

# Federal Climate Debate

Hon. Chris Bowen MP  
Shadow Minister for Climate Change and Energy

*In conversation with*

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**Ebony Bennett** [00:00:02] Good day, everyone. I'm Ebony Bennett, deputy director at the Australia Institute, and welcome today to a special federal climate ministers debate. I want to thank you all for joining us. And I'd like to begin by acknowledging that Canberra is Ngunnawal country, and Ngambri country, and pay my respects to elders past and present and welcome any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders joining us today. Sovereignty was never ceded and this always was and always will be Aboriginal land. Just a few zoom tips before we begin to help things run smoothly today. If you hover over the bottom of your screen, you should be able to see a Q&A function where you can ask questions of the shadow minister and you should also be able to upvote other people's questions and make comments. A reminder to please keep things civil and on topic in the chat or you will be removed. And lastly, a reminder that this discussion is being recorded and will be posted on Australia Institute TV later today. Recently, the ABC's Vote Compass revealed that climate change is the most important issue for voters this election. Yet while we have seen some very big claims in the climate space, what Australia is lacking is real solutions and real action with the type of urgency that science tells us is necessary. The National Press Club has debates on agriculture, defence, regional Australia and the economy. Yet climate change, which will have serious ramifications for all these issues and more, has really been missing. So we put it to the public whether they thought such an event was needed and the response was overwhelming. More than 3600 people in just a few days responded to the Australia Institute travel for a debate on climate to discuss what Government and Opposition think need to be done during this critical action for climate change. A critical decade for climate action. We invited both the Minister for Industry, Energy and Emissions Reduction, Angus Taylor, and the Shadow Minister who's joining us today, the Honourable Chris Bowen. Unfortunately, Minister Taylor declined our invitation and did not send a statement or anything for us to read out so you can find all of their policy details online. But we are delighted that the Shadow Minister Chris Bowen is able to join us today. While it may make a debate somewhat difficult, the

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issue is so important that we wanted to still have the shadow minister on. It's a valuable opportunity for you, the public, to interrogate Labour's climate change policies and of course just to discuss one of the most critical issues facing Australia and the world. I'd now like to introduce Ben Oquist, executive director of the Australia Institute, for a few introductory remarks and to introduce the Shadow Minister. Thanks, Ben.

**Ben Oquist** [00:02:52] Thank you, everybody, and thanks for your leadership in pursuing this webinar series, webinar series right through the election campaign. A valuable opportunity to discuss a wide range of policy issues and important for our democracy that people are engaged in an informed and deliberative manner. And it's it's a great testament to your skills, a great privilege for the Australia Institute to host and I think really helping improve our democracy. So hats off to you, Ebony, and all the time involved in making this series such a success. Thank you, Chris Bowen, for making the time to be here. To echo Ebony sentiments, I very much want to stress that we did want this to be a debate. This is a debate that Australia needs and not talking about climate change is not going to make it go away. When it comes to climate, what is daily need is and is a true contest of ideas of effective and ambitious and equitable policy that will bring down emissions in Australia and help bring them down in the world and protect our environment at the rate and scale that is so urgently needed. Just days before the election was called. As you know, the international the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change issued its final report, warning of the high likelihood of global temperatures rising between 1.5 and two degrees above pre-industrial levels, rising above that critical threshold. In fact, just weeks before the election was called, Australians were hit with some of the worst floods in recorded history. Yet despite these events, we don't have a leaders debate on climate happening in this election and that's baffling. The Australia Institute is dedicated wholly to research and ideas designed to drive good policy and good policy outcomes in Australia. We have a programme on climate and energy dedicated to research and good ideas and climate and energy policy. But while we can suggest and advocate for policies and communicate them, we cannot implement them. That is up to our government and our Parliament. Climate change is happening now and people here in Australia and overseas are already having their lives turned upside down as a result and I personally locked off with my sympathy to anyone here today who was affected by the floods and the devastating fires before that. To those who have been displaced or lost family and homes, the sheer urgency and reality of the climate crisis is palpable. There is enormous appetite for leadership on climate change, in my view. Two thirds of Australians, 67%, agree that Australia strongly should be a world leader in finding solutions to climate change. More than two thirds of the community want Australia to set targets aligned with limiting global warming to 1.5 to 2 degrees. Eight in ten Australians support the phase out of coal fired power stations. That's clearly according to our Climate of the Nation survey in these final days before the election, it's crucial that we debate actual policies and none more so than on climate change. I'm sorry that this will not be a debate in the true sense of the word, but I'm looking forward to a robust discussion nonetheless. I've had the privilege of seeing Chris Bowen advocate for these ideas personally at a conference in Sydney this week. So I know it'll be a good discussion. He's got lots to say. He's been driving a big debate in in climate. Even if we're not having the latest debate that we need it. A little bit of background on, Chris, for those who don't know. In Parliament in 2004 has held a wide range of portfolios, including serving as Treasurer. Critically, he knows the economic implications, consequences and opportunities from climate change. I was Minister for Human Services. Minister for Immigration Minister, Financial Services, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Competition Policy,

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Minister for Small Business and Minister for Tertiary Education. So Chris has been responsible for a range of significant policy reforms and programmes in these portfolios and brings that expertise to, I think, one of the not the most important portfolio responsibilities in any government. He served as interim leader of the Labour Party and Acting Leader of the Opposition following the 2013 federal election and served as shadow treasurer, of course. He is now Minister for Climate Change and Energy. He's been joined here today by Climate and Energy Programme director Richie Merzian, who is known to many of you who's driving a big body of research and communication at the Australia Institute covering all aspects of climate policy, which brings a wealth of knowledge, having worked inside government and as a climate diplomat and negotiator internationally. Thank you, Richie, for your work and your leadership in driving good climate policy debates and outcomes. With all that, I'll hand back to you to get us going. Thank you so much for joining us today. The Honourable Chris Bowen.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:08:12] Thank you so much, Ben. I just want to quickly outline how today will work. So first I'm going to ask the Shadow Minister some questions. Then we'll have a bit of a broader discussion, perhaps some questions from journalists, and then we'll go to questions from the audience. Welcome. Shadow Minister Chris Bowen, thank you so much for joining us today. I want to begin by asking you about Labour's policy of 43% emissions reduction this decade. You've made the point that that's an aggregation of all Labour's policies. I just wanted to start off with could you please tell us which of those Labour policies are going to do the heavy lifting to get us to that target in the next decade?

**Chris Bowen** [00:08:52] Thanks, Ebony. I'm delighted to join you. And just before I begin, can I join you in celebrating the elders of the Gadigal people that you are? I should. Pay my respects. And also note that it is of course well beyond time that Australia's first peoples had a constitutionally enshrined voice to the Australian Parliament. One of the most important things about that Labour government would do is progress that in relation to your question, your right. We put out a 43% emissions reduction target, but it is more than a target. We are the only party going this election explaining not only what our target is but to explain how we will achieve it. The 43% is the modelled aggregate impact of all our policies, not just an ambition or an objective or goal. It is actually the result of our policies that have been modelled by Reputex, who as well as being economic modelling, energy modellers, and they have found that we will deliver a 43% emissions reduction with the policies by 2030, with the policies that we have announced and would implement. You ask what are the big drivers? And there are primarily true out of all the policies we've announced. They're all important. But in terms of emissions reduction by 2030, there's two that I would highlight. There's the reforms to the safeguard mechanism, which has become controversial in recent days with the sort of very predictable, typical toxic scare campaign by the Liberals, Liberals and Nationals. But the fact is, you can't reduce emissions in Australia unless you're getting emissions down from our biggest emitters. It's not rocket science and the safeguards mechanism was designed by the Government and I've taken their architecture because I think the architecture is pretty good in terms of the policy design, which is a scheme which applies to the top 215 emitters in the country. But take it up and we'll make it work. At the moment, there are loopholes, more loopholes, more holes in a piece of Swiss cheese in the in how the baseline is set. We would put the safeguards mechanism on a trajectory to net zero and then work with those facilities through the Clean Energy

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Regulator to see their emissions come down. Bearing in mind the technology facility has available and the competitive pressures they face from overseas. The other one that I'll point to is rewiring the nation. We know there's no transition without transmission. We need to really improve the energy grid. I know it's not particularly sexy or front page news, but unless we upgrade Australia's grid, we won't be getting on getting the renewables coming forward that we need and our modellers have found that it contributes to 5% emissions reduction by 2030. Such a big important part of our agenda. We all know, we would all know that there are already large renewable installations being rejected by regulators. It can't go on like this. We need to get renewable energy for Australia's regions to it's consumed in the cities by large and big industrial conurbations and rewiring the nation will be very important to getting through, getting the renewables on and getting to 82% renewables by 2030, which again is the model is all about policies. I could talk about all of them. I'm pretty proud of our transport and electric vehicles policy, but I know we'll probably get to that. That's an important part of our policy and we added some more just on the weekend afternoon effect to is open up stories to people who otherwise can't afford a household battery. Solar banks reporting for people who can't have solar panels on a roof because they renters. We're in a strata arrangement. They're all important. But I would point to those two big Labour's controversially. The Government has attacked both of them. To be clear, Angus has attacked both our railway and the nation policy and our safeguards mechanism because I pretend to be committed to net zero when I actually say a policy that might achieve net zero. I'll always oppose the actual policy.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:12:38] The next question I have is that part of Labour's climate policy platform is the intention to bid to co-host COP 29 in partnership with a Pacific island nation? I believe the Institute's put out a paper on that that we might come to a bit later. But how would Labour, if elected, go about repairing kind of Australia's relationship with the Pacific and what would that look like, that bid to to co-host a cop?

**Chris Bowen** [00:13:05] Well, firstly, in relation to repairing relationships with the Pacific, except firstly you've got to turn up and you've got to engage. And I know that might sound classic, but it's not happening. You know, I went to a climate forum in Penrith last week with about 400 representatives of the Pacifica community organised by the Uniting Church of Australia. It was a wonderful event. I spoke about our approach. There was a huge turnout because the Pacifica community in Australia knows what's at stake for their communities at home, on their home island. The Uniting Church, which is not is not an organisation that most people are afraid of, invited a long list of Liberal MP to come and talk to that forum. Nobody showed up. I was the only political representative who took the time to go and talk to Pacifica communities. I don't think that's something I need to be proud. My job. But. But the government didn't even turn up to show those communities respect. So take that principle and put it on a broader on a broader canvas. That engagement, whether it be here in Australia or with ambassadors or high commissioners, or whether it be with visits to the Pacific to talk about our approach and to engage with leaders about what is necessary would be an approach. Penny Wong and myself where opinion I would both want to say climate diplomacy at the top of our diplomatic agenda. But first we have to get our domestic arrangements in order and to have a more credible solution, a more critical answer as we go around the world. And that's nowhere near. Now, nowhere is that more important in the Pacific in relation to cost. And I don't know whether we'll win the bid or not, of course, but we want to try because we

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want to, one, send a message to the rest of the world that Australia is under new management when it comes to climate change. And frankly, it's an opportunity to showcase Australia's wares as a renewable energy powerhouse to really the world's biggest trade show. And we have so much to offer the world on renewable energy. And yes, we will offer to co-host with any Pacific island nation who chooses to. I don't know how many or which ones would take that up, but that would be on coming to office pretty hard. Our diplomatic agenda then to engage with the Pacific Islands and Pacific Islands, friends and us. Would you like to? Of course. No hard feelings from us if they don't want to participate, if they do want to participate in a bid and co-host up with us in some form, I can't think of a better way for the Pacific Island nations to make their case to the world than to have them as an integral part of cop. And in some form or other, if we win the bid to host the cop, they would be involved and I would see them as very genuine partners in hosting that cop. I think it's a massive opportunity. Again, I know the government has said it's a waste of money. I fundamentally disagree. It is not a waste of money to host a cop in Australia for all those raises. And I just want to make this one final point as we talk about the Pacific, as important as it is and it is vital, it must be the top of our agenda, we must never, ever forget. It is not just about the Pacific. Our brothers and sisters in the Torres Strait, Torres Strait Islanders are facing very, very similar issues on Australian soil and Australian territorial soil. They are facing the impact of rising sea levels just as Pacific islands are. So as you're talking about the Pacific, we should never forget the Torres Strait.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:16:28] Yeah, just sticking with that briefly, I guess, will you will a Labour government rejoin the United Nations Green Climate Fund, which is a key source of funding for climate action, particularly in the Pacific, but also for developing countries.

**Chris Bowen** [00:16:42] So many what we've said would be our priorities. What we announced in the Pacific package again I think last week, that is an increase in overseas development assistance to the Pacific at 525 million, which is a substantial boost to the Pacific package. We believe our aid programme is important as it is around the world must really be more focussed on the Pacific. We would also establish a Pacific Climate Infrastructure Financing Partnership, which would really be again a level of engagement with with Pacific Islands practically based on joint investments which can impact in relation to what the Pacific Islands can do, in relation to what else we can do. We would need to look at that in government and get advice and talk to Pacific Islands, but I think they're pretty, pretty big and substantial commitments that we've made pre-election.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:17:34] I might Petroleum's in Australia is from exports, yet we know there's really been no policies to drive down demand for foreign oil. I know you want to talk about electric vehicles, but I did want to ask about Labour's policies specifically around increasing public and active transport and and when Australia will have fuel efficiency standards. And then on EVs particularly anything around manufacturing electric buses. So public and active transport, fuel efficiency standards, how are we going to drive down emissions in the transport sector?

**Chris Bowen** [00:18:09] Yeah, all very important issues. EBONY In relation to public transport, of course I'd be negligent if I didn't point out Labour's track record at the federal level on public

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transport because that shows the sort of approach we take. And of course the Prime Minister and our Government would be the former Transport Minister who engineered the big investments in public transport under the last Labour Government. So it's interesting that the last government, the Rudd Gillard government committed more funding to urban public transport infrastructure than all the federal governments preceding it. From 1901 one government committed more money to public transport infrastructure than every other government for 100 to 7 more years, for more than 120, 20 years. And that is steady, I think sort of says a lot about the approach of the Labour Party takes office. Of course we made commitments to public transport projects in this election. In Hobart, Brisbane, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth and in New South Wales. So again, it's not just sort of rhetoric or some sort of in principle, we've actually put the money behind public transport projects as well in relation to active infrastructure. You know, to be clear, this year really has to be a partnership between all levels of government, local government. I'm the full measure so I get to help important local government needs for local planning decisions around things like active transport, state government funds, a lot of the exact, you know, the particular infrastructure projects. And of course, we're funded. And I think our project, our discretion in active transport comes in funding, saying to state states and local government, if we're funding this particular project, we'd like to know what you're considering for active transport elements of it, whether it's a cycle path alongside a road. And probably the best example of that is the M7 in Western Sydney, which has, I think it's 56 kilometres of soccer pass along the M7. I mean, I drive with the M7 a lot. It's where I live and on the weekend you see many cyclists and you can travel through Western Sydney on that cycle path and it's interconnections with other cycle networks, so that's example. Catherine King, shadow minister for Transport Infrastructure, already signal that approach that we would be factoring in active transport to our funding mechanisms in relation to electric vehicles. Let's just quickly run through what our policy is because it's pretty important cutting the taxes on a base to make them more affordable. So that's abolishing the fringe benefits tax and the tariff on every no emissions vehicle below the luxury car tax threshold. That makes a real difference. The FBT is important because while it doesn't apply to consumers, it only applies to businesses buying an RV for their employees. It's really important for two quick reasons one 50% of all car sales in Australia are fleet. So if you're not buying aviation your fleet you're not really making progress. And secondly, fleets turn turnover every two or three years. We need a second hand a market in Australia. There's none to speak of at the moment. Getting fleet to transition to hydrogen or ABS means you'll have a second hand market in three or four years time. We've got to stop. And that also applies to the Commonwealth. We would take the Commonwealth fleet to now emissions vehicles. 75% of purchases by 2025 would be either hydrogen or RV again. Commonwealth turns average cars every three years is 10,000 cars in the Commonwealth. That's going to flow through to us again and every market. And it sends a message to manufacturers. If you want to win the Commonwealth contract, which is one of the biggest in the country, you're going to have to provide a no emissions vehicles to Australia. And then of course on the weekend we announced our Drive the Nation Fund, Driving the Nation Fund, which would see a fast charger once every 150 kilometres on the National Highway Network. Now we understand the range anxiety is a big concern holding people back. You have to be frank, not all of us drive long, long distances, but all of us like the idea of driving long distances, even if we don't shut it will hold people back from buying lives. If they are if they're not convinced. There's good charging infrastructure, I'm delighted to say will partner with the NRMA, who's done great work on the potential rollout of fast chargers across the country. They're going to co-fund this initiative with us if we win office. I want to pay tribute to the NRMA for what they've done. They're meeting that debate. But we want to be able to say with your track, with you travelling from Perth to Sydney or Adelaide to Darwin or Brisbane down to Adelaide via whichever way you want to go,

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there will be a guaranteed fast charger on average once every 150 cars are driving me by myself. I know how you do. You do have to. As much as I love my highway and I really do, you do have to plan your trip and think about your charging. If you just know that infrastructure's there, I drive mine between Sydney and Canberra a lot. For example, it can make the journey without charging. But if I'm not fully charged, I need to know that there's a charge added and it just makes such a difference to your planning. Well, I think to vehicle emission standards. I welcome the fact the manufacturers now have a voluntary code. I mean, that's a that's a good step forward. I want to say that working we work with the manufacturers on their code and it's voluntary nature. But my focus has been on bringing the cost in dealing with a range anxiety and getting a second hand market going by driving fleet purchases.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:23:32] Thank you so much. I want to acknowledge we've got a thousand people on the line with us today. Thank you so much. I can see you're putting questions in here for Chris Bowen as well. Thank you so much for joining us. We will come to questions from the audience in a minute, but we've still got a few others here. And Chris Bowen. In the last few years, the Federal Government has given billions of dollars in subsidies, in particular to the gas industry to open up new gas basins. That will make a major. For export. But it's really justified that mainly as increasing gas supply for the domestic market. Do you think that money, if it had gone instead to households, businesses and industries to electrify, it would have been a more effective way of cutting energy bills. And, you know, can the same be said for cutting the fuel excise recently instead of electric transport subsidies?

**Chris Bowen** [00:24:24] So in relation to gas. My position is has been crystal clear and they presented many, many forums and it's not one which everybody loves, but I will always full of as I say it. We've got on one side the Liberal National Party saying there's a gas recovery, gas coverage going to create any coming boom. It's not true. It's been true. It's a lie. There is no substance to that. There is no gas recovery and the Labour Party does not buy into the concept of a gas recovery. And we won't because it's it's just a fraudulent statement. Having said that, there are others who say we need to get gas out of the system a.s.a.p. While I don't regard gas, this as surely as a transition to it is the case that we need peaking and firming while we're transitioning to renewable energy and while we're building a storage. The Imam has found we need to triple our storage, whether it be through batteries or pumped hydro hydrogen. We need to keep reliable energy as we move to 100% renewables by 82% by 2030. And that means we're going to need picking up firming. And when you come to peaking affirming, you really only got three options. Coal fired power, which maybe we'll talk about nuclear, which I don't support. And gas and your gas does have the benefit of being able to switch on and off really quickly as opposed to coal. Once you start a coal fired power station, you can switch it off in relation to the integrity of funding. Will I support a figure like that? We need a federal CEC and federal CEC will be able to examine all decision integrity, whether it be government funding, gas or anything else. And it's just unbelievable. We're still having this debate.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:25:54] Yeah. I want to stick with coal fired power stations there that you mentioned. The Australia Institute's annual Climate of the Nation survey shows around eight in ten Australians support a phase out of coal fired power stations. We've seen that Hazelwood closing

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suddenly caused big problems. Clearly there is a role there for government in managing the retirement of Australia's ageing coal fired power fleet. And we know recently that the Australian energy market operator said that regular breakdowns at gas and coal fired power stations, coupled with the high cost of gas and coal at the moment is really pushing up electricity, wholesale electricity prices. What is Labour's plan to manage the phase out of our expensive now an ageing coal fired power stations you know as as that fleet ages and needs to retire.

**Chris Bowen** [00:26:44] Yeah. So you're right. Coal fired power stations will close regardless of who's in office. I'm prepared to acknowledge that government isn't. There have been many closures under the current government, but they're not being managed, as you suggested, and they will continue. They need to be managed. And there will be no new coal fired power certainly coming on. The government pretends that they'll build a new coal fired power station at Collinsville. I've got to I've got to say. I do not believe that is that is a promise which they will keep it that there won't be new coal fired power in Australia. And I'm prepared to say so as those ageing coal fired power stations are closed. We need to manage that change, as you suggest. And there's really two elements to managing the change, the energy supply across the country that's important. More renewables and more storage. We've got a massive task when it comes to storage. Nobody is more passionate about building storage than me because, you know, when the our opponents say, well, the wind doesn't always blow or the sun doesn't always shine. That's about essentially sensible saying the rain doesn't always fall. What we store water so we can drink it while the rain not falling with the store you will energy when when wind isn't blowing, the sun is shining. It's a massive task that we are nowhere near what we need to do to build that storage site. We've got to manage the energy part of coal fired power closing down, and then we've got to manage the community part and that is jobs. And I think we do that by creating new jobs in renewable energy. That's one of the keys. And manufacturing and manufacturing of renewables to bring all three together. That's why when we model why, I'm pleased that when we modelled our policies energy impact, their impact through power prices, through direct investments, etc., our policies create 640,000 jobs across the country and five out of six of those are in the regions. Now, the regions that will mainly benefit from our policies are also coal regions because that's where they create energy. They're good at it. So as we invest more and we get the framework for investment in renewable energy, that's going to happen in those same communities that are changing because coal fired power stations are closing. A great example of that is offshore wind. A great example. I'll just finish on this. What great example is offshore wind, which we pushed to make legal. You don't get many winds in opposition. I'll take that one. We push to make it legal and it's now legal. Offshore wind is great. Push creates a lot of energy, creates a lot of jobs. It also is directly linked to coal, to coal regions because that's where the greatest, strongest need to feed in those massive turbines into the grid. So they'll do that in communities in which they used to be or transitioning out coal fired power stations, creating jobs because those big turbines need maintenance and they need ships to take workers out. So that's a great example with the right policies, jobs you can create in areas which are going through economic change as a result of coal fired power stations.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:29:33] I've got a question that kind of follows on from that, from Miki Perkins, the environment reporter at the Age, who asks, So then will you create a national energy plan to oversee that transition? How how are you really going to manage that at the federal level?

**Chris Bowen** [00:29:47] Well, National Energy Partnership, Parent Australia Policy, I mean, it's the most comprehensive energy policy that's been released by an opposition and it is really all about that. It's about managing this change, about getting more renewables, 82% renewables in the system by 2030, 82% of our electricity being renewables and creating jobs covering 4005 out of six of them in the regions. Yet of course we need to work with particular communities on their on their changes and we know will be a ground up process where we work with communities about what's going on with particular changes. But really it's about creating those new jobs, that renewable energy creation and getting the jobs going through cheaper power prices, whether it be renewable energy manufacturing itself. I find it extraordinary that we put we've put as a nation 60 million solar panels on our roofs in the last ten years. I'm sure everybody from almost everybody in this in this webinar has got solar panels on the roof. We've all done that in the last ten years at 60 million solar panels, 1% of be made in Australia. 1 billion. You've really got to try hard to get Australians. My panel, I can tell you I've done it and if you've got to go and procure them and it's not always easy, so we could change that by making more of them in Australia.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:31:03] Chris, I've got a question here from Jacob Graber at the AFA. He says, Mr. Bowen, how should voters think about cost of living, which Labour is blaming on the Government more broadly, given the prospect and risk that the cost of the transition leads to upward pressure on prices before they come down? Who should bear these costs and how do you plan to spread any pain?

**Chris Bowen** [00:31:30] No. Well, I mean, the good news is, as you know, that renewable energy is the cheapest form of energy, followed by the gas thing called a nickel nuclear in that order. Renewables lose that gas. So we get more use in the system. We reducing power prices. That's just a statement of fact. And so we are managing this change, but we're managing it in a change which is not bringing in more expensive energy, bringing in cheaper energy. And that includes, by the way, despite the myth peddled by some that includes the cost of storage and transmission, even including the cost of storage and transmission. Renewable energy is still the cheapest. And we do we need big investments in in transmission and storage. But even factoring those investments in renewables is the cheapest. So that actually puts downward pressure on prices, as is evidence to gain in modelling. So of course these big cost of living pressures in Australia, but one of the things we can do is get this change well underway with a proper framework which encourages private sector investment in renewables, the cheapest form of energy.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:32:31] Richie, I might just ask you there. I know Germany's taken an approach that we were talking about earlier to managing the phase out of coal. What are other countries doing and how they are approaching it?

**Richie Merzian** [00:32:43] Most of them are basically at least using European examples, being forward leaning in, actually mapping out the retirement of their fleets. Germany in particular I think has been best practise where they brought together the unions, the owners of the coal fired power

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stations, the state governments, even NGOs. And together they mapped out what the retirement plan would look like for every single coal power station in the country. And I guess the big question is whether Australia can do the same thing right now. What's happening is we don't have a national plan, so deals are stitched up between state governments and the owners of these coal fired power stations. And that's happening on a state by state level, despite us having a national electricity market. So I guess what the question is, is do we lean into that and actually say, no, we need an active plan here because they're going to retire faster than their nameplate retirement date.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:33:39] I've got another question here, Chris, from Marian Rae at AP. She asks, Would a Labour administration keep issuing accused as well as the safeguard mechanism credits that I've mentioned? In other words, a two tiered carbon market.

**Chris Bowen** [00:33:56] Yeah, I'll answer that. But I just want to quickly also answer Richie's point and agree with it. In effect, Richie is right about what's happening. States are doing the hard yards because they're the only ones interested in this change at the moment. I want that. I want to have continued engagement from the states and with the states, but I want that as part of our national framework. It was extraordinary that recently we had the announcement of a large coal fired power station and Matt Kane was all over it as the site minister. And Angus Taylor found out about the night before, it wasn't even in the room where it happened, wasn't engaged because the federal government is regarded by all the serious players as irrelevant because they made themselves irrelevant. I want to bring the Federal Government back to the centre of that change because it is a key part of our responsibilities working in partnership with the states. And one of the first things I would do if we came first on May 21st is convene a meeting of my state and territory colleagues to help get that that process back on track. That would be very high on my to do list should I be sworn in in relation to act. Use of safeguard mechanism credits is the fundamental answer. We would have the system continue and we would have credits and part of that policy is to introduce below the baseline credits for safeguard facilities. That's also been government policy. They just haven't got around to doing it. We would get around to doing it because I do think it's an important part of the architecture. I will say in relation to credit, so integrity is important. I find the recent reports of integrity problems with case concerning stroke troubling. I know the Australia Institute has been playing an important role in progressing that. I'm not here, to be honest, to determine to arbitrate whether those concerns are made out invalid. But I'm concerned about and I want a process in relation to accused which is beyond reproach and which has public confidence. And I've announced actually to be fair analysis even before these concerns came to light in recent weeks, which we announced as part of our December 3rd Pairing Australia package, that we would have a comprehensive, short and sharp because we've got to get on with it. But I want it to be independent and comprehensive review of the methods and the accused scheme to ensure that it is producing real abatement. I'm not interested in carbon credits which pay people not to clear land which was never going to be cleared. That's just not on. Now again, I stress I'm not here to declare or arbitrate. I'm not going to do the review that the concerns, I might add, or just changes necessary or that charge is necessary. But we will have that review done independently so that I can have confidence as the Minister in the scheme.

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**Ebony Bennett** [00:36:45] I'm going to take a question from the audience now and then. I've still got a couple of other journalists questions to follow up, but I've got a lot of people here in the questions asking about fossil fuel subsidies Chris Bowen, Rodger Tonkin and Tom Broadhurst. He'll have both asked will Labour commit to redirecting the billions of dollars in subsidies going to fossil fuels to renewable solutions with a future? And another question Will Labour withdraw subsidies for fossil fuels? Surely that's the first step in any transition?

**Chris Bowen** [00:37:17] I think the first step is to get the policy framework right and that's where Australia Government does make some changes. For example, requiring the emissions reduction, the biggest emitters directly in consultation with them on what's doable, etc.. But that's the policy approach I take in. To be clear, in relation to fossil fuel subsidies, I think there's definitional issues. Some people have very broad definitions of fossil fuel subsidies. Some of us would agree on what many of them are, but they are areas where investments in transport, etc., which some people regard as fossil fuel subsidies, which I think is more contested and more debateable. But the policy framework that I take this election and will implement is the one encompassed in the Powering Australia document the most comprehensive energy and climate change policy the Opposition has released a long time, backed up by all that modelling and it has that impact getting 82% renewables and 43% emissions reduction.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:38:14] I've got another question here from Linda Ward who asks why Labour is supporting the LNP Government on opening 114 new coal and gas projects when we're already experiencing the impacts of climate. Could you just talk a little bit about that pipeline of fossil fuel projects?

**Chris Bowen** [00:38:33] Well, I appreciate the question. It is and I'm not trying to be disrespectful that that is a Greens party talking point, that particular point. But I'm more than happy to deal with it. I believe the market determines demand for Australian exports to Australian resources. I believe the market is changing 80% of our trading partners committed to net zero. But what I'm going to do and what the Labour Government will do is see the environmental process work through. Actually environmental approvals are an important matter of law and actually when a government or alternative government says we don't care what environmental approvals fund, we're not going to allow that project under environmental approvals, you undermine that environmental group process. You actually bring it into question and leave it open to legal challenge. So you've got to pressure pretty carefully here and not scoring own goal by undermining the environmental approval process. That's the approach we take. If a project gets through environmental approval processes and it stacks up financially from the proponent, will then that project can proceed. But it's got to go through those processes. So it's not quite right. My friends in the Greens party shy about, you know, Labour and Liberal support for particular projects like this. I only speak for myself. The Liberal Party can speak for itself in forms it chooses to participate. But we believe in the environmental process proceeding.

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**Ebony Bennett** [00:39:50] And I will just say that a couple of people asking why we didn't invite the Greens to participate in this debate. This was designed to be a federal climate ministers debate. However, for people interested in the Greens policies, we are in talks with Adam Bandt's office for a webinar with the Greens leader in the coming weeks before the election. I've got a question here from Adam Morton at The Guardian. He asks Chris Bowen Concerns have been raised by Professor Andrew Macintosh and others about the role of the clean energy regulator in the administration of carbon credits and the Emissions Reduction Fund. Will the role of the regulator be included in the review that you have promised?

**Chris Bowen** [00:40:31] Well, the review will look at the integrity of the system and what the reviewer views. We don't have any appointments yet, but what they regard as relevant to the integrity of the system. Now, I must say that the make up of the clean energy regulator, both the what is the clean energy regulator has a number of elements to a full time government employees and then there's part time appointments. But I would I would look at those on their merits and coming to office. The Clean Energy regulator himself, David Parker, is a respected bureaucrat and has my respect in relation to other appointments and other processes. I would wait a little bit ahead of myself. I would wait to come into office before reaching a determination on that.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:41:15] Okay. A question here from Michael Masinga from Renew Economy. Is Labour open to strengthening its medium term targets? And if not, how will Labour respond to pressure from the Greens and independents who are calling for stronger targets? Matt, stick with that.

**Chris Bowen** [00:41:33] Well, the targets will implement other targets. We're talking to the people and that's 43% and that's what we would implement as a Labour government. I've said that it would be ideal to legislate those targets, that target in particular. That would be ideal. But if there's not support in the Parliament and particularly in the Senate. Then we will proceed and implement that target. It doesn't actually need legislation. We can notify the conference of the Parties that Australia is the target and we would do so. So that is, I think it's important to be fair. I understand people's views. You've got the Liberals and Nationals saying they're 26, 28, 43 others are higher. I do make the point that 43 isn't just our target, it's the model result of our policies. With respect, the Greens can't say that I can't I can't put out an explanation or a modelled view of how they would achieve their target. We can, but it's important in this in closing down the climate wars and ending this toxic politics that governments do what they say they're going to do. We will we will implement that 43% target, ideally with legislation, but if not with legislation, we would get on with the job and if it doesn't, if it's not going to be legislated, then I respect the views of others, but that would be what we would just get on and do.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:42:45] I've got a question from the audience, John Engler, that says The United Nations secretary general and the latest IPCC climate report identified reducing methane emissions as incredibly important coming from agriculture and the mining of coal and gas and waste landfill. Will labour what will labour do in boosting accurate measurements of methane emissions, and

would you push for Australia to sign on to the global methane pledge of reducing methane emissions by 30% by 2030?

**Chris Bowen** [00:43:17] Look, I'm not going to sign on to a pledge, which I don't know how it would be implemented in Australia without getting further advice. So it's very important frankly is the alternative government that anything we say we do, we know how we would achieve it. Yes, it's important to reduce methane. Absolutely. No question, particularly in Australia's context with as the listener said, as the participants said, both our resources sector now agriculture sector. So there's plenty to do in relation to methane, but I'm not going to sign up to a pledge. We weren't consulted about the pledges. The Opposition, although I would I expect that we would be by those who presented it because it's not appropriate to engage in opposition before government. Then I look forward to talking to my international counterparts about their methane reduction programmes and how Australia might participate in that. But that's not that's not a commitment I'm in a position to make without having all the evidence and advice about what is doable in the Australian context. But I know making progress is true. I know we can reduce agricultural methane emissions by great Australian science. I mean the asparagus, the seaweed is ammonia miracle reducing methane from cattle. You almost 100% very big figures that you get methane reduction. But I also, to be fair recognise it's a challenge because we are broadacre farming country. We spread out cattle out over many hundreds of thousands of acres in Australia. We don't have feedlot farming like they do in some other countries, so putting the asparagus into the feed is a lot harder in Australia. So that's not to say we shouldn't do it, we shouldn't try, we shouldn't have government engagement. But you know, it is to say that it's not just as you're saying we're going to just reduce agricultural emissions by 80% or some figure without having very thorough scientific advice about what's achievable when when it comes to that.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:45:04] I've got a couple of questions in here that I clocked that were on carbon capture and storage. I'm sorry. There's so many questions coming in. I'm finding it hard to keep hold of them. Chris Bowen, we know a lot.

**Chris Bowen** [00:45:16] Welcome to my world.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:45:17] And many have been invested in carbon capture and storage in Australia without too much to show for it. What role does Labour a Labour government see carbon capture and storage playing in the future here? Given, you know, we've already wasted billions with virtually nothing to show for it?

**Chris Bowen** [00:45:33] Well, again, my approach to carbon capture storage is very much based on scientific evidence and research and results. And again, this gets very odd, illogical government things. Carbon capture storage is the answer to all the problems. You don't really. You do. I don't know if Angus was here, he could say it. But the view is, by and large, carbon capture storage is extremely important going forward. There are other to say carbon capture. Storage has their work.

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We'll never work out where I have an evidence based approach and we don't have the luxury of ideology. If something works, it should be embraced. It doesn't work. We must reject it and move on. Carbon capture storage hasn't work in coal. You might be won't working coal. No evidence it will ever work with anything to do with coal. And we shouldn't pretend it ever would. It's been tried, not put no problem in trying the right thing to do to try it. But it just hasn't stacked up. It doesn't work if this. Well, I don't mind companies giving it a go, but it's got to be evidentiary based and we've got to see real emissions reduction, our future emissions in. That's what I want. I don't I'm not ideological about how we achieve that. I note. That the IPCC has found, for example, going forward, that we're going to need negative emissions, we're going to direct the capture of carbon. That's the IPCC. That's that's next level serious. That's taking us to the next level. That's what the IPCC said. So I just don't think we had the luxury of tribal sort of says this is great. Is terrible. I take the more evidence pragmatic approach. It's not going to work in many, many cases. If it can be shown to work in a way that not just the company says, but is independently verified by chief scientist and others, and then I'm up to that discussion. I'm not here to say that this is the answer, nor that it's necessarily never going to work in any circumstance. We know where has it worked? Let's just see how it goes in the future.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:47:34] Richie, I might just asked you there. I know the Australia Institute has done a lot of research into carbon capture and storage. Is there anything you'd like to add to that?

**Richie Merzian** [00:47:43] And if it's evidence based and the evidence will show CCS has been a colossal failure of a \$4 billion committed by state and federal governments in Australia over two decades, not a single fully operational CCS site to show for it. The only one that can be pointed to is Chevron's Gorgon sign that's still not fully operational and because it failed, it released more emissions than an entire year's worth of domestic aviation in a normal year. That that's sort of what CCS is showing. The worst part is that most CCS projects around the world are used for enhanced oil recovery. That means you push the CO2 down, you get more oil, and when you burn that oil, you end up with more emissions. So really, if the goal is less emissions, as Chris said, then it's hard to see how CCS will benefit. The only question then is does CAS deserve more public support? Because it's certainly failed upwards in attracting lots of lots of dollars from the taxpayer, both state and federal. So really, would TCS deserve more public funding? Would be the question.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:48:41] Thank you so much. I can tell if you're interested in carbon capture and storage or on the Australia Institute's research around the integrity questions around carbon credits, market and offsets, and around the regulator that Chris referred to earlier. Please head on over to our website, Australia Institute dot org. Are you where public policy think tank. All our research is freely available to the public and you can read it there. I'm Chris Bowen. I can see a lot of people, including John McBain, in the questions asking not just around mitigation but adaptation. I referred in my introduction obviously to the fact that Australia's been experiencing floods, bushfires, the Black Summer bushfires. We're really dealing with the impacts of climate change here and now in a lot of communities around Australia. What is Labour going to be doing and how might you work with state and local governments to really help communities adapt as we deal with those impacts that are already here with us?

**Chris Bowen** [00:49:38] Yeah, it's a great question, an important issue because we just as much as it pains me to say we have to acknowledge that we are going to need adaptation because the world has lifted to light. There has been warming, there will continue to be warming. We need to hold it as low as possible going forward, which are already having impacts. And we see that every day in Australia, we know the impacts it's going to have, has had, is having and will have in the future. We'll have to be honest about that. I guess I'd point to a few things. Firstly, there's the emergency relief fund, which the government has. They haven't spent any meaningful money out of it. We would spend \$200 million a year on adaptation, on things like cyclone shelters and flood levies and bushfire prevention management. We are just going to need to do that and we need to acknowledge that we need to work with communities as we do. So what I would point to more broadly though is the need to deal with the climate change impacts on Australia's health across the board, not just in communities impacted by natural disasters, but all of us. And this is this is real and urgent. Now we're adding one day of heat wave to Australia every five years. I don't mean to be melodramatic, but people will die as a result of that, particularly our elderly people. I represent an area where, you know, there's not that much tree cover. Many families don't have air conditioning. When you add a day every five years to heatwaves, you're really impacting on people who are struggling to cope. We've got to see the impacts of that on coronary results, on coronary events, people having more heart attacks as a part of a longer, we're going to see the impact of vector borne diseases, mosquito borne illnesses all across the board. We're going to see that. So we need to have a national health policy priority area of the climate change impacts on health. We've announced that that's important. That's the Commonwealth and the states identifying an area important in health and really prioritising at this. There's a number of them at the moment. The really important is diabetes management and a number of important areas. I. See a reason why the climate change impacts. It wouldn't be one of those areas and we would do that.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:51:50] Thank you. I've got a couple more questions here. One is from Glen Ryan, who asks, Will Labour implement any specific policy to set targets and reduce emissions from sectors other than electricity?

**Chris Bowen** [00:52:06] Well, our policies are economy, our emissions reduction is economy. That's what our modelling looks at. It's not just electricity, 43%, obviously 82% renewables are just like 2G, but 43% is across the board as a result of all our policies, including our electric vehicle and transport policies. I've talked about safeguard mechanism, which is in the industry sector by and large, and resources. So the answer to that is yes. The participant might not have been clear on all our policies. It's not just electricity, 43% across the board.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:52:39] I've got a couple of people asking about the ambition of Labour's target here. Warren Dell says the Labour Party's 2030 aim is 43%. Why not 47 to 50%? Can you just talk to us a little bit about how you arrived in that target?

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**Chris Bowen** [00:52:54] Sure. As I said, it's not. The target is the result of our policies. So I didn't say to the modellers I want 43%, then tell me what policies achieve it. I said the modellers is the policy if we're going to announce safeguards because everybody knows all of them. They didn't put it through their model and say this gives you 43% as you know. It's also the case that 43% is what's necessary for net zero by 2030. If you're not at 43%, you've got no chance of getting to net zero. It brings us back to the pact in the world with Canada and South Korea, for example. So it brings us back to the international pact. But I just want to make this point too, because I know a number of participants will say as as that there's just been just said one time, I've got to be honest with you, we starting in 2022. I wish we were starting in 2015 or 2016 or 2019. I'm sitting out what we could do by 2030. 2030 is. Is coming up on us real quick tonight, two months. This is a big change to get 43% emissions reduction in 92 months. The biggest transformation our economy is through, our modern economy has been through. And we've got 92 months to do it. So, sure, if we won the elections in 2013, 16 or 19, then maybe we could have got the framework in earlier. But when you come second in an election. It means you don't have the capacity to put your policies into place. We've come second and too many elections. I hope to come first on May 21st so that we can get on with the job. But we are starting late in 2022. I'll just say bluntly. There's a cost to nine years of denial and delay. And that cost is not being able to achieve the emissions reductions by 2030 that many people would like to see. Now, we'll put the 43% in, get the policies to achieve it in due course. Of course, we would set the 2035 target in due course, but the 2030 target that we can achieve and is realistic as well as being ambitious is 43.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:55:04] Chris, we've only got a few minutes to go in one minute. What is your pitch for people who care about climate change this election?

**Chris Bowen** [00:55:14] When you if you care about climate change action, the most important thing that can happen is to change the government. That is the most important thing. Understand, many people have many views about many things. But the fact of the matter is, we've had nine years of effective denial. We've had nine years. And still in this election campaign, we've got senior members of the government arguing about the very basics about whether net zero is something they're working towards. Net zero is the bare minimum. It's the absolute absolutely essential starting point. It's not a radical concept. And the government of the day. He's arguing about whether they're even committed to that. So we need to change the government so that we then get the framework in place and we get on with the job. Nothing will change without a change of government on May 21st. Why would we expect that after nine years of climate denial and delay, the next three years are going to be any different? Why would we? Why would we expect that after nine years of using the toxic politics of identity to pitch Australians against each other anything we can? We want to unite Australia. You will never find me or Albo or anybody in a Labour government saying what inner city dwellers care about climate change and regional dwellers pay the cost of action on climate change. It's a lot. We want to bring all Australians with us on this journey, regardless of where they live, regardless of their views about the debate previously. This is a messy challenge for the world. It's frankly a massive economic opportunity for Australia. It's about time we had a government seize that opportunity, took its international responsibilities seriously, created jobs in Australia, created investment in Australia, got the policy right, and got on with the jobs of Cradock, with the job of creating the jobs of the future by giving the country a climate change policy which is sensible.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:57:03] Ben Oquist Do you want to take it that.

**Chris Bowen** [00:57:07] Thank you. Thank you, everybody, for participating. What a great debate and discussion. Hundreds of comments flying in. Hundreds of questions. Such engagement, as you said, over 1000 people online. What a great thing for democracy. This discussion has been at so much enthusiasm and passion and ideas. Thank you, Ebony. Thank you, Richie, for bringing us all together and so many of the ideas that are helping drive these discussions. But of course, most of all, thank you to Chris Paul. And what what? Fronting up, taking questions from all comers, from journalists, the public, from Ebony, from Richie in a really lively discussion. That's not not just great climate. But as I said at the beginning, I think bright from democracy can only flourish and democracy with a contest of ideas from across the political spectrum. And we saw some of that today. Thank you for your enthusiasm and passion that you brings the final stages of this election campaign and you've got a lot on. And we really appreciate the engagement. Thank you for your comments about the importance of integrity in our climate markets and obviously your concerns and passion there. As you mentioned, the strategy is working a lot on that and we noted your strong language today. Thank you for that, for fronting up. We didn't get both sides of the debate. We still got a debate and discussion. And I think this election campaign is better for what we've just experienced there with a big engagement from a wide group of Australians from across Australia. Thank you all for turning up and thanks. Thanks. Thanks, Chris.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:58:53] Thanks, Ben. Thanks, Chris Bowen. Thanks, Richie Merzian. Thank you to all of you who have trained in today. We will have to wrap it up there as always. Sorry we couldn't get to all of your questions. We do have more webinars coming up during the election next week. You can join us on Wednesday with Helen Haines and Zali Steggall, the independent members for India and Warringah, about the integrity election. Huge focus on that this election. So head on over to the Australia Institute. Australia Institute dot org dot AEW to sign up for that webinar next week. And as I said, we are in discussions with Adam Barnes office about a webinar before the end of the before the election on that. Don't forget to subscribe to the Australia Institute's podcast, Follow the Money, where we take big economic issues and explain them in plain English. You can subscribe on iTunes or wherever you normally listen to podcasts. If you had to duck out for any reason, don't forget to tell your friends you can catch up with this online at Australia Institute Dot TV. Thank you again, Chris. Ben Ritchie, we really appreciate all your time today. Stay safe out there and we'll see you soon. Don't forget to vote by everyone.

**Chris Bowen** [01:00:01] My pleasure. Thank you, everyone.