traditionally been involved in energy generation in Australia, and those opportunities can apply to Queensland, to the Hunter Valley to the illawarra, to the Pilbara, and going forward as well. So what we need to do is transition our exports to a more renewable focus as the rest of the world moves to next year. And we need to be upfront with communities about that.

Ebony Bennett 37:24

Thanks. So I'll go to questions from the audience now. And I think following on from a couple of issues that you've talked on, the first question is from Howard wit, he says how will labour react if our major trading partners introduce a carbon price or tariffs or border adjustment levy on those who don't have such a price? Well,

Chris Bowen 37:45

we'll point out that this is a result of Australian government inaction that our exporters are being subject to this. I mean, what the opposition says in Australia about a that sort of thing is unlikely to sway the

European Union or anyone else it'll be a question that Australia has to deal with in Australia has to do with because of almost a decade of policy and action, if that's what eventuates

Ebony Bennett 38:09

The next question is from Tom Swan. He asks President Biden has made an executive order banning fossil fuel subsidies will Labor consider or sorry, well, Mr. Bowen consider a similar policy.

Chris Bowen 38:21

Well, again, our policy focuses on creating new renewable energy as their coal fired power stations rich in their natural life, and I think is where the action is in relation to our energy generation and then investing in those renewable energy opportunities in those regional areas. That is where my policy focus is. I think that is the Australian contribution. And we can make a very, very strong contribution that way.

Ebony Bennett 38:50

The next question is from Tony Walker, and I think follows on a bit from that. So, Chris, you're talking about targeting regions for clean energy investment, he says there are plenty of sophisticated just transition and climate action groups working in regions towards the type of fundamental change we see, we need to see, do you see a way a Labour government could recognize and provide support to the work those groups are doing on the ground? So that change isn't just imposed from the top, but it happens democratically with participation from the community?

Chris Bowen 39:20

Yeah, absolutely. And I'm a big supporter of those efforts. The Hunter Jobs Alliance, I think was really the first one to be framed in that way. And I hosted us a forum in Canberra a couple of weeks ago where Labour Party caucus members could come in here for the 100 Jobs Alliance, the work that they're doing, and it was very well attended, including by the leader Anthony Albanese to hear that work. And that's a good opportunity to support that work. And I know that that model is being applied across the country. I know that there's one starting in Geelong, for example. So I do think that that work is very important and deserves the support of federal parliament. It's got my support, and I engaged those groups as I go around the country, we are also committed to ensuring government infrastructure. And there were things in our platform about this government infrastructure suppliers, that support as to communities to regional communities as we, as we are undertaking this change. And we'll have more policy detailed one the plan that before the next election. But I also agree with the questioner, that bottom up is important and these things are can't just all be imposed from Canberra, regional communities know themselves are better than Canberra, many of the opportunities and what needs to be done to realize them. So I agree with your question about.

Ebony Bennett 40:38

Thank you. You've already touched on this a little bit, but maybe a little bit more detail here. Diana. Glen asks, Will the Labour Party use the national reconstruction fund to establish an electric vehicle production industry in Australia?

Chris Bowen 40:53

Well, I think that's got a lot of potential, whether it is electric vehicles in title or components, electric vehicles or batteries, and has potential and the idea of the fund is to co invest with the private sector. So in a private sector proposals, to say we think this can work, but we need some government assistance. And that is exactly what that fund is targeted for. and renewable manufacturing, whether it be those things, or the infrastructure that goes with wind generation wind energy generation turbines, or other things. I think there's great potential there. And so yes, that is what that fund is designed for. We've also identified some other key strategic areas around health technology, etc, about renewable energy, manufacturing is right up there. And we are to make this work. To be able to say to regional communities, there's opportunity in manufacturing can't just be rhetoric, there's got to be, there's got to be substance to underpin that. And the jobs fund the manufacturing fund that we've been asked as part of that substance. Yes. And Richie, I

Ebony Bennett 41:55

might just come to you. To follow up on that. I know the Australia Institute center for future work has done quite a lot of work, for example, around our lithium deposits. And the fact that we don't really value add much to that, and that there is huge capacity in Australia to get into, you know, refining lithium producing batteries and down the line producing electric vehicles. drones, just tell us a little bit more about some of that research. Sure.

Richie Merzian 42:21

I mean, the simple point is, if you want to help the manufacturing industry, you can support directly the manufacturing industry, rather than pretending like finding gas companies to bring down the gas price in the hope that manufacturers will use the savings to then increase their their manufacturing lines doesn't stack up, especially when our research shows that the majority of manufacturers do not consider gas to be a major component of their cost stack. So our research shows that if you can actually invest directly in the industries that are going to be part of the clean energy revolution, then you can get a much bigger bang for your buck, both in terms of job creation. And in terms of economic benefit. A number of state governments are really moving into this the W a government has a whole lithium Valley strategy about how to integrate vertically integrate its lithium mining with manufacturing. It's not just limited to lithium as well. There are a number of rare earths that Australia is rich in that it mines and exports as well. And also there's there's a there's an obvious demand for it. I mean, Tesla gets the majority of its lithium from Australia, but there's no manufacturing key. If we want Eevee strategy, and we want a manufacturing strategy, then let's merge them together and see what we can do to build on that here. And the final point to make is that the the other thing is to remove any impediments. And so it should be noted that something like the Victorian electric vehicle tax won't just diminish the uptake of electric vehicles. It'll also diminish the appetite from companies to set up shop in Victoria, to actually look at bringing back any car manufacturing parts there as well. So it's kind of when you look at it at lunch, there are a number of things that we can do both to increase opportunities, but also to get rid of impediments.

Ebony Bennett 44:03

I've got a follow up question from the audience on that. For you, Chris. It's from you and black from the new daily. He wanted to ask about those road user charges in Victoria, which we've already touched on says that they've been described as a major disincentive to electric vehicle ownership with Australia's

largest employer group saying it put the cart before the horse and others saying it would slam the brakes on the transition to a V's. So wouldn't Albanese government asked the Victorian Government to reverse or cancel those charges as part of a broader holistic approach to replacing the declining fuel excise revenue.

44:38

I think if we were in office, we'd certainly have a conversation with premiers and State Treasurer's and climate change ministers about handling a V's going forward and incentivizing Evie toke up. As I said, I do understand the pressures that state Treasury's looking at in terms of road user charging more broadly, and I do think It's a national debate and conversation that's going to have to be had, it would be better if the federal government was engaged in that conversation with the states about how you would better coordinate, we do need to get a rapid take up of a V's across the country. Now, if the treasurer of Victoria was here, he would say to you, I would think that road user charging will be less onerous on electric vehicles than it is on internal combustion engines per kilometer, it's still going to be still going to be better off compared to internal combustion engine in terms of what you pay in petrol tax, as opposed to what you'd pay in a in a per kilometer Evie charge. But, you know, my job as department chain shadow is to get federal policy incentivizing electric vehicle tank up, we've already started it and there's a lot more to do.

Ebony Bennett 45:44

The next question is from Graham McClay, and this might be a quick one, he says, Where does labour stand on Sally Steggles climate bill?

Chris Bowen 45:52

Well, it's obviously it was pilot bill is fine. You know, it's it's a bill, which is a good step forward, but it will never come to a vote in Parliament. The way the parliament works is, the government decides what we vote on. And so I've met with stylee. I've discussed it with her it's not it's not exactly as I would have written it. It's not doesn't reflect labor policy in every element. But, you know, it's certainly a lot of commonality there a lot of common ground between our two approaches, and they'll be and they'll be more common ground, perhaps, as I announced more policy. But I sometimes get asked, you know, why doesn't labour vote for john listicles bill, and I say, well, because we never get the opportunity, it won't come on for a vote before the next election. The Labour Party, if we form the next government will have legislation will legislate a net zero by 2050 target, for example, they'll be legislation underpinning not only what I've announced already, but underpinning everything else that we will announce that needs legislation to be done so that we play legislation under a Labour government. Unfortunately, Charlie's bill, will, will just not never come on for discussion on the House of Representatives for Sally knows that that's not a criticism bizarrely at all. It's simply a statement of fact that the government won't allow it to come on for a vote.

Richie Merzian 47:04

Anybody jumping on Zoe's bill, just with a quick follow up, one of the things that Sally's bill has is basically the construction of a new climate commission to provide that independent advice that would have a lot more weight and require a response from government in terms of setting targets, starting with net zero by 2050 bits, providing interim budgets that have had major impact in how the UK has

addressed its emissions, and will hopefully do the same. He would that independent commission would be basically filled with experts that would be appointed by a panel. And what they would do is it would stop, I guess, some of the appointments that we're currently seeing now in some of the bodies that the federal government has, and most recently, last week, it was appointing grant King to head up the climate change authority as the chair ranking who when the Business Council of Australia had ranking his chair, it said that Labour's target of 45% by 2030 was economy wrecking is obviously taken a number of positions that haven't helped our climate policies. Is there some merit though, to at least looking at the idea of an independent commission to actually provide that kind of advice around targets?

Chris Bowen 48:14

Yeah, look, I think clearly that when the government's attempted to abolish the climate change authority on multiple occasions entirely, as you know, and having failed to do that they decided to emasculated Instead, it has nine staff. You know, I'm not sure how many staff or the Australia Institute but you do a great job. You imagine what the climate climate authority could do with more than nine staff Actually, I seriously resourced or authority, giving that independent advice to government. So again, I'll have more to say about the architecture of government. But the principle that the authority should be properly resourced and truly independent, is one that I strongly agree with.

Ebony Bennett 48:53

I've probably only got time for one or two more questions. The next one is from Terry sweetser. He says, Chris, do you see current government climate policy as an opportunity for China to exercise more influence in the Pacific? And will Australia become a pariah in Oceania as a result of current Morison government policy?

Chris Bowen 49:13

Well, I do think our lack of action on climate is a problem for us in the Pacific. And the Pacific nations Pacific Islands understand the ramifications of climate change probably better than anybody else in the world. Because they are looking at it every single day. And I think back to pay the dolphins offensive comments about the Pacific islands in the water lapping on their doorsteps and the lack of empathy that that showed for our brothers and sisters in the Pacific. So does it does it impact on our soft power in the Pacific, our lack of domestic seriousness when it comes to climate change policy? Absolutely, absolutely does. Or does that have geopolitical ramifications for our soft power in the Pacific? Yes.

Ebony Bennett 49:57

The next question that I've got here is from And he talks about decades ago, France managing a transition from many coal mines to nuclear. And while nuclear is not on the cards in Australia, she asks, surely Australia can manage a transition to renewables more inclusively. I just wondered if you could talk a little bit more, perhaps about some of the state government initiatives about renewables and how labour will will back more clean energy coming in as soon as possible?

Chris Bowen 50:28

Yeah, well, I think, pretty right there. Yes, we can do that transition more inclusively. But really my point here is that it can't just be a footnote, sort of saying we're going to climate change policy. And by the

way, you know, we'll get to regional jobs. And we'll look after you at some point in the future, we'll retrain you doesn't cut it. Jobs and jobs growth in regional Australia has to be at the heart of renewable energy policy and climate change policy. And it can be it must be it has to be. So it's really what I'm talking about is an economic policy, a jobs creation policy, which deals with climate change, and reassuring people that they are at the center of it. And as your question before, indicated, it's a bottom up initiatives that can help there. In terms of the state governments, I point to a couple of things I point to Victoria's investment in the Latrobe Valley. Remember when high voltage lines were closed and there was you know, shock and horror it was going to be terrible for energy generation and for regional that regional economy? Well, the Andrews Labor government stepped up and unemployment in the tri Valley today is lower than it was when Hazelwood was operating. So proper investments properly targeted regional approaches can and do work. And then you've got government since engaged state governments engaging in renewable energy zones focused on regional Australia. And to be fair, not just local governments, the Liberal government in New South Wales has a strong policy in that regard. Renewable Energy zones focused on regional Australia or regional New South Wales, which again, are making a difference and really making sure that people are clear about their role in a renewable energy future. So there are real policy levers that can and must be pulled. And at the moment, the states are doing all the heavy lifting, there's absolutely no federal involvement in the discussion about the future of regions in our renewable economy. There's just not there's no leadership from Canberra. And with all due respect to the good work, states are doing labor and liberal, they can only do so much it needs that federal leadership as well.

Ebony Bennett 52:31

I'm not sure if we'll have time for another question after this. So this might be the last one. But it's from Lars Bendel, who says how do we reach net zero or net negative emissions without a plan to deal with agriculture? And then I just might add to that and ask about, you know, other sectors, obviously, they all have to work together to reduce emissions?

Chris Bowen 52:50

Well, the answer the larger you don't, you don't get to net zero without a plan for our own culture. So it was a bit of I sort of forced to buy it a few months ago, a couple of months, people than a month ago, about whether net zero would apply to agriculture, net zero must be an economy wide ambition and must be an economy wide target. Otherwise, it's meaningless. But more perhaps more importantly, agriculture has to be included in the policy leaders to get there. And not only do I think that the National Farmers Federation thinks that and basically every farmer I've ever spoken to thinks that too, because they get it, they see the opportunities. Now, really, it comes down to providing support to farmers as they transition their operations to be more emissions, sensitive, less less emissions intensive and to assist them in, in storing carbon in their soils, for example, now that takes research and development, it takes investment in science, it takes investment in plants to convert that science into practical plans for farmers. And again, I'm looking at all those sorts of options. But you need that sectoral approach. So to your question, yes, we need a sectoral approach. We've started on that road in the Labour Party in the transport sector. We started on that road in the energy in the electricity sector, which is a little different because households are making change themselves. As you know, we are the world's leader in rooftop solar. But that takes management, including managing the grid, and hence our community batteries

proposal to help manage that. Then you've got industry agriculture, which are important parts of those sectors as well, and they need to be part of it, and you need appropriate policies for them as well.

Ebony Bennett 54:35

And just quickly, I've got two questions that I think are related. And if you could answer these briefly, Chris. One is from Michael mckeeva. Who says, Do you see any difference in the coming election in comparison to how climate was addressed in previous elections? And also one about Labour's policy is it in alignment with Matt Kane's recent announcements in news South Wales. And do you have hope for some bipartisanship on climate policy in that respect?

Chris Bowen 55:05

Yeah, both both good questions. So to Michael. Yeah, the, I think you'll see a much stronger emphasis from the Labour Party on the economic opportunities to climate change. I refuse to accept this false trade off that the conservatives peddle at every election, that somehow ambitious action on climate change comes at a cost to the economy. Now, we don't win that argument. during an election campaign, we've got to win that argument now and everyday between the election including the machine campaign, but we've got to win the argument that these is a massive opportunity for Australia, the risks of not acting economically, are extraordinary, the opportunities of acting are very, very strong. And let's, let's, let's, let's win this argument. Remember that that ridiculous argument that Scott Morrison put last time about the cost of action on climate change when he's presiding over massive missed opportunities for regional economies? So really, I think that is the big change in terms of the approach that we take. It's its core economic policy, that I that I intend to prosecute in election campaign, strong action on climate change in relation to Matt Cain. Yes. The policy, the New South Wales Government is a good one. It was supported in a bipartisan fashion at the state level. And I have absolutely no, you know, no qualms in saying I support good climate change policy at the state level, regardless of what side proposed. I see it around the country, including in New South Wales.

Ebony Bennett 56:37

Well, we might have to wrap it up there. Thank you so much for joining us today, Chris Bowen, and thanks for persevering through all those tech

Chris Bowen 56:43

we got. We got there in in I know it's a little bit bumpy to start with. But we got there. And that's the main conversation. So thanks for persevering with us as well.

Ebony Bennett 56:52

No worries. Thanks. And thanks to your team for Yeah, for getting us through all of that, thanks to Richie mercy. And and thank you, all of you for joining us today. We had more than 750 people on the line at one point, there may be a few more. And we had lots of great questions. As always, I'm sorry, I couldn't get to them all. But please don't forget to join us in the next few weeks for some other great webinars we have coming up as Richie mentioned earlier in this webinar. Next week, we'll be talking to two experts from America in anticipation of that Biden Climate Summit. Talking about whether or not it will be America first when it comes to climate action. So that's next week, Wednesday, that April the 21st at 11am. And then on Thursday, the following week, we'll be talking to Eli parisa, the co founder of

upworthy and avas, about remaking the public square and taking on big tech. So I do hope that you can join us for those. Thanks for tuning in today. Thanks again to Chris and Richie. Thank you all for joining us and hopefully we'll see you next week. Stay safe out there, everyone.