

# COP29 in Australia:

## How hosting an international climate conference could revive Australia's regional and global reputation

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*Australia has never hosted a United Nations climate conference (COP) and the recent proposal from the Labor Party to bid for the 2024 COP in partnership with the Pacific could shift Australia's reputation from climate laggard to regional leader. This shift should be accompanied by substantive changes to Australia's climate policy, including on Australia's climate aid and re-joining the UN Green Climate Fund. Hosting a COP would also have a number of economic, diplomatic and security co-benefits.*

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# Summary

Australia has a chequered history in global climate negotiations. Recently Australia had the dishonour of winning the ‘colossal fossil’ from non-government organisations for its unconstructive role at the recent Glasgow climate summit and its weak domestic policies on climate change. In the 30-year history of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference, Australia has never hosted a major climate meeting. Yet this could change.

In December 2021, the Australian Labor Party committed to bid for the Conference of the Parties (COP) meeting in 2024. This would mean hosting the United Nations (UN) largest event in just over two years’ time. And the commitment was to host it “in partnership with a Pacific Island nation” presenting a unique opportunity to improve regional relations and emerge as a serious player on the global stage.

Australia does not shy away from hosting big (and expensive) events like the Olympics, the Commonwealth Games and the G20 summit. Hosting a COP would be a more modest affair that would still bring in significant economic benefits from up to 20,000 participants, especially for the sectors hardest hit during the pandemic like tourism and hospitality.

It would however require a lot of diplomatic heavy lifting to successfully bid for COP29. The Australian Government would need to resource and task officials to secure the support of key UN regional groupings. Australia would first need the support of its own Western Europe and Others UN regional group to host the next allocated COP for the group which is in 2026. Next it would need to convince the Eastern European UN regional group to agree to the swap for their next allocated slot in 2024.

This means engaging early in a range of channels, ensuring Australia’s own domestic policies hold up to scrutiny and working closely together with regional groups to ensure diverse needs are represented. Hosting the COP in ‘partnership’ with Pacific Island nations would bring a range of benefits for regional security and diplomacy, considering that Pacific Island nations have long been calling for Australia to work with them on climate change.

To ensure the Pacific Island nations want to host a COP with Australia might also require improving Australia’s international climate policies. This includes significantly increasing its climate aid for emissions reductions and adaptation. This would also include re-joining the UN’s Green Climate Fund (GCF).

Australia played key leadership roles in the GCF and ensured it delivered for the Pacific region. That was ended without warning by Prime Minister Morrison. Australia is isolated as the only developed country that is not contributing to the GCF, which can be quickly corrected through a new financial commitment.

UNFCCC COPs serve are essential to advancing international cooperation on climate. At a time where climate change is threatening populations worldwide, taking up the office of COP president would demonstrate that Australia is willing to not only match international climate action, but to lead from the front, transforming Australia's international climate diplomacy.

# Introduction

In December 2021, the Australian Labor Party announced its climate policy platform in the leadup to the federal election. While most news outlets focused on the new emissions reduction target of 43 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030, there was a unique and substantive policy announcement that went overlooked.

Labor announced that if it formed government it would bid to co-host the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP) in 2024 (which would be the 29<sup>th</sup> COP known as COP29), in partnership with Pacific Island nations.<sup>1</sup>

While Australia is quick to bid for sporting events, it has been generally lukewarm on hosting, or even attending diplomatic events. Especially when it comes to climate change.

Sixteen days out from COP26 last year the Queen criticised Prime Minister Morrison for failing to commit to attend the conference in Glasgow.<sup>2</sup> It was only following the Queen's criticism that the Prime Minister announced his decision to attend. Prime Minister Morrison also skipped the 2019 UN Climate Action Summit in New York despite being in the US at the time.<sup>3</sup>

Australia has been increasingly isolated on climate action, which was no more evident than at the 26<sup>th</sup> COP which took place in Glasgow, where Australia took out the dishonour of being named the 'colossal fossil' of the conference.<sup>4</sup> Australia did not sign onto any of the side pledges around phasing out fossil fuels,<sup>5</sup> and at home continues to

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Labor Party (2021) *Powering Australia* <https://www.alp.org.au/policies/powering-australia>

<sup>2</sup> Razik (2021) *The Queen slams 'irritating' world leaders over refusal to attend COP26*, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/the-queen-slams-irritating-world-leaders-over-refusal-to-attend-cop26/qheyqx7o4>

<sup>3</sup> Murphy (2019) *Scott Morrison won't attend UN climate summit despite being in the US*, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/sep/12/scott-morrison-wont-attend-un-climate-summit-despite-being-in-the-us>

<sup>4</sup> Milman (2021) *Australia named 'colossal fossil' of COP26 for 'appalling performance'*, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/12/australia-named-colossal-fossil-of-cop26-for-appalling-performance>

<sup>5</sup> Morton (2021) *Australian government refuses to join 40 nations phasing out coal, saying it won't 'wipe out industries'*, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/05/australia-refuses-to-join-40-nations-phasing-out-coal-as-angus-taylor-says-coalition-wont-wipe-out-industries>

open new coal and gas projects despite International Energy Agency (IEA) pathway to avoid dangerous climate change showing no room for new fossil fuel investments.<sup>6</sup>

Hosting a COP would align with Australia's commitment to effective global cooperation and reset its engagement with the UN system.<sup>7</sup>

Much like Australia's campaign for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council in 2013-14, the Australian Government amplified diplomatic engagement by opening several new embassies and consulates. It renewed its interest in multilateralism and serving as a global honest broker.<sup>8</sup>

This paper examines both what would be required for an Australian Government to host an ambitious and successful COP as well as the potential benefits.

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<sup>6</sup> International Energy Agency (2021) *Net Zero by 2050: A roadmap for the global energy sector*, <https://www.iea.org/reports/net-zero-by-2050>

<sup>7</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (n.d.) *United Nations*, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/international-organisations/un/united-nations-un>

<sup>8</sup> Cross (2016) *Australia's campaign for a seat on the United Nations Security Council*, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australias-campaign-for-a-seat-on-the-united-nations-security-council/>

# UNFCCC background

## WHAT IS THE COP?

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The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is an international treaty that opened for signature at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, coming into effect in 1994. Its aim is to secure international action on climate change, and it is the parent treaty to the Kyoto Protocol, and more recently the Paris Agreement, which was achieved during Conference of the Parties (COP) 21 in 2015. Under the Paris Agreement, Parties to the UNFCCC have agreed to limit global warming to well below 2°C, and to pursue efforts to limit warming to 1.5°C to avoid dangerous climate change.

The COP is the decision-making body of the convention, representing all states that are Parties to the Convention. The COP meets yearly, hosting its first meeting in 1995. It is responsible for keeping international efforts to address climate change on track, regularly reviewing progress towards the convention's aims.

Considering the increasing and immediate threat that climate change poses to global populations, the UNFCCC now has 197 Parties. Accordingly, UNFCCC COPs have grown substantially in recent years to become the biggest event in the UN system, with over 40,000 registered participants at COP26 in Glasgow in late 2021.<sup>9</sup>

## WHO RUNS THE COP?

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COP meetings are jointly coordinated by the Secretariat of the UNFCCC, based in Bonn, Germany, and the COP President for that particular year.

The office of COP President is subject to yearly rotation among the UN's five regional groupings:<sup>10</sup> Africa; Asia; Latin America and the Caribbean; Eastern Europe; and Western Europe and Others (of which Australia is part). It is usually the party holding the COP Presidency that will also host the conference. However, if there is no offer, or if the Presidency is logistically unable to do so, they are held at the UNFCCC Secretariat in Bonn, Germany – as was done for COP23, with Fiji as President.

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<sup>9</sup> UNFCCC (2021) *COP26 Highlights From the Secretary-General*, <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/cop26#:~:text=The%20UN%20Climate%20Change%20Conference,observers%20and%203.886%20media%20representatives>.

<sup>10</sup> UNFCCC (1996) FCCC/CP/1996/2, [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/02\\_0.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/02_0.pdf)



The COP President has significant influence to shape the conference's agenda and proceedings. It has generally been the case that when developed (members of the OECD) nations host they tend to focus on mitigation issues (how to reduce emissions, set targets, build carbon markets, and improve transparency and accountability). When developing countries host the COP, they tend to focus on the means to reduce emissions, that is technology transfer, climate finance and capacity building.

Under the UK's Presidency of COP26 in Glasgow major breakthroughs were achieved on mitigation including agreeing on the framework for a new carbon market.<sup>11</sup> Egypt's Presidency of COP27, on behalf of the African regional group, will likely focus on climate financing to assist developing countries to reduce emissions, access carbon markets and adapt to the unavoidable consequences.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> UK Government (2022) *COP President visits Egypt and UAE to build on momentum from COP26 for global climate action*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cop-president-visits-egypt-and-united-arab-emirates-to-build-on-momentum-from-cop26-for-global-climate-action>

<sup>12</sup> African Center for Economic Transformation (2022) *The Road to COP27 in Africa: Three Priorities for Action*, <https://acetforafrica.org/publications/articles/the-road-to-cop27-in-africa-three-priorities-for-action/>

# Pre-COP Groundwork

## REGIONAL NEGOTIATIONS

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In 2024, when Labor wants to bid to host a COP, it will actually be Eastern Europe regional group's turn to hold the Presidency.<sup>13</sup> Australia's group, Western Europe and Others, is not scheduled to host again until 2026 (with the UK taking up the most recent allocation to the group). As such, securing a bid to host COP29 in 2024 will require overcoming two diplomatic hurdles.

First, the Australian Government will have to get the agreement of the Western Europe and Others group that it can host a COP. There are 28 other members of this group<sup>14</sup> and Australia will have to compete with any other interested bidders. Where there are two equally keen countries, a compromise could be sought. For example, both the UK and Italy wanted to host COP26. It was agreed that the UK and Italy would host 'in partnership' and Italy would host the preparatory meeting (known as the Pre-COP) and the UK host the actual COP.

Not only will Australia have to win the bid to host the next COP allocated to the Western Europe and Others group, but it must also lobby its group to agree to swap places with the Eastern Europe group.

The second step is getting the Eastern European group to agree to the swap. Swaps are uncommon but they appear to have occurred before. For example, Denmark's bid to host COP16 in 2009 appears to be the result of a swap between the Western Europe and Others group and the Latin American and Caribbean regional group. As a result, Denmark and Mexico appear to have swapped places.<sup>15</sup>

A COP host is announced by the UNFCCC one year in advance and require at least two years to organise. With COP29 dates already agreed for 11th – 22nd November 2024<sup>16</sup> the host would be announced at COP28 in the UAE in November 2023. However,

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<sup>13</sup> UNFCCC (2021) *FCCC/CP/2021/L.1*, [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cp2021\\_L01E.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cp2021_L01E.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> United Nations Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (2022) *UN Regional Groups*, <https://www.un.org/dgacm/en/content/regional-groups>

<sup>15</sup> See Denmark offer here:

<https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/docs/2006/cop12/eng/05a01.pdf>, See UNFCCC decision here: <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2008/sbi/eng/08.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> UNFCCC (2021) *Dates and venues of future sessions*, <https://unfccc.int/documents/310476>

Australia's bid to host should be well advanced if not secured by the time COP27 arrives in November this year.<sup>17</sup> Which means that Australia has no time to lose.

Of all the regional groups, the Eastern European group seems to be the least competitive when it comes to internal bids for which of its members should host the COP. The last three Eastern European COPs have all taken place in the same country (Poland in 2008, 2013 and 2018). Given the limited appetite for Eastern European countries to bid for the COP, and the current war between two members, the group might jump at the opportunity to avoid hosting a COP anytime soon.

## PARTNERSHIP WITH THE PACIFIC

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A COP Presidency and the location of the COP is managed by the responsible regional group. Partnerships to manage the COP are usually between members of the same regional group, like the UK hosting COP26 'in partnership' with Italy. However, it is possible to build partnerships between different regions.

When Chile, the host of COP25, was struggling to manage civil unrest in the lead up to the South American and Caribbean COP in 2019, it was Spain that came in to the rescue.<sup>18</sup> The COP was hosted in Madrid, with Chile maintained the role as COP President.

The Labor announcement to bid for COP29 came with an intention to host in partnership with the Pacific.<sup>19</sup> All Pacific countries, bar New Zealand, are part of the Asia-Pacific regional group. While Pacific countries would not be formally involved in the bidding which involves the Western Europe and Eastern Europe groups to arrange, there are other ways it could be involved.

While the main COP event would likely be hosted in Australia, the Pacific Island nations could be consulted as a partner, either as a group through the Pacific Island Forum or as individuals. This could include helping to determine the goals and themes for the COP including any side-announcements like the Deforestation Pledge at COP26. It

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<sup>17</sup> UNFCCC (2020) *How to COP: A handbook for hosting united nations climate change conferences*, [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/How-to-COP\\_2020.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/How-to-COP_2020.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Jones (2019) *Spain offers to host UN climate conference after Chile cancellation*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/31/spain-offers-host-un-climate-conference-after-chile-cancellation>

<sup>19</sup> Mazengarb (2021) *Labor lowers 2030 target to 43 per cent, to blunt Morrison scare campaign*, <https://reneweconomy.com.au/labor-lowers-2030-target-to-43-per-cent-to-blunt-morrison-scare-campaign/>

could also include hosting one or more of the preparatory meetings including the formal Pre-COP, which takes place one to two months before the main COP event.<sup>20</sup>

However, for this partnership to be possible, it will require an improvement in Australia's relations with the Pacific on climate change.

Currently, it is fraught at best. The tendency to refer to the Pacific region as “our backyard” as well as Australia's lack of climate action are longstanding points of tension in regional diplomacy and cooperation.<sup>21</sup> While Australia's continued reliance on fossil fuels is a particular sticking point, Pacific leaders have also called out Australia's diplomatic attitude as a major problem at regional negotiations. Fijian Prime Minister Bainimarama has referred to Australia's approach as insulting,<sup>22</sup> while Samoan Prime Minister Mata'afa has called on Australia to mature its relationships with the Pacific.<sup>23</sup>

Pacific Island nations have been integral to progressing action on climate globally,<sup>24</sup> and this leadership would be more important than ever in hosting a COP. Considering that climate change is considered the biggest threat to the Pacific region,<sup>25</sup> working together would allow both Australia and its regional neighbours to draw on their respective strengths and create a cohesive approach that can represent diverse needs.

## LOGISTICS

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Once Australia has successfully negotiated its COP bid through the Western Europe and Others group, agreed to the swap with the Eastern Europe group, and decided on the 'partnership' structure with Pacific Island nations, then it can put a formal expression of interest to the UNFCCC. This expression of interest must include an outline of logistical, technical, and financial elements of hosting a COP, outlined in further detail

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<sup>20</sup> UK Government (2021) *The UK-Italy Partnership*, <https://ukcop26.org/it/partnership-tra-regno-unito-e-italia/>

<sup>21</sup> Newton Cain (2022) *This is where we live: has Australia been a good neighbour in the Pacific?* <https://au.news.yahoo.com/where-live-australia-good-neighbour-195823559.html>

<sup>22</sup> Lyons (2019) *Fiji PM accuses Scott Morrison of 'insulting' and alienating Pacific leaders*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/16/fiji-pm-frank-bainimarama-insulting-scott-morrison-rift-pacific-countries>

<sup>23</sup> The Australia Institute (2021) *Inaugural Pacific Climate Diplomacy Forum*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C6GdXs0H4v8>

<sup>24</sup> Morgan (2021) *Ripple Effect: the cost of our Pacific neglect*, <https://www.australianforeignaffairs.com/articles/extract/2021/08/ripple-effect>

<sup>25</sup> Pacific Islands Forum (2019) *The Boe Declaration on Regional Security*, <https://www.forumsec.org/2018/09/05/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/>

in a UNFCCC guide,<sup>26</sup> which the Secretariat will seek to confirm in a visit to the host country. This occurs at least 18 months before the date for the COP (see Figure 1).

Once accepted by the UNFCCC, the official announcement of the Presidency will be announced 12 months in advance, with logistical planning to swiftly follow.<sup>27</sup>

**Figure 1: Basic timeline for each COP event**



Source: UNFCCC (2020) How to COP

<sup>26</sup> UNFCCC (2020) *How to COP: A handbook for hosting united nations climate change conferences*, [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/How-to-COP\\_2020.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/How-to-COP_2020.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

## Host Country Agreement

The most important element of planning for a COP is the Host Country Agreement (HCA). This is a legally binding agreement between the Secretariat and the host country which clearly delineates the respective responsibilities of each party, in terms of preparation and organisation of the conference. This includes matters around finance, security, participation, and staffing.

It is usually finalised and signed in the midyear sessions of the UNFCCC subsidiary bodies in the year of hosting, and as such must occur in tandem with other preparations.

One important element of the HCA is negotiating privileges and immunities for official representatives. Normally, officials working in diplomatic missions and consular posts across the world enjoy privileges and immunities in accordance with international conventions.<sup>28</sup> When a conference is hosted, it is expected that these privileges and immunities are extended to representatives of Parties to the UNFCCC travelling for the conference. As such, their negotiation makes up an important element of the HCA. This can then form the basis of legislation in the host country, as the UK did in 2021.<sup>29</sup>

Further, facilitating visas for participants from all countries around the world is essential to hosting an international climate conference. Under the HCA, “the visa process should be expedited, and visas provided free of charge”.<sup>30</sup>

The Secretariat further notes that if, under regular national security restrictions, certain delegations would not be issued a visa, the country may not be approved to host the conference.

As such, Australia would need to work closely with the relevant authorities to ensure smooth entry for all delegations. Ensuring that security requirements are made clear to those flying in, as well as ensuring visas are available at entry ports, is vital to avoid any refusal of entry that may subsequently impact diplomacy.

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<sup>28</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2022) *Protocol guidelines: privileges and immunities*, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/corporate/protocol-guidelines/5-privileges-and-immunities>

<sup>29</sup> UK Government (2021) *The Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Immunities and Privileges) Order 2021*, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2021/1090/contents/made>

<sup>30</sup> UNFCCC (2020) *How to COP*, [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/How-to-COP\\_2020.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/How-to-COP_2020.pdf)

## Participants

A wide variety of participants attend COPs. Parties and observer states will send delegations, but there is also a strong presence from observer organisations, including UN agencies from the International Atomic Energy Agency to the International Monetary Fund.<sup>31</sup> Non-Government Organisations as well as media to cover the conference make up a growing proportion of participants at recent COPs.

COPs usually attract between 20,000 and 30,000 participants.<sup>32</sup> COP26 was a record year for participation with over 40,000 registered participants. However, COP26 was a significant milestone, marking 5 years on from the Paris Agreement, and therefore included the participation of over 100 heads of states. Most COPs do not reach such a size and is like COP29 would have half as many participants.

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<sup>31</sup> UNFCCC (2021) *Provisional list of participants*,  
[https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/PLOP\\_COP26.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/PLOP_COP26.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> UNFCCC (2020) *How to COP*, [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/How-to-COP\\_2020.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/How-to-COP_2020.pdf)

# Negotiating a successful COP

## DIPLOMATIC OUTREACH

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A successful COP requires expending diplomatic capital. Australia will need to engage early and often. Australia's climate diplomacy will need to be scaled up. Alongside the commitment to host COP29, the Australian Labor Party has committed to reinstate the position of Ambassador for Climate Change (which existed from 2007 until 2013 and was abolished under the Abbott Government).<sup>33</sup>

Australia's diplomatic outreach will need to call on its network and turn climate change into a top tier foreign policy priority. This should permeate into other multilateral events and engagements.

## Utilising overseas missions

Hiring overseas staff dedicated to climate diplomacy can aid in understanding local policy and context, building relationships, and collaborating to reach agreements.

In the leadup to COP26, the UK set up a dedicated 'Climate Diplomacy Fund' and built teams in their overseas missions to focus solely on making COP26 a success.<sup>34</sup> Having diplomats on the ground across the world helped inform the UK's plans including to look for ways to increase ambition.

The US and Germany provide a different example. In recognising the climate crisis as a national security issue, the US established the office of climate envoy, appointing former Secretary of State John Kerry to conduct high-level climate negotiating. The success of this position is evidenced through one of the most significant announcements at COP26; the US-China Joint Glasgow Declaration on Enhancing Climate Action in the 2020s.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, Germany has recently appointed head of Greenpeace International, Jennifer Morgan, as their new "Special Envoy for International Climate Action". Appointing a

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<sup>33</sup> Australian Labor Party (2021) *Powering Australia*, <https://www.alp.org.au/policies/powering-australia>

<sup>34</sup> UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (2020) *Climate Diplomacy: objectives 2020 to 2021*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/official-development-assistance-oda-fcdo-international-programme-spend-objectives-2020-to-2021/climate-diplomacy-objectives-2020-to-2021>

<sup>35</sup> McGrath (2021) *COP26: China and US agree to boost climate cooperation*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-59238869>



person with a strong climate background is a clear signal from Germany of their commitment.<sup>36</sup> Special Envoy Morgan will likely play a leading role at the upcoming G7 hosted by Germany, as well as COP27 at the end of the year.

## Upcoming opportunities

For the Australian Government to secure the COP it must first start in its own regional group. The largest players in the Western Europe and Others group are also members of the G7. It will be hosted by Germany in June this year and the new German Chancellor has said he intends to establish a “climate club”. The aim is to coordinate and advance ambitious action on issues such as emissions standards and carbon pricing.<sup>37</sup>

In 2021, the UK presidency invited Australia as a guest to the G7. It is unclear whether Australia will be invited to Germany’s G7 this year. Unlike the rest of the G7, Australia has not increased its short-term climate target nor committed to stop overseas financing of unabated coal projects.<sup>38</sup> Until Australia changes its domestic climate ambitions, it might not find favour with the G7 host and members.<sup>39</sup>

Australia should also look to opportunities closer to home to warm relations with the Pacific. The Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction 2022, which is taking place in Brisbane 19-22 September is a good place to start.

This conference will focus on disaster risk reduction which complements the need to adapt to the unavoidable climate impacts. The event can act as a launchpad for Australian and Pacific Island regional priorities on climate change and adaptation. It can also help develop the contours of the partnership between Australia and its neighbours for COP29.

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<sup>36</sup> Guardian (2022) *Germany Appoints Jennifer Morgan Ex-Greenpeace Chief Climate Envoy*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/09/germany-appoints-jennifer-morgan-ex-greenpeace-chief-climate-envoy>

<sup>37</sup> Government of Germany (2021) *Speech by Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the WEF’s Davos Dialogue on 19 January 2022*, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/speech-by-federal-chancellor-olaf-scholz-at-the-world-economic-forum-s-davos-dialogue-on-19-january-2022-video-conference-working-together-restoring-trust--1999052>

<sup>38</sup> Farand (2021) *G7 commits to end unabated coal finance in 2021 to ‘keep 1.5C within reach’*, <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2021/05/21/g7-commits-end-unabated-coal-finance-2021-keep-1-5c-within-reach/>

<sup>39</sup> Morgan (2022) *New German leader proposes a ‘climate club’ of leading economies that would punish free riders like Australia*, <https://theconversation.com/new-german-leader-proposes-a-climate-club-of-leading-economies-that-would-punish-free-riders-like-australia-175842>

In mid-November this year, Indonesia will host the G20 Heads of State and Government Summit in Bali. While international security issues will dominate the conference given Russian President Putin will likely attend,<sup>40</sup> there will still be a focus on climate change and in particular financing solutions.<sup>41</sup> The Australian Prime Minister would do well to encourage support for Australia's COP29 bid in the lead up to and at the conference.

## Climate finance groundwork

Climate finance consists of the development assistance and investment from developed countries to developing countries to help reduce emission and adapt to climate impacts. It will be a key issue at COP29, given the 2024 deadline for a new target on the provision of climate finance from developed to developing countries.

The current target, crucial to the deal brokered under the Paris Agreement, was USD\$100 billion per year in public and private sources to be mobilised by 2020. Unfortunately, the funding mobilised by developed countries fell short of the target.<sup>42</sup> At COP26, work programs were developed to ensure this finance is provided by 2025, as well as to determine the new collective quantified goal on climate finance post-2025.

The new collective quantified goal will be determined through an ad hoc work program, entailing four technical expert dialogues per year and a high-level ministerial dialogue each year to 2024.<sup>43</sup> The technical dialogues are facilitated by co-chairs from one developed and one developing nation, with the 2022 co-chairs coming from Italy and Trinidad and Tobago.<sup>44</sup>

It will be important for Australia to be closely involved in these discussions, and perhaps even consider co-chairing a year of dialogues in partnership with a Pacific

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<sup>40</sup> Newsweek (2022) *Putin Accepts Invitation to Attend G20 Summit, Setting Up Biden Showdown*, <https://www.newsweek.com/putin-accepts-invitation-attend-g20-summit-indonesia-biden-showdown-1702103>

<sup>41</sup> Antara News (2022) *G20 Presidency expected to focus on climate change financing: UNDP*, <https://en.antaranews.com/news/214573/g20-presidency-expected-to-focus-on-climate-change-financing-undp>

<sup>42</sup> Oxfam, Climate Action Network Australia, ActionAid Australia, Climate Council, The Australia Institute, Edmund Rice Centre and Greenpeace (2021) *Fairer Futures: Financing Global Climate Solutions*, <https://www.oxfam.org.au/2021/11/climate-justice-climate-finance/>

<sup>43</sup> UNFCCC (2021) *Draft text on CMA 3 agenda sub-item 8(e) New collective quantified goal on climate finance*, [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/New\\_collective\\_goal\\_decision\\_1.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/New_collective_goal_decision_1.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> UNFCCC (2022) *Co-chairs of the ad hoc work programme on the new collective quantified goal on climate finance*, <https://unfccc.int/topics/climate-finance/workstreams/NCQG/co-chairs>

Island nation in preparation for the COP. This will demonstrate Australia's leadership to represent broader interests than just its own.

Australia will also need to consider increasing its own climate finance contribution. This includes rejoining (and replenishing with a new financial commitment to) the UN's Green Climate Fund (GCF).<sup>45</sup>

Australia was instrumental in setting up GCF, was the longest serving Co-Chair of the GCF Board, focused heavily on ensuring the Pacific was supported by the GCF and even had a former Australian Government Special Envoy for Climate Change appointed as the head of the GCF Secretariat. Australia also co-hosted a GCF Board meeting with Samoa in the Pacific in 2016 – a great example of the partnership it could bring to COP29.

In the words of Australia's Board Member and then Co-Chair of the GCF Board Ewen McDonald, who now heads up the Office of the Pacific in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT):

*"In Samoa, I was privileged to be re-elected developed country Co-Chair for 2017—the first time any country will lead in consecutive terms. This reflected the Board's confidence in Australia's leadership. Australia now has an important opportunity to consolidate last year's progress and continue to draw attention – and resources – to the Pacific."*<sup>46</sup>

In 2018 Australia's progress in climate finance leadership was derailed, when Prime Minister Scott Morrison stated in a 2GB radio interview that he would not be refinancing "that big climate fund".<sup>47</sup> Senate Estimates confirmed the decision not to fund the GCF was made by the Prime Minister, not the Foreign Minister or through the advice of DFAT.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Oxfam, Climate Action Network Australia, ActionAid Australia, Climate Council, The Australia Institute, Edmund Rice Centre and Greenpeace (2021) *Fairer Futures: Financing Global Climate Solutions*, <https://www.oxfam.org.au/2021/11/climate-justice-climate-finance/>

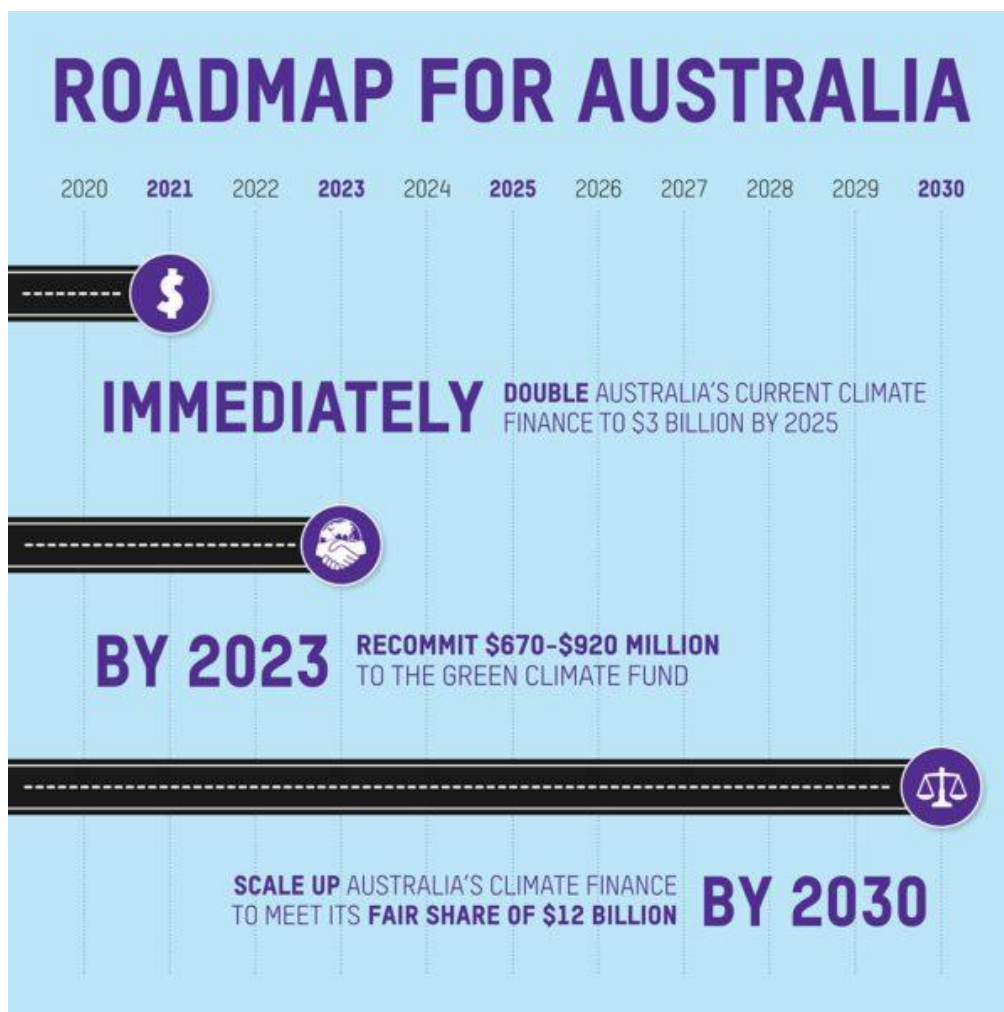
<sup>46</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2016) *The Green Climate Fund in 2016: a successful year of Australian leadership*, <http://web.archive.org/web/20210228032051/https://blog.dfat.gov.au/2017/02/10/the-green-climate-fund-in-2016-a-successful-year-of-australian-leadership/>

<sup>47</sup> 2GB (2018) *Interview with Prime Minister Morrison*, <https://www.2gb.com/its-not-as-though-theyre-painting-it-on-there-pm-supports-opera-house-promotion/>

<sup>48</sup> Senate Estimates (2018) *Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee 25/10/2018*, <https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;db=COMMITTEES;id=committees%2Festimate%2F726eefc8-0a12-4c57-8016-8d4e4fe45117%2F0002;query=Id%3A%22committees%2Festimate%2F726eefc8-0a12-4c57-8016-8d4e4fe45117%2F0000%22>

Re-joining the GCF would be a necessary step for Australia to ramp up its commitment to climate finance and to the region.<sup>49</sup> The Australia Institute worked with Oxfam and other partners to produce a roadmap for the Australian Government on climate finance, including committing up \$670-\$920 million to the GCF.<sup>50</sup>

**Figure 2: Roadmap for Australia to contribute its climate finance fair share**



Source: Climate Action Network Australia, ActionAid Australia, Climate Council, The Australia Institute, Edmund Rice Centre and Greenpeace

Additionally, climate finance contributions need to be supported by serious domestic action. While Australia’s recent modest increase in climate finance was welcomed by

<sup>49</sup> Pickering and Mitchell (2020) *After Biden’s win, Australia needs to recommit to the UN Green Climate Fund*, <https://devpolicy.org/after-bidens-win-australia-needs-to-recommit-to-the-un-green-climate-fund-20201130/>

<sup>50</sup> Oxfam, Climate Action Network Australia, ActionAid Australia, Climate Council, The Australia Institute, Edmund Rice Centre and Greenpeace (2021) *Fairer Futures: Financing Global Climate Solutions*, <https://www.oxfam.org.au/2021/11/climate-justice-climate-finance/>

Fijian Prime Minister at COP26, the overall message was clear: to be seen as a serious player in the region, Australia needs to not merely throw money at the problem, but shift its policies on climate to match.<sup>51</sup>

## DOMESTIC POLICY: LEADING FROM THE FRONT

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If Australia wants to bring the world to its shores to discuss climate change, then it might need to brush up on its domestic policies.

Despite claiming to be “meeting and beating” its targets, the Australian Government’s short-term target of 26-28 per cent emissions reductions on 2005 levels by 2030<sup>52</sup> is inconsistent with net zero by 2050 (like crawling at the start of a marathon race) and out of step with international ambition. A good indicator is the United States. Australia has generally followed a similar path to the US,<sup>53</sup> but the Biden Administration have taken the lead with their commitment to halve emissions this decade.

The US halving emissions by 2030 would amount to a 43% reduction from 2019 levels. For Australia, halving its emissions by 2030 would be a 42% reduction on 2019 levels — the same proportional effort. Australia should look to a similar range of ambition (around halving emissions in 2030) to bring it in line with its counterparts.

Other commitments will be necessary like ending subsidies for fossil fuel projects which the UK has championed<sup>54</sup> and has been echoed by voices in the Pacific.<sup>55</sup> Australia continues to invest in and expand subsidies to new fossil fuel projects.<sup>56</sup>

Australia’s opportunity to host a COP provides the impetus for a significant policy shift. This can build off the work of Australia’s state and territory governments which have been leading the way on the transition in the electricity, transport, and industrial space.

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<sup>51</sup> O’Malley (2021) *Pacific nations need carbon cuts from Australia not just cash*, <https://www.smh.com.au/world/oceania/pacific-nations-need-carbon-cuts-from-australia-not-just-cash-fiji-prime-minister-20211102-p59540.html>

<sup>52</sup> Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources (2015) *Australia’s Intended Nationally Determined Contribution to a new Climate Change Agreement*, <https://www.industry.gov.au/policies-and-initiatives/international-climate-change-commitments>

<sup>53</sup> Melville-Rae, Armistead (2021) *Short term ambition: 2030 targets for the US and Australia*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/short-term-ambition-2030-targets-for-the-us-and-australia/>

<sup>54</sup> UK COP26 (2021) *Statement on International Public Support for the Clean Energy Transition*, <https://ukcop26.org/statement-on-international-public-support-for-the-clean-energy-transition/>

<sup>55</sup> Climate Action Network Pacific (2021) *Pacific COP26 Demands*, <https://350.org/pacificdemands/#six>

<sup>56</sup> Armistead et al. (2022) *Fossil fuel subsidies in Australia (2021-22)*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/fossil-fuel-subsidies-in-australia-2021-22/>

# Benefits for Australia

## REPUTATION

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Australia has a reputation in the international climate negotiations and it's not as an advocate for strong climate action or a voice for the least developed countries. Australia's reputation is one of supporting the continued use of fossil fuels and exploiting loopholes in the international climate negotiations to avoid reducing emissions.<sup>57</sup>

Australia has faced increasing international pressure to do more, which was particularly evident in the leadup to COP26 in Glasgow.<sup>58</sup> A credible and well-resourced bid to host a COP can begin to shed this reputation.

Taking up the office of President for the 2024 international climate negotiations would be a chance to redeem Australia's climate reputation. It would bring Australia in line with its allies, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It could demonstrate global leadership rather than a narrow national interest (which has been defined by previous Australian Governments as the fossil fuel industries' interests).<sup>59</sup>

## REGIONAL SECURITY

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Climate change is currently a cause of regional tension and hosting a COP in partnership with Pacific Island nations could improve regional cooperation. While Australia has always promoted a 'special relationship' with Pacific Island nations, the divergent priorities and interests of Australia and Pacific Island countries have become a source of tension, ultimately undermining regional ties.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Verschuer, Melville-Rea and Merzian (2021) *What is Australia bringing to COP26?*  
<https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/what-is-australia-bringing-to-cop26/>

<sup>58</sup> Slezak, Clarke (2021) *Australia widely criticised over emission reduction targets ahead of COP26 climate talks*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-08-20/climate-change-ipcc-australia-uk-conference-glasgow/100392252>

<sup>59</sup> Denniss and Behm (2021) *How Australian diplomacy protects fossil fuels*,  
<https://www.australianforeignaffairs.com/articles/extract/2021/07/double-game>

<sup>60</sup> O'Callaghan (2019) *Morrison's Pacific step-up means nothing without real climate action*,  
<https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/morrison-pacific-step-up-means-nothing-without-real-climate-action/>

Stopping catastrophic climate change is of integral importance to the survival of Pacific Island nations' people, livelihoods, and ecosystems. Australia is a signatory to the Boe Declaration from 2018, which declares climate change the single biggest threat to the Pacific region.<sup>61</sup> Yet Australia's actions at home and abroad have not aligned with the Boe Declaration.

With increased climate ambition at home and meaningful regional engagement through a well-defined 'partnership', Pacific Island countries and Australia may experience a rapprochement through COP29. COP29 could help build trust with the region, on what they determine as the biggest threat to the region.

Imagine the Australian Government partnering with Pacific Island nations to host key UN climate meetings in their capital cities in the lead up to COP29, culminating in the Pre-COP meeting in Honiara, Solomon Islands.

Prioritising climate change and drawing on respective strengths in partnership with Pacific Island countries will reap benefits for a more secure and aligned region.

## ECONOMIC BOOST

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Hosting a COP would bring a significant boost to hospitality and tourism, two of the sectors hardest hit during the pandemic. Events the size of a COP require investment in local industries, particularly hotels, restaurants, and conference facilities.

The UNFCCC COP sustainability criteria stipulates that all businesses and people engaged to facilitate a COP should be locally employed.<sup>62</sup> Hosting a COP would therefore benefit local businesses across a variety of areas including technical support, energy supply, cleaning, deliveries, catering, and accommodation. It was estimated that hosting COP26 boosted Glasgow's tourism and hospitality sectors by AUD \$139 million.<sup>63</sup>

After the pandemic closed Australia's border, hosting a major international event like a COP would demonstrate that Australia is back, open, and ready to host. Australia has a long history of hosting big, elaborate events. At the time, the 2000 Sydney Olympics

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<sup>61</sup> Pacific Islands Forum (2019) The Boe Declaration on Regional Security, <https://www.forumsec.org/2018/09/05/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/>

<sup>62</sup> UNFCCC (2020) *How to COP*, <https://unfccc.int/documents/185998>

<sup>63</sup> Rodger (2019) *UN climate summit 'to boost Glasgow's economy by £73m*, <https://www.scotsman.com/news/environment/un-climate-summit-boost-glasgows-economy-ps73m-1407661>



cost \$6.5 billion, excluding the wider costs for urban and transport infrastructure.<sup>64</sup> The 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne cost \$1.1 billion, not including separate security costs.<sup>65</sup>

On the diplomatic side, when Sydney hosted the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in 2007, parts of the city were locked down for three days and three central railways stations were closed for security.<sup>66</sup> Despite the disruptions, Prime Minister Howard emphasised the economic benefits and international exposure that hosting the summit brought Sydney. More recently, the 2014 G20 summit in Brisbane, which was held over two days, cost \$400 million.<sup>67</sup>

Brisbane's successful bid to host the 2032 Olympics last year indicates that Australia is not shying away from its history of hosting big events. The pitch document for the 2032 Olympics estimated that hosting the games will cost \$5.8 billion but this cost is likely to increase in the next ten years.<sup>68</sup> Hosting a COP would be a moderate expense compared to a major sporting events or one involving dozens of world leaders.

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<sup>64</sup> Thomas (2018) *Olympic Games' rising costs forcing many cities to balk at being hosts*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-01/rising-costs-force-olympic-rethink-over-value-for-money/9494894>

<sup>65</sup> ABC News (2006) *Commonwealth Games cost Victoria \$1b*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2006-09-14/commonwealth-games-cost-victoria-1b/1264654>

<sup>66</sup> SBS News (2015) *Sydney locked down for APEC*, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/sydney-locked-down-for-apec>

<sup>67</sup> Silva (2014) *G20 security forces complete final major training exercise*, <https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/queensland/g20-security-forces-complete-final-major-training-exercise-20141006-10qua3.html>

<sup>68</sup> Bleby (2021) *Brisbane 2032 Olympic host costs are already soaring*, <https://www.afr.com/companies/sport/brisbane-2032-olympic-host-costs-are-already-soaring-20210610-p58028>



# Conclusion

Hosting COP29 would provide numerous economic, regional, and diplomatic benefits to Australia. It would demonstrate that the Australian Government has turned a leaf on its diplomatic engagement. Instead of shying away from international meetings on climate change, it would be bringing the world here.

It is no easy feat given the under-resourcing on climate change in federal government departments. Restoring the Ambassador for Climate Change and providing significant additional resources will allow DFAT to step into action ahead of the G7 meeting in Germany and the G20 in Indonesia. The Australian Government will need to elevate climate change to become a top tier diplomatic priority, much like the UK, and be willing to go over and above to secure the support of regional groups to host the COP.

The Australian Government will also need to go over and above to restore relations with Pacific Island nations. For too long Australia has been at the opposite end to its neighbours when it comes to climate change. Hosting a COP in partnership with the region is a first step to bridging this divide.

There is also a final and outstanding question for the Australian Government. Which city will host the COP?

While many host countries tend to opt for their capital cities, it doesn't have to be the case. It might even be worth having a public consultation or competition to see which city can win the opportunity. It will be a grand prize. The opportunity to help reset Australia's global climate reputation and broker the next stage of international climate action.