

Lies of Emission

The Australian Government as a source of climate misinformation and disinformation

The Australian Government is a source of climate misinformation and disinformation. Through official communications that amplify fossil fuel industry narratives, exaggerate progress, and promote false solutions, it undermines science, delays decarbonisation, and legitimises fossil fuel expansion. Addressing this requires systemic reforms to prevent and hold government accountable for misleading climate information.

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Summary

Climate misinformation and disinformation in Australia often originates from the very institutions charged with protecting the public interest.

Ministers, departments, and statutory agencies have repeatedly presented selective or misleading information about Australia's emissions performance, the projected impacts of policies, and the role of fossil fuels in the economy. This includes overstating emissions reductions by relying heavily on accounting tricks, promoting questionable carbon offset methodologies, and echoing industry talking points without adequate scrutiny. Independent integrity concerns, including conflicts of interest in notionally 'independent' agencies, further erode public trust. When statutory bodies are led or advised by individuals with financial or professional stakes in offset markets, environmental services, or high-emissions industries, the credibility of their assessments and communications is compromised.

The government is not only a source of climate disinformation but frequently benefits from misleading narratives generated by others. Fossil fuel companies, lobby groups, and associated actors promote claims that minimise the harms of coal and gas and exaggerate the role of offsets or new technologies. Governments and parliamentarians—past and present—have echoed the same narratives, including:

- Using creative accounting to minimise climate impact and inflate progress;
- promoting false solutions and the idea that the climate impact of fossil fuel production and use can be mitigated with carbon offsets or technology such as carbon capture and storage;
- promoting fossil gas as 'essential' for the clean energy transition;
- claiming that expanding fossil fuel production is compatible with emissions reductions and meeting climate targets;
- dismissing science-based advocacy as naïve and conflating calls to end new coal and gas projects with demands to shut down all fossil fuels immediately;
- framing fossil fuel expansion as indispensable to regional security;
- portraying reduced fossil fuel production or an end to new fossil fuel production as economically reckless.

When governments repeat or amplify these claims, they lend them the authority of public office. Industry benefits by having its talking points validated at the highest level; government benefits by gaining political legitimacy, lowered public expectations, and cover for approving new coal and gas projects. The result is a mutually reinforcing cycle in which

misleading narratives are normalised, scrutiny is deflected, and inadequate policies are insulated from accountability.

Addressing climate misinformation therefore requires structural interventions to constrain the government's own capacity to mislead, including enforceable truth standards for official communications, strict conflict-of-interest rules, and independence safeguards for statutory bodies.

While this report focuses on climate, the reforms outlined here address the same root causes that enable misinformation across Australian public life. The absence of truth-in-advertising standards, weak transparency requirements for government data and modelling, permissive conflict-of-interest rules, and the dominance of concentrated media power all create fertile ground for misleading narratives to flourish.

By establishing enforceable truth standards, mandating transparency of assumptions and datasets, tightening integrity rules for statutory bodies, and addressing media concentration, Australia can not only curb climate misinformation but also build systemic resilience against misinformation in health, economics, national security and other domains. Climate is therefore both the most urgent and the most appropriate test case for reform.

Introduction

Climate misinformation and disinformation in Australia is often framed as the product of fringe actors, foreign interference, or bad-faith industry campaigns. But this perspective misses a more uncomfortable reality: successive Australian governments are not only exposed to climate misinformation. They are consistent sources and beneficiaries of it.

Ministers, departments, and statutory agencies have repeatedly presented Australia's climate record in ways that obscure the true scale of its contribution to climate change. Fossil fuel exports are erased from national totals. Offsets are promoted as equivalent to emissions reductions. Land-sector accounting artefacts are used to exaggerate progress. These are not neutral errors but narratives that systematically advantage government: lowering public expectations, providing cover for approving new coal and gas projects, and preserving the fiscal and diplomatic benefits of fossil fuel exports.

Crucially, governments also benefit from disinformation they do not create. When industry, lobby groups, or statutory bodies promote claims that exaggerate abatement or understate fossil fuel risks, the government inherits narratives that align with its own short-term interests. By repeating and legitimising these talking points, governments transform contested industry claims into official policy positions, amplifying their reach and credibility.

The vulnerabilities that allow climate misinformation to flourish are not confined to this policy area. Selective data presentation, undisclosed conflicts of interest, opaque modelling, and the absence of enforceable truth standards undermine integrity across health, defence, and economic policy as well. Structural reforms—such as binding truth-in-communications standards, transparency requirements for data and modelling, strong conflict-of-interest rules, and independent oversight—would therefore strengthen accountability across all domains, not just climate.

Yet reform is particularly difficult in the climate space because governments have little incentive to dismantle an information environment that advantages them. Any solution must therefore confront not only technical weaknesses but also the political incentives that sustain them.

A critical first step is to identify the root causes of misinformation and disinformation, including drawing public attention to the government choices that perpetrate, permit and promote deception. The second step is to identify and leverage legal and diplomatic developments which increase the legal and reputational risks for governments that enable misleading climate conduct.

International law now recognises that governments have obligations not only to prevent environmental harm directly, but also to regulate and oversee private actors whose conduct foreseeably undermines mitigation. In its 2025 advisory opinion on climate change, the International Court of Justice confirmed that states which fail to regulate harmful activity by corporations, lobby groups, or platforms, may be breaching international law.¹

These developments create new avenues for accountability and increase the likelihood that the Commonwealth will eventually be forced to align its policies with its stated climate commitments and address sources of misinformation and disinformation.

¹ ICJ (2025) "Advisory Opinion on the Obligations of States in Respect of Climate Change", <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/187/187-20250723-adv-01-00-en.pdf>

Government as a source of climate misinformation and disinformation

Contrary to the assumption that misinformation comes only from fringe actors or industry lobbyists, successive Australian governments have been among its most consistent sources. Through official statements, departmental testimony, agency publications and policy branding, governments have repeatedly put forward claims that distort the public's understanding of climate policy.²

Government climate communications regularly promote narratives and statistics that give a misleading picture of Australia's climate performance, the role of fossil fuels, and the viability of certain technologies. These claims range from actively misleading to technically true in narrow terms but omitting critical context, leading the public to draw inaccurate conclusions.

These claims are not politically neutral—they systematically advantage government by lowering expectations, creating cover for the approval of new coal and gas projects, and preserving the short-term fiscal and diplomatic benefits of fossil fuel exports.

The Australia Institute has previously provided detailed evidence on these issues in its submission to the Senate inquiry into greenwashing, as well as in a supplementary submission (unpublished as of 12 September 2025).³

By presenting selective statistics, erasing exported emissions, reframing fossil fuel expansion as climate action, and promoting offsets and CCS as solutions, governments construct a narrative that conceals the real scale of Australia's contribution to climate change. The benefits are direct: political cover for approving new fossil fuel projects, the preservation of export revenue, and reduced public demand for structural reform.

² Hemming & Denniss (2023) *Submission: Senate inquiry into greenwashing*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/submission-senate-inquiry-into-greenwashing/>;

Denniss (2025) *Target Practice*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/target-practice/>

³ Hemming and Denniss (2023) *Submission: Senate inquiry into greenwashing*; Hemming (2025) *The Economics of Deception Greenwashing as a rational market Strategy: Supplementary submission to the senate inquiry into Greenwashing*, unpublished as at 12 September 2025

Even the language of policy is used to mislead. For example, the “Safeguard Mechanism” suggests pollution control, yet allows large emitters to increase their emissions.⁴ The “Environment Protection (Sea Dumping) Act 1981” is used to facilitate offshore CO₂ storage not environmental protection. These names obscure the true purpose and effect of the policies, perpetuating public confusion about whether they meaningfully constrain fossil fuel emissions.

SELECTIVE AND MISLEADING OFFICIAL CLAIMS BY GOVERNMENT

Creative accounting to minimise climate impact and inflate progress

Excluding Exported Emissions

Each year Australia exports more than twice the emissions produced within its borders in fossil fuels. When consumed around the world, Australia’s fossil fuel exports resulted in 1.1 billion tonnes of CO₂e greenhouse gas emissions in 2020-21.⁵ Australia’s domestic emissions for that same period were 528.91 million tonnes.⁶

In 2024 Foreign Minister, Penny Wong, told media in Samoa that said Australia’s emissions had “peaked” in 2005.⁷ The technicality of this statement is discussed further below but in the first instance this claim ignores the fact that, regardless of domestic emissions, Australia’s gas and coal exports (and associated greenhouse gas emissions) have increased substantially since 2005.⁸

⁴ Joshi (2025) “The Safeguard Mechanism’s pro-fossil flaws – explained”, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/the-safeguard-mechanisms-pro-fossil-flaws-explained/>

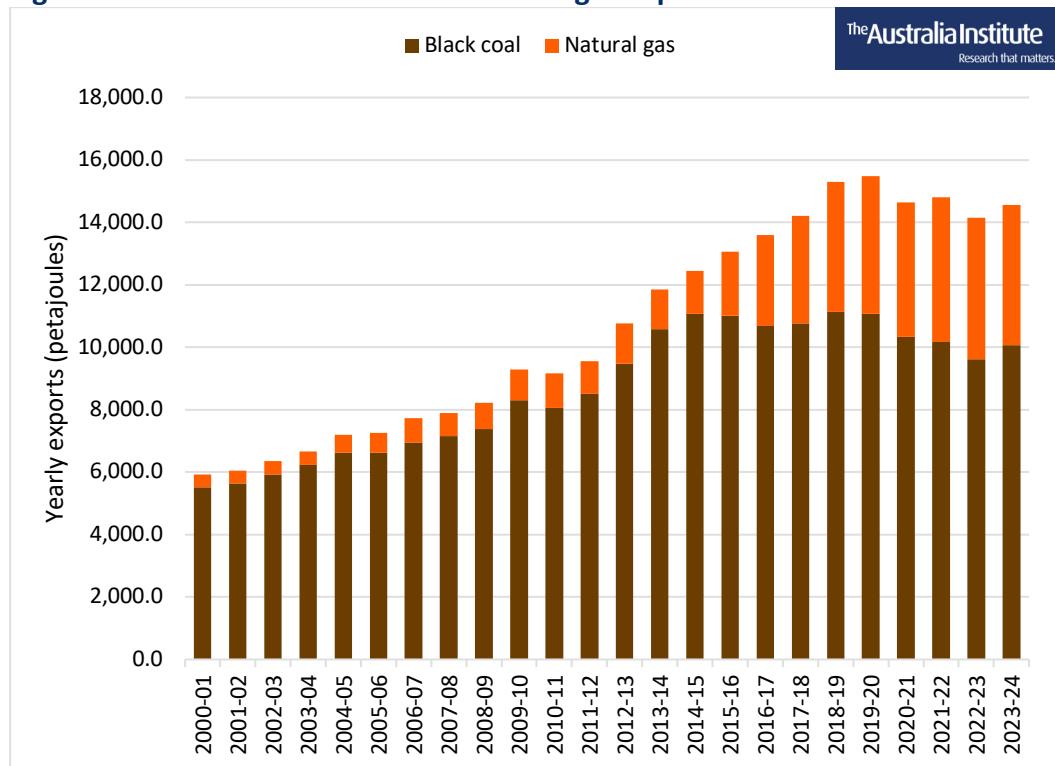
⁵ Australian Government – Department of Industry, Science and Resources (2023) *Resources and Energy Quarterly: Historical Data*; Australian Government – Department of Industry, Science and Resources (2023) *National Greenhouse Accounts Factors: Australian National Greenhouse Accounts*, <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/climate-change/publications/national-greenhouse-accounts-factors-2023>

⁶ Australian Government – Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water (2024) *National Greenhouse Gas Inventory Quarterly Update: September 2023*, <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/climate-change/publications/national-greenhouse-gas-inventory-quarterly-update-september-2023>

⁷ Wong (2024) “Press Conference Apia, Samoa”, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/transcript/press-conference-apia-samoa>

⁸ Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (2025) “Australian Energy Update 2025”, Table J, <https://www.energy.gov.au/publications/australian-energy-update-2025>

Figure 1: Australian black coal and natural gas exports 2000-2024



Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (2025) "Australian Energy Update 2025", Table J

No matter where in the world Australian gas and coal exports are burned, they will contribute to climate change. However, successive Australian Governments, including this one, have argued that they have no responsibility for the impact of emissions from the fossil fuels they export. In its submission to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the Australian Government claimed that its climate obligations only apply to emissions within its territory, suggesting that states are not responsible under international law for emissions resulting from the downstream use of exported fossil fuels.⁹ Australia also argued that international law should not interfere with domestic decisions about economic development or natural resource use.¹⁰

While Australia's approach to climate accounting is consistent with the UNFCCC accounting rules that Australia has worked so hard to shape, it is important to reiterate that from a scientific point of view it is irrelevant where new gas and coal production is burned, the global consequences will be the same.

By minimising the country's contribution, the government shifts responsibility onto others and presents itself as a minor player in global emissions, even while being one of the world's

⁹ Commonwealth of Australia (2024) "Written comments of Australia", p27, <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/187/187-20240815-wri-14-00-en.pdf>

¹⁰ Commonwealth of Australia (2024) "Written comments of Australia", p7

largest fossil fuel exporters. This erasure allows continued approvals without appearing globally irresponsible.

Overstating Emissions Reductions

Linked to Penny Wong's framing is another recurring line of government communication: that Australia's emissions are steadily declining. In a May 2025 media release, Minister for Climate and Energy, Chris Bowen, claimed that Australia's emissions were 28% below 2005 levels.¹¹

However, this figure is misleading as it relies almost entirely on emission reductions in the land sector (forests and land management) to 'offset' fossil fuel emissions generated across the economy.

Under current UNFCCC accounting rules, it is possible for a country like Australia to report significant emissions reductions without actually cutting fossil fuel consumption or production. This is largely due to how land sector emissions are counted and the ability to offset increases in fossil fuel emissions with estimated carbon sequestration from forests and other land use changes.

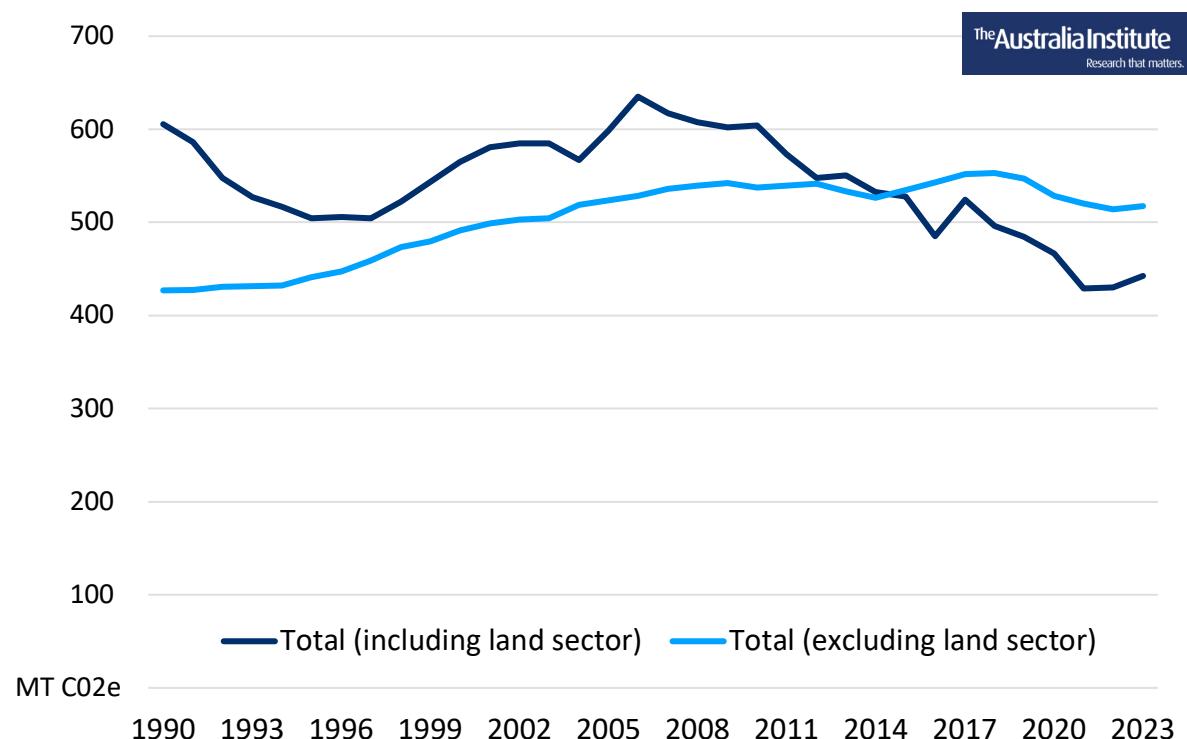
The explanation for this seeming contradiction is based on the fact that Australia is a vast continent featuring extensive tree and vegetation cover. In the early years of this millennium, drought and high rates of land clearing for agriculture meant 'land sector' emissions were unusually high. Since then, changes to land clearing and forestry practices and prolonged high rainfall have enabled Australia to claim emissions reductions in its official accounts (primarily due to the estimated rapid rate of tree growth) despite minimal decarbonisation of the industrial sectors of the economy.¹²

As shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3 below, Australia is not engaged in the rapid decarbonisation of industrial, transport and electricity sector emissions. When actual emissions, predominantly from producing and combusting fossil fuels, are considered, Australia's emissions are still roughly the same as they were in 2005. Figure 3 gives a breakdown of emissions across individual sectors in Australia and shows that some sectors have increased since 2005.

¹¹ Bowen (2025) "New data shows emissions down in year to March 2025", <https://minister.dcceew.gov.au/bowen/media-releases/new-data-shows-emissions-down-year-march-2025>

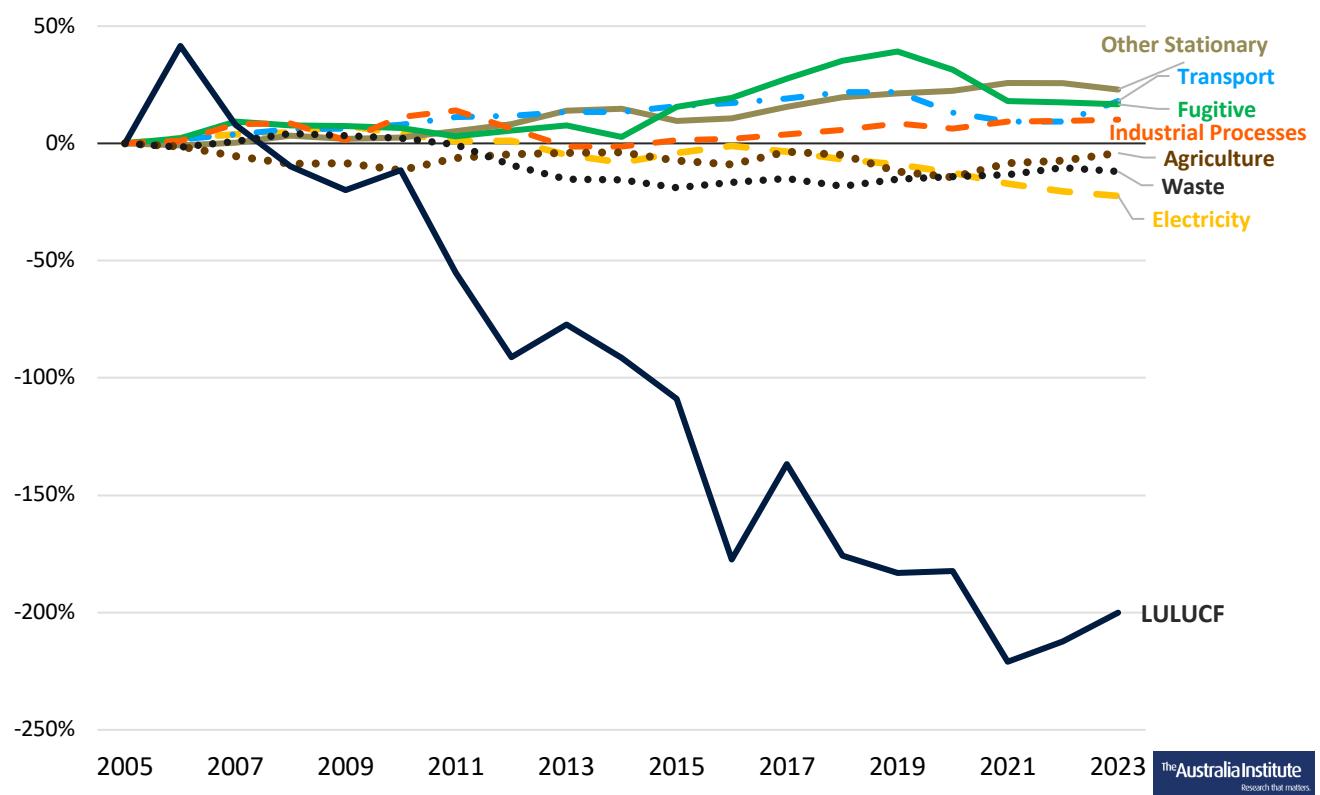
¹² Merzian and Hemming (2021) *Banking on Australia's Emissions*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/banking-on-australias-emissions/>

Figure 2: Australian emissions since 1990 with and without land sector



Source: DCCEEW (2023) *Emissions inventories - UNFCCC inventory*,
<https://www.greenhouseaccounts.climatechange.gov.au/>; Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (2025) Quarterly Update of Australia's National Greenhouse Gas Inventory: December 2024, <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/nggi-quarterly-update-december-2024.pdf>

Figure 3: Percentage change in emissions, by sector, since 2005

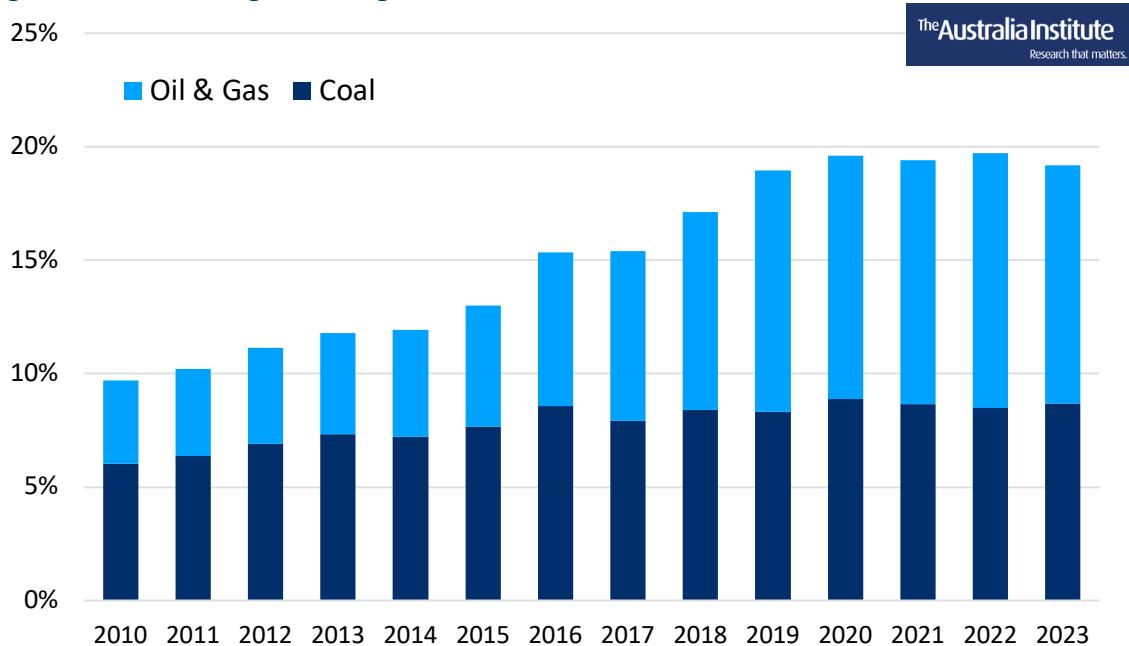


Source: DCCEEW (2023) *Emissions inventories - UNFCCC inventory*,
<https://www.greenhouseaccounts.climatechange.gov.au/>

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Figure 4 shows that close to *one fifth* of Australia's domestic emissions come from producing coal, gas and oil, predominantly for export and how these emissions have been increasing.

Figure 4: Coal mining, oil and gas extraction - share of total Australian emissions



Source: Saunders and Hemming (2025) *Off the Charts: Nearly a fifth of Australia's emissions now come from sending fossil fuels overseas*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/nearly-a-fifth-of-australias-emissions-now-comes-from-sending-fossil-fuels-overseas/>; Australian Bureau of Statistics (2025) *Australian National Accounts: Input-Output Tables*, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/national-accounts/australian-national-accounts-input-output-tables/latest-release>

This framing enables government to present itself as having delivered substantial emissions reductions while avoiding structural reforms in energy and industry. The benefit is that it deflects criticism, creates the impression that Australia is “on track” to meet its targets, and lowers public demand for stronger climate policies.

Promoting False Solutions

When confronted with the contradiction between fossil fuel expansion and commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, governments often promote carbon offsets and technology such as carbon capture and storage (CCS) as scalable solutions that will bridge that contradiction.

Carbon offsets are repeatedly promoted as equivalent to genuine emissions reductions, despite widespread evidence to the contrary. Independent reviews, experts, and even carbon market participants have identified serious flaws in the way offsets are issued and used, particularly in methods such as Human-Induced Regeneration and Avoided

Deforestation. Concerns about integrity have been compounded by the government's decision to establish a notionally "independent" review of Australia's offset scheme, which was arguably designed to defend the system rather than fix its problems.¹³

Because Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCUs) are legislated financial instruments, promoting them as robust when they are not risks misleading a regulated market. Nevertheless, Climate Change and Energy Minister Chris Bowen has insisted that "rigorous integrity reforms" to Australia's carbon offsets are working, that carbon offsets are a "critical part of the 'net' in Net Zero" and that "Carbon markets have enormous potential to support Australia's ambition to cut emissions by 43% below 2005 levels by 2030".¹⁴

Similarly, CCS is repeatedly described as proven and scalable, particularly for gas and coal projects. In reality, large-scale CCS projects worldwide have consistently failed to meet

¹³ Macintosh et al. (2024) "Australian human-induced native forest regeneration carbon offset projects have limited impact on changes in woody vegetation cover and carbon removals", <https://www.nature.com/articles/s43247-024-01313-x>; Hemming, Merzian & School (2021) *Questionable integrity: Non-additionality in the Emissions Reduction Fund's Avoided Deforestation Method*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/questionable-integrity-non-additionality-in-the-emissions-reduction-funds-avoided-deforestation-method/>; Morton (2022) "Forest regeneration that earned multimillion-dollar carbon credits resulted in fewer trees, analysis finds", <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/nov/07/forest-regeneration-that-earned-multimillion-dollar-carbon-credits-resulted-in-fewer-trees-analysis-finds>; Slezak (2022) "Industry bosses making money from carbon credits say system needs to change", <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-09-06/companies-making-money-from-carbon-credits-speak-out/101400566>; Equity Generation Lawyers (2025) "Parents for Climate v EnergyAustralia (Offsets Greenwashing)", <https://equitygenerationlawyers.com/case/ap4ca-v-energyaustralia/>; Pannell (2021) "346. Soil carbon is a highly flawed climate policy, Part 1", <https://www.pannelldiscussions.net/2021/04/346-soil-carbon-1/>; Macintosh (2023) "Chubb review of Australia's carbon credit scheme falls short – and problems will continue to fester", <https://theconversation.com/chubb-review-of-australias-carbon-credit-scheme-falls-short-and-problems-will-continue-to-fester-197401>; Hemming & Merzian (2022) *Submission to Chubb Carbon Offsets Inquiry*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/submission-to-chubb-carbon-offsets-inquiry/>

¹⁴ Bowen (2025) "Address to Australasian Emissions Reduction Summit, Melbourne", <https://minister.dcceew.gov.au/bowen/speeches/address-australasian-emissions-reduction-summit-melbourne>; Bowen & Wilson (2024) "Joint media release: new Environmental Plantings method to strengthen Australia's carbon market", <https://minister.dcceew.gov.au/bowen/media-releases/joint-media-release-new-environmental-plantings-method-strengthen-australias-carbon-market>; Bowen (2022) "Independent Review of ACCUs", <https://minister.dcceew.gov.au/bowen/media-releases/independent-review-accus>

performance expectations, including those in Australia.¹⁵ Yet government and Ministerial communications present CCS as a plausible pathway to emissions reduction, sustaining the illusion that fossil fuel production can continue indefinitely.¹⁶ In July 2025, Minister for Industry and Innovation and Minister for Science Tim Ayres granted Major Project Status to the Bonaparte Carbon Capture and Storage Project. In the Minister's own media release, titled "*Large-scale renewable energy ventures awarded Major Project Status*", the CCS development was explicitly presented as a renewable energy project.¹⁷ Framing CCS in this way is misleading: it is not renewable energy, but an abatement technology promoted by gas companies to extend the life of fossil fuel production.

These claims benefit government by allowing it to approve new fossil fuel projects without admitting that they undermine climate targets, and by creating the appearance of progress through accounting rather than action.

Promoting fossil gas as 'essential' for the clean energy transition

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and International Energy Agency (IEA) have been explicit: no new gas fields are compatible with limiting warming to 1.5°C.¹⁸

Gas is not a transition fuel. Gas is a fossil fuel. Burning it produces carbon dioxide, and its extraction releases CO₂ and methane directly from the ground. The notion of gas as a "transition fuel" emerged because gas produces fewer emissions than coal and has sometimes displaced coal in the energy mix. That may have been a plausible framing 30 years ago, but it is no longer defensible today.

¹⁵ Joshi (2025) "Expensive, publicly-funded Carbon Capture & Storage is barely visible in new emissions data", <https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/expensive-publicly-funded-carbon-capture-storage-is-barely-visible-in-new-emissions-data/>

¹⁶ King (2022) "New petroleum acreage to provide energy security", <https://www.minister.industry.gov.au/ministers/king/media-releases/new-petroleum-acreage-provide-energy-security>

¹⁷ Ayres (2025) "Large-scale renewable energy ventures awarded major Project Status", <https://www.minister.industry.gov.au/ministers/timayres/media-releases/large-scale-renewable-energy-ventures-awarded-major-project-status>

¹⁸ CarbonBrief (2025) "IEA reiterates 'no new oil and gas needed' if global warming is limited to 1.5C", <https://www.carbonbrief.org/iea-reiterates-no-new-oil-and-gas-needed-if-global-warming-is-limited-to-1-5c/>; IPCC (2023) "Climate Change 2023 Synthesis Report: Summary for Policymakers", p20, <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/>

Global warming has already reached 1.1°C.¹⁹ There is no room in the remaining carbon budget for new gas projects that will not begin producing for years. The science is clear: limiting warming to 1.5°C requires rapid decarbonisation and the prevention of all new fossil fuel developments, including gas.

Nevertheless, Australian ministers have continued to argue otherwise. In April 2024, Climate Minister Chris Bowen said Australia had “no option but to seek new supplies of gas”.²⁰ In May, he reiterated that “with current supplies of gas dwindling, new supply will be needed – even as we electrify at pace”.²¹ Interestingly these statements seem to directly contradict earlier comments from 2022 where Minister Bowen stated “The one thing about gas is I don’t regard it as a transition fuel, I don’t regard it as low emissions fuel...”.²² This inconsistency adds weight to the argument that ministers are not guided by evidence or conviction, but by what is politically convenient in the moment.

At the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders’ Retreat in 2025, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese reiterated the government’s position, saying: “We know that gas has an important role to play in the transition.”²³ Resources Minister Madeleine King has made similar remarks, declaring that “gas will play a key role as a transition fuel as Australia works to reach net zero emissions by 2050.”²⁴

Claiming that expanding fossil fuel production is compatible with emissions reductions and meeting climate targets

As already noted, Resources Minister Madeleine King has repeatedly declared that “gas will play a key role as a transition fuel as Australia works to reach net zero emissions by 2050.”²⁵ Similarly, in a July 2024 address to the Indian Ocean Defence & Security conference, she

¹⁹ McGrath (2024) “Is the UN warning of 3.1C global warming a surprise?”, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn0d24w28qno>

²⁰ Greber (2024) “New gas supplies ‘needed’ says Bowen as Gippsland wind takes off”, <https://www.afr.com/policy/energy-and-climate/new-gas-supplies-needed-says-bowen-as-gippsland-wind-takes-off-20240430-p5fnra>

²¹ Bowen (2024) “Speech to Energy Users Association of Australia”, <https://minister.dccew.gov.au/bowen/speeches/speech-energy-users-association-australia>

²² Parkinson (2022), “Chris Bowen: Gas is neither a transition fuel, nor low emissions. But at least it’s flexible”, [reneweconomy.com.au/chris-bowen-gas-is-neither-a-transition-fuel-nor-low-emissions-but-at-least-its-flexible/amp/](https://reneweconomy.com.au/chris-bowen-gas-is-neither-a-transition-fuel-nor-low-emissions-but-at-least-its-flexible/)

²³ Read, Cropp & Rabe (2025) “Gas has ‘important role’ in climate battle: Albanese”, <https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/approving-north-west-shelf-breaks-international-law-australia-told-20250910-p5mu39>

²⁴ King (2022) “New petroleum acreage to provide energy security”

²⁵ King (2022) “New petroleum acreage to provide energy security”

claimed that, “As our WA Premier Roger Cook has rightly pointed out: LNG is also displacing coal in many economies and helping to reduce global emissions.”²⁶

King went further in a December 2024 opinion piece titled *Why net zero will only be possible with natural gas*, where she argued: “Under all credible net zero scenarios, natural gas is needed through to 2050 and beyond. To put it simply – we will need to keep producing more gas in Australia to ensure a stable and orderly energy transition at home and in our region.”²⁷ This assertion is simply not true: international scientific authorities, including the IEA and IPCC, have been explicit that no new coal or gas projects are compatible with limiting warming to 1.5°C.

These statements exemplify a consistent government narrative: that fossil fuel expansion can be reconciled with climate goals because Australian LNG exports are said to displace higher-emitting coal in other countries. In reality, new projects increase emissions in two directions at once. Globally, they add to the overall supply of fossil fuels and lock in decades of combustion and methane leakage. Domestically, they drive up production and fugitive emissions, which already account for about one-fifth of Australia’s national inventory. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has reinforced this logic, defending Woodside’s North West Shelf extension in September 2025 as consistent with Australia’s net zero pathway.²⁸

Such claims defy basic physics. *You cannot reduce greenhouse gas emissions by increasing them*. The idea that gas displaces coal rests on assumptions that cannot be independently verified and that ignore lifecycle methane leakage, which erodes much of gas’s supposed advantage. In practice, global gas demand is projected to fall sharply under any 1.5°C-aligned pathway, meaning new supply adds to total emissions rather than replacing existing fuels.

By presenting gas expansion as climate action, Australian ministers obscure the true impact of fossil exports, misrepresent domestic emissions, and shift accountability offshore. Whether combusted at home or overseas, new gas projects lock in decades of additional emissions that push climate goals further out of reach. The claim that fossil fuel expansion is compatible with net zero is therefore not only misleading but constitutes government-driven climate disinformation.

²⁶ Hon Madeline King MP (2024) “Address to Indian Ocean Defence and Security 2024”, <https://www.minister.industry.gov.au/ministers/king/speeches/address-indian-ocean-defence-and-security-2024>

²⁷ Hon Madeline King MP (2024) “Why net zero will only be possible with natural gas”, <https://www.minister.industry.gov.au/ministers/king/opinion-piece/why-net-zero-will-only-be-possible-natural-gas#:~:text=Under%20all%20credible%20net%20zero,home%20and%20in%20our%20region>.

²⁸ Evans (2025) “PM defends North West Shelf gas extension to 2070, as critics warn about net zero commitment”, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-05-29/albanese-defends-woodside-north-west-extension-net-zero/105351380>

Dismissing science-based advocacy as naïve and conflating calls to end new coal and gas projects with demands to shut down all fossil fuels immediately

Australian ministers frequently frame calls for evidence-based climate policy as naïve or impractical, positioning themselves as the only actors grappling with “real-world” constraints. Yet the scientific consensus is unambiguous: the IPCC, the IEA, and the majority of the world’s leading scientists have all concluded that the only way to constrain global warming to internationally agreed limits is to stop approving new fossil fuel projects.²⁹ This is not an arbitrary demand but a matter of physics.

Climate Minister Chris Bowen, for example, dismissed science-based advocacy, saying: “with all due respect to those commentators who say we should be doing more, they don’t need to deliver, the Government does... it’s all very well to say, we want more, but you’ve got to explain how.”³⁰ In Parliament, he reinforced this framing by insisting that Australia cannot simply “wish away fossil fuels.”³¹ Such rhetoric sidesteps what the science shows is necessary —halting new coal and gas approvals—while recasting those advocating for it as unrealistic or unserious, despite their proposals being grounded in the clearest available evidence.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has similarly cast science-based advocacy as fanciful, stating: “You can’t have renewables unless you have firming capacity... you don’t change a transition through warm thoughts.”³² He has also argued that “it would not be responsible to turn off the tap overnight.”³³ Yet no credible scientific body or climate advocate has suggested shutting down existing gas supply or projects immediately. The call is to stop approving new projects that lock in decades of additional emissions. By conflating that position with demands to close the industry overnight, ministers create a strawman that

²⁹ CarbonBrief (2025) “IEA reiterates ‘no new oil and gas needed’ if global warming is limited to 1.5C”, <https://www.carbonbrief.org/iea-reiterates-no-new-oil-and-gas-needed-if-global-warming-is-limited-to-1-5c/>; IPCC (2023) “Climate Change 2023 Synthesis Report: Summary for Policymakers”, p20, <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/>

³⁰ The Hon Chris Bowen (2025) “Interview with Sally Sara, ABC RN Breakfast”, <https://minister.dcceew.gov.au/bowen/transcripts/interview-sally-sara-abc-rn-breakfast>

³¹ Gould and Boscaini (2025) “Federal politics: Chris Bowen says Australia can not ‘wish away fossil fuels’ to reduce emissions — as it happened”, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-07-30/federal-politics-parliament-blog-july-30/105587636>

³² Olbrycht-Palmer (2025) “Anthony Albanese defends major gas project, says net-zero needs more than ‘warm thoughts’”, <https://www.news.com.au/technology/environment/sustainability/anthony-albanese-defends-major-gas-project-says-netzero-needs-more-than-warm-thoughts/news-story/d826dbab20aca031d3aabca83b6dc042>

³³ The Hon Anthony Albanese MP (2023), “Address to Future Energy Forum”, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/address-future-energy-forum?>

allows them to present themselves as pragmatic realists while depicting evidence-based advocacy as naïve idealism.

In support of this framing, the federal government recently approved a 40-year extension to the Woodside-operated North West Shelf gas project through to 2070, a facility overwhelmingly geared to exports, not domestic energy supply. Presenting an export project as indispensable to Australia's renewable transition not only misrepresents its role but entrenches the narrative that rejecting fossil approvals is naïve, when in fact it is the minimum requirement of science-based policy.

Framing fossil fuel expansion as indispensable to regional security

Another recurring narrative is the portrayal of gas as a guarantor of economic stability and regional security. This framing runs directly counter to international science and policy.

Government strategy papers reinforce this positioning. Australia's *Future Gas Strategy* claims that Australian LNG is central to Indo-Pacific energy security and regional living standards.³⁴ Resources Minister Madeleine King has gone further, arguing that Australian gas is actually helping Japan reduce emissions.³⁵

The security dimension is often invoked rhetorically to legitimise gas expansion by linking it to Australia's alliances. Ministers frequently frame LNG exports as essential to regional stability, particularly in relation to Japan. Yet the strength of the Australia–Japan relationship does not depend on gas. The two countries already share a deep security partnership, reinforced by their common alliance with the United States, both bilaterally and through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. In 2022, they signed the Reciprocal Access Agreement—the first visiting forces agreement Japan has concluded with any country other than the United States—further cementing defence cooperation.³⁶ These agreements demonstrate that the alliance is anchored in shared strategic and security interests, not fossil fuel trade.

Casting gas as a linchpin of Indo-Pacific security therefore misrepresents the nature of Australia's alliances. No realistic fluctuation in the gas trade would threaten Japan's or the

³⁴ Department of Industry, Science and Resources (2024) *Future Gas Strategy*, p5, <https://www.industry.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-05/future-gas-strategy.pdf>

³⁵ King (2024) "Australia as a long-term and reliable energy supplier", <https://www.minister.industry.gov.au/ministers/king/speeches/australia-long-term-and-reliable-energy-supplier>

³⁶ Al Jazeera (2022) "Australia, Japan sign 'historic' defence pact amid China concerns", <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/6/australia-japan-sign-historic-defence-treaty-amid-chinas-rise>

United States' security commitments to Australia. Hyperbolic language linking gas markets to Indo-Pacific security should therefore be understood as political cover for fossil fuel expansion rather than a genuine requirement for regional stability. By blurring the lines between climate, trade and security, governments cast the approval of new gas projects as a patriotic necessity, when in fact it is a deliberate policy choice to privilege industry interests over climate science.

Portraying reduced fossil fuel production, or an end to new fossil fuel production, as economically reckless

One of the most common defences of continued fossil fuel expansion in Australia is that winding it back would be “reckless” or “devastating” for the economy. Ministers frequently frame even modest calls to stop approving new coal and gas projects as equivalent to an immediate shutdown of the industry, creating a false dichotomy between business as usual and economic collapse. This rhetorical device shifts the debate away from science-based planning for a managed decline and instead paints climate action as a threat to jobs, revenues, and national prosperity.

Energy and Climate Change Minister Chris Bowen has previously told *RN Breakfast* that a “blanket ban” on coal and gas would be “irresponsible.”³⁷ Bowen doubled on this defence in 2025, stating “It’s easy to say, for example, ‘no new gas’ just as a slogan. That’s not in touch with reality when you consider we need gas to support renewables. Gas is a flexible energy source.”³⁸

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has similarly argued that Labor would not support a moratorium on fossil fuel projects because doing so would have a “devastating impact on the Australian economy.”³⁹ Albanese then went further, claiming:

“If Australia today said we are not going to export any more coal, what you’d see is a lot of jobs lost, you would see a significant loss to our economy, significantly less taxation, revenue for education, health and other services, and that coal wouldn’t lead to a reduction in global emissions, what you would see is a replacement with

³⁷ Dhanji (2023) “No new coal or gas is a slogan, not a policy: Bowen”, <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/radionational-breakfast/-no-new-coal-or-gas-is-a-slogan-not-a-policy-bowen/102061144>

³⁸ Lang (2025) “No Australian spared: National Climate Risk Assessment delivers dire warning”, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/podcast-episode/no-australian-spared-national-climate-risk-assessment-delivers-dire-warning/dv11b9bw>

³⁹ Murphy, Karp & Butler (2022) “Anthony Albanese rules out banning fossil fuel projects, citing risk to Australian economy”, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/jul/26/anthony-albanese-rules-out-banning-fossil-fuel-projects-citing-risk-to-australian-economy>

coal from other countries that's likely to produce higher emissions ... because of the quality of the product.”⁴⁰

While coal, oil and gas production account for such a significant proportion of Australia's domestic emissions (due to large amounts of fugitive methane emissions and the fact that large amounts of gas needs to be burned to liquify the enormous amount of gas Australia exports), these industries only account for 7% of Australia's GDP and a much lower percentage of national income due to the fact that the vast majority of companies exporting gas and coal from Australia are foreign owned.⁴¹

For example, while every billion dollars in profit INPEX or Chevron make exporting Australian gas is included in Australia's GDP, every one of those billion dollars goes to the foreign owners of INPEX and Chevron.⁴²

The Australian Government often suggests that the fossil fuel industry is an essential source of employment and tax revenue. Official government data, however, makes clear this is not the case.

⁴⁰ Murphy, Karp & Butler (2022) “Anthony Albanese rules out banning fossil fuel projects, citing risk to Australian economy”, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/jul/26/anthony-albanese-rules-out-banning-fossil-fuel-projects-citing-risk-to-australian-economy>

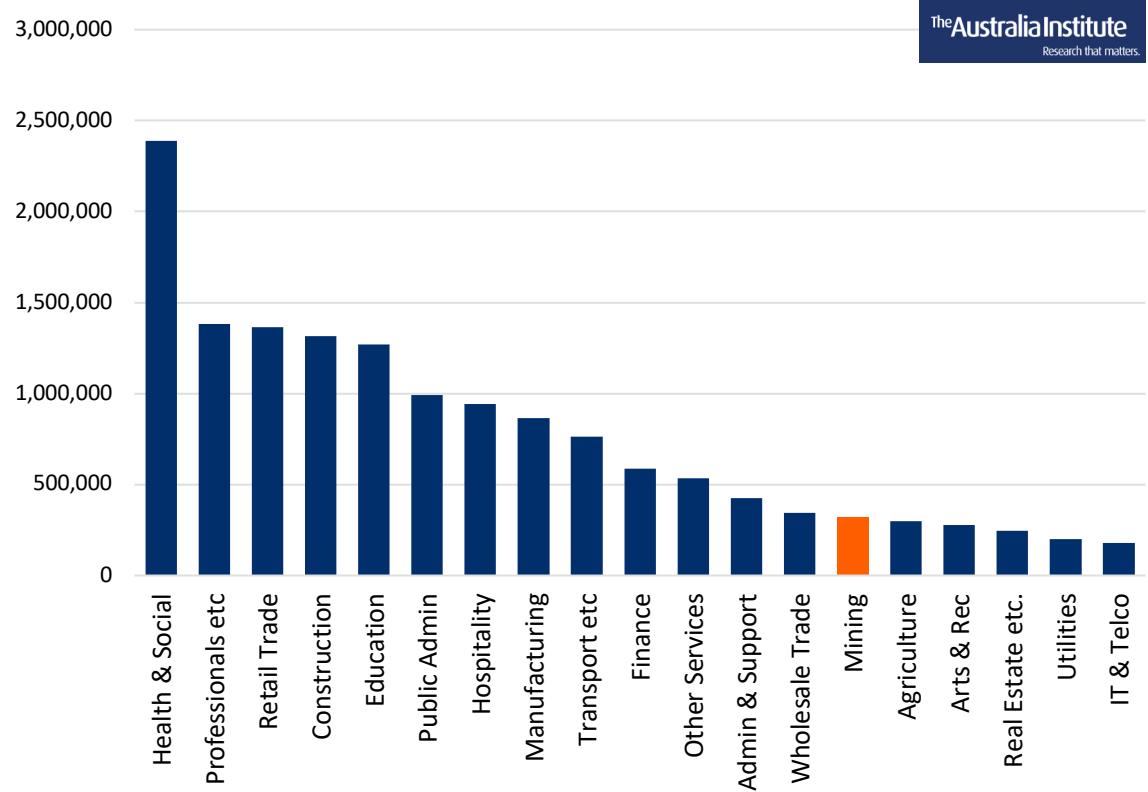
⁴¹ Estimated on real, 2022-23, prices. ABS (2024) *Australian System of National Accounts*, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/national-accounts/australian-system-national-accounts>; ABS (2025) *Australian National Accounts: Input-Output Tables*, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/national-accounts/australian-national-accounts-input-output-tables/>;

DFAT (2025) *Australian industries and foreign direct investment*, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/trade/trade-and-investment-data-information-and-publications/foreign-investment-statistics/australian-industries-and-foreign-investment>

⁴² INPEX (2022) “Tax Transparency Report”, <https://www.inpex.com.au/media/4wknx3jh/2022-inpex-aus-tax-transparency-report.pdf>; Chevron (2024) “tax transparency report”, <https://australia.chevron.com/-/media/australia/publications/documents/tax-transparency-report--year-end-december-2023.pdf>

Not a big employer

Figure 4: Australian industries by employment, May 2025



Source: ABS (2025) *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed - May 2025*,
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia-detailed>

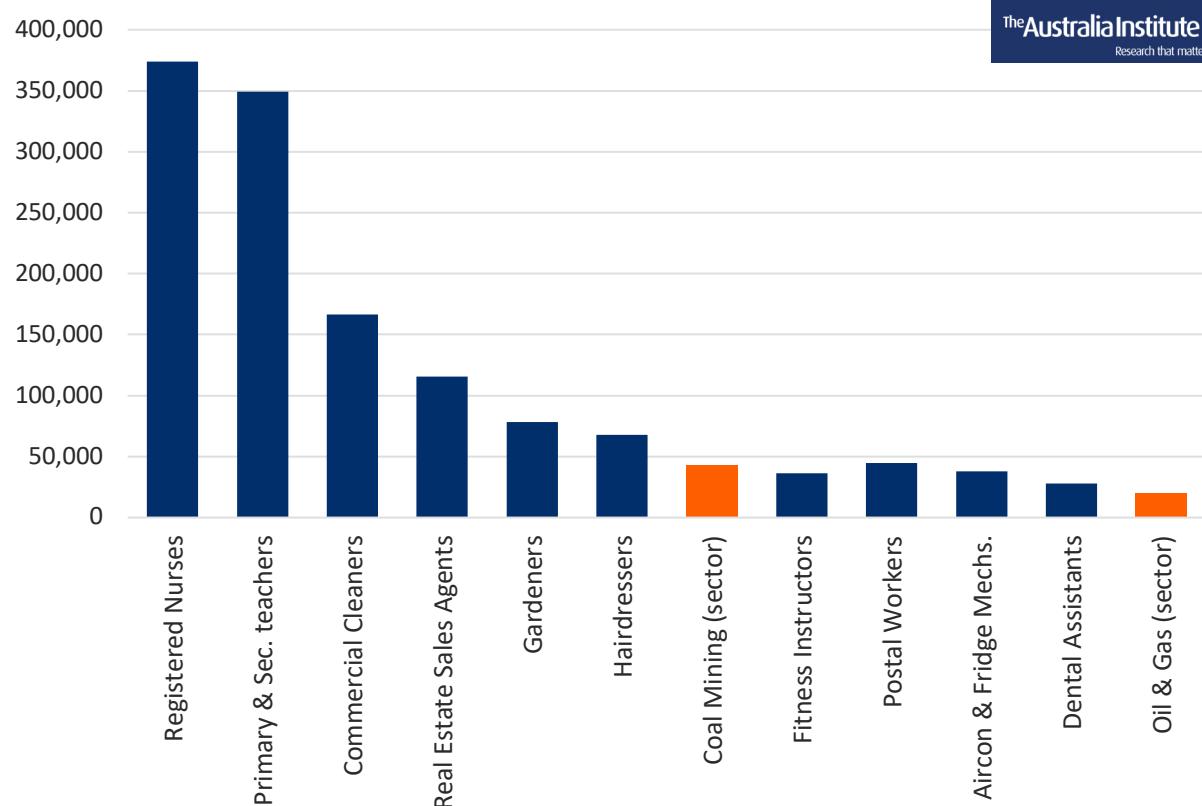
According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), coal mining employed 42,672 people and oil and gas extraction just 20,497 in May 2025.⁴³ This is a fraction of a percent of the total number of Australia's jobs, insignificant when compared to the manufacturing industry which employed 880,000 people and the health sector which employed almost 2.4 million.⁴⁴ In Australia, there are more gardeners and hairdressers than coal mining workers and McDonalds employ more workers than the fossil fuel industry.⁴⁵

⁴³ ABS (2025) *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed - May 2025*

⁴⁴ ABS (2025) *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed - May 2025*

⁴⁵ McDonalds (n.d.) *Macca's story*, <https://mcdonalds.com.au/about-maccas/maccas-story>

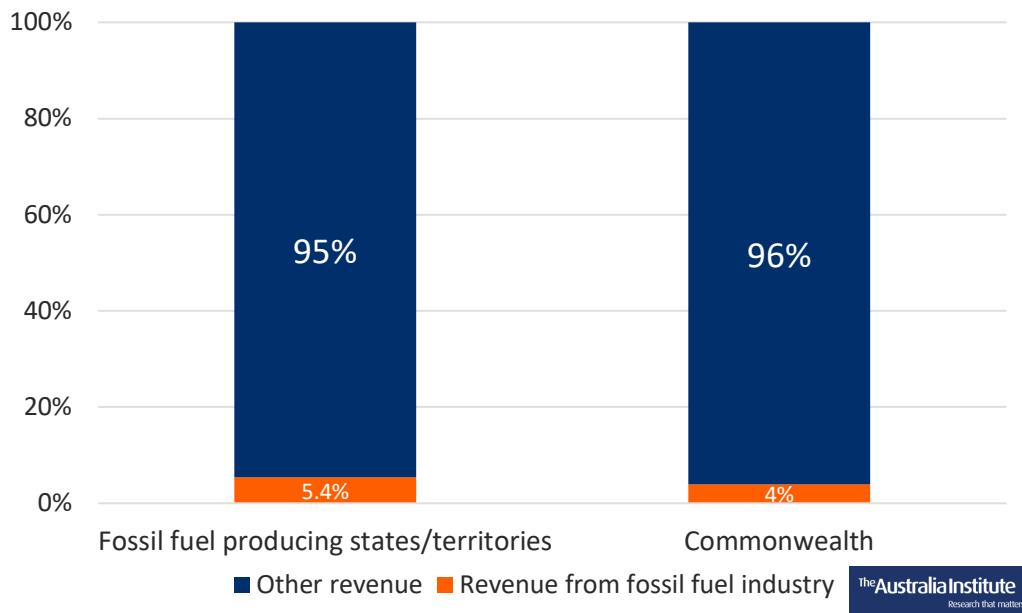
Figure 5: Fossil fuel employment compared to other occupations, May 2025



Source: ABS (2025) *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed - May 2025*,
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia-detailed>

Not overly reliant on revenue

Figure 6: Revenue from fossil fuels compared to other revenue, 2023/24



Source: ABS (2025) *Government Finance Statistics*,
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/government/government-finance-statistics-australia/>,
State and Commonwealth Budget Papers

Australia's major fossil fuel producing jurisdictions are New South Wales (coal), Queensland (coal and gas), Western Australia (gas), South Australia (gas), and Northern Territory (gas). Of the over \$298 billion in revenue these governments collected in 2023-24, royalties from coal and gas accounted for just \$16.0 billion, or around 5.4%. In other words, even in the major fossil fuel producing states, 94.6% of their revenue does not come from coal and gas.⁴⁶

Similarly, at the Commonwealth level, total revenue was \$703 billion in 2023-24, of which around 27 billion, or less than 4%, came from Petroleum Resource Rent Tax, company tax, royalties, and fuel excise paid by the fossil fuel industry.⁴⁷

Australia raises very little money from its fossil fuel industry. By comparison, Qatar exports a similar amount of LNG to Australia but collects six times as much tax as Australia does from its LNG exports.⁴⁸

Australia exports about 80% of the gas produced in Australia. Of this exported gas, 56% does not have royalties paid on it.⁴⁹ From 2020-2024, \$149 billion worth of liquified natural gas was exported from Australia royalty-free.⁵⁰ These companies also pay very little tax—so little, in fact, that the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) has called the oil and gas industry “systemic non-payers” of tax.⁵¹

To put it simply, the fossil fuel industry's political influence in Australia is far greater than its economic significance.

⁴⁶ Calculated from state government budget papers. NSW figures include all royalties as royalties are not disaggregated into commodity type in budget papers.

⁴⁷ Calculated from Commonwealth budget papers and Australian Taxation Office (2024) *Taxation statistics 2021-22*, <https://www.ato.gov.au/about-ato/research-and-statistics/in-detail/taxation-statistics/taxation-statistics-2021-22>. All figures on accrual (revenue) basis except for company tax figures which are on a cash (receipts basis).

⁴⁸ APPEA (2023) *Key Statistics*, https://energyproducers.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/APPEA_KS23_Final_low-res.pdf; Qatar Government – Ministry of Finance (2022-23) *Public Budget Statement, Quarterly Reports*, Q3 2022-Q4 2023.

⁴⁹ Ogge, Campbell & Verstegan (2024) *Australia's great gas giveaway*, p8, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/australias-great-gas-giveaway/>

⁵⁰ Ogge et al (2024) *Australia's great gas giveaway*

⁵¹ McIlroy (2019) “Oil, gas ‘systemic non-payers’ of tax”, Australian Financial Review, 12 Dec 2019

INSTITUTIONAL REINFORCEMENT

The government's misinformation is not confined to political rhetoric; it is entrenched through the very institutions that should provide independent advice and accurate information.

Senior public servants and statutory agencies play a central role in reinforcing misleading narratives, both by overstating progress and by concealing the scale of climate harm. Freedom of Information (FOI) and Hansard testimony reveal numerous examples, including the following.

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW)

DCCEEW provides the backbone of climate messaging through official communications, briefing material for Senate Estimates, and talking points for ministers. These communications routinely frame Australia as acting with maximum urgency, exaggerate emissions reductions, and downplay the climate impact of fossil fuel expansion. In Senate Estimates, Jo Evans, then Deputy Secretary of the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, asserted that "we are already pushing our emissions reductions to go as fast as is possible".⁵² This statement was delivered despite the fact that national emissions had increased over the preceding 18 months and new coalmines and gas projects were being approved—the opposite of "reducing as fast as possible".⁵³ In earlier testimony in 2019, Evans went so far as to suggest that climate change might actually be an advantage for some countries.⁵⁴

Internal documents reinforce this pattern. FOI material shows senior executive Kath Rowley coaching staff on how to downplay the Scarborough LNG project's emissions, ending her guidance with a smiley face.⁵⁵ This illustrates not accidental miscommunication, but an institutional effort to soften the climate implications of fossil fuel expansion. These claims benefit government by projecting competence and urgency while simultaneously enabling project approvals.

⁵² Evans (2023) response to question at supplementary senate estimates, <https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;db=COMMITTEES;id=committees%2Festimate%2F27434%2F0002;query=Id%3A%22committees%2Festimate%2F27434%2F0000%22>

⁵³ Hemming (2024) "An executive summary", <https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2024/february/polly-hemming/executive-summary>

⁵⁴ News.com.au (2019) "Department of Environment has no view on climate crisis, says climate change will benefit some", <https://www.news.com.au/national/department-of-environment-has-no-view-on-climate-crisis-says-climate-change-will-benefit-some/video/09b0a48f625dc9047364ba15cc179a58>

⁵⁵ Emails released under FOI (2022) "RE: for visibility - Resource Min request for info re Scarborough emissions [SEC=OFFICIAL:Sensitive]", p11, <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/71868.pdf>

Clean Energy Regulator (CER)

The Clean Energy Regulator routinely defends the integrity of offset methods, even in the face of compelling evidence to the contrary,⁵⁶ and has publicly dismissed independent researchers and whistleblowers as misinformed.⁵⁷ The CER has misrepresented experts as backing their views,⁵⁸ “intimidated” scientists who were critical of their approach,⁵⁹ and interfered in the CSIRO’s submission to the Chubb review of carbon credits to edit out criticism of carbon credits.⁶⁰

Despite being an ‘independent’ statutory body, the Clean Energy Regulator has come under increasing scrutiny for the way in which it appears to overtly defend the carbon offsets it nominally ‘regulates’ against documented concerns raised by scientists, academics, independent experts and media investigations.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Kelly (2021) “Clean Energy Regulator rejects junk carbon credit claims”, <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/breakfast/clean-energy-regulator-rejects-junk-carboncredit-claims/13631010>;

Loussikian (2022) “Carbon credits scheme criticism ‘unfounded’: Angus Taylor”, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/carbon-credits-scheme-criticism-unfounded-angus-taylor/newsstory/b8d5bb1eb2deec868a5d98d5e5d6ff85>

⁵⁷ Clean Energy Regulator (2022) “ERAC response to TAI Report: Come Clean – Carbon Capture and Storage CCS”, <https://cer.gov.au/news-and-media/news/2022/march/erac-response-to-tai-report-come-clean-carbon-capture-and-storage-ccs>;

Clean Energy Regulator (2022) “Statement: CER Response to AAP story on the blue carbon method”, <https://cer.gov.au/news-and-media/media/2022/january/statement-cer-response-to-aap-story-blue-carbon-method>

Clean Energy Regulator (2021) “Statement: CER Response to ABC story on the ACCU price”, <https://cer.gov.au/news-and-media/media/2021/december/statement-cer-response-to-abc-story-accu-price>

Clean Energy Regulator (2021) “Statement: TAI paper on Carbon Capture and Storage”, <https://cer.gov.au/news-and-media/media/2021/december/statement-tai-paper-carbon-capture-and-storage>

⁵⁸ Keane (2025) “While the government denies the science on carbon credits, the climate suffers”, <https://www.crikey.com.au/2025/03/12/carbon-credits-australia-human-induced-regeneration-accus/>

⁵⁹ Grieve & Fox Koob (2024) “Extreme risk: Carbon watchdog mismanaged conflicts, intimidated scientists”, <https://www.theage.com.au/environment/climate-change/extreme-risk-carbon-watchdog-mismanaged-conflicts-intimidated-scientists-20240910-p5k9gh.html>

⁶⁰ Grieve & Bachelard (2024) “Entirely inappropriate: Top scientist slams watchdog interference in carbon review”, <https://www.theage.com.au/environment/climate-change/entirely-inappropriate-top-scientist-slams-watchdog-interference-in-carbon-review-20240919-p5kbu2.html>

⁶¹ Kelly (2021) “Clean Energy Regulator rejects junk carbon credit claims”;

Loussikian (2022) “Carbon credits scheme criticism ‘unfounded’: Angus Taylor”;

Clean Energy Regulator (2022) “ERAC response to TAI Report: Come Clean – Carbon Capture and Storage CCS”;

Clean Energy Regulator (2022) “Statement: CER Response to AAP story on the blue carbon method”

Clean Energy Regulator (2021) “Statement: CER Response to ABC story on the ACCU price”;

Clean Energy Regulator (2021) “Statement: TAI paper on Carbon Capture and Storage”

Independent analysis in 2022 found that more than 70% of credits issued under the three most popular offset methods used by the Emissions Reduction Fund – which CER oversees – did not represent genuine emissions abatement.⁶² The CER attempted to refute the findings of this analysis before having “time to review” the studies it came from.⁶³

Further research in 2024 finding that 95% of credits issued for human-induced-restoration (HIR) projects did not comply with regulatory requirements.⁶⁴ The CER’s failure to take action on severe issues with HIR projects was labelled “bizarre and unlawful” in a 2024 *Saturday Paper* article.⁶⁵ Despite this, the CER continues to defend and promote HID projects.⁶⁶

Climate Change Authority (CCA)

The Climate Change Authority has increasingly promoted offsets and CCS as “cost-effective abatement,” aligning with industry lobbying positions and legitimising accounting fixes over genuine emissions reductions.⁶⁷

The CCA’s membership comprises several individuals with close links to the carbon credit or fossil fuel industries. Chair Matt Kean, for example, has “material personal interests” in agricultural projects generating carbon credits through his role in “green” investment firm

⁶² Macintosh & Butler (2023) “Chubb review of Australia’s carbon credit scheme falls short – and problems will continue to fester”, <https://theconversation.com/chubb-review-of-australias-carbon-credit-scheme-falls-short-and-problems-will-continue-to-fester-197401>

⁶³ Clean Energy Regulator (2022) “CER response to claims by Professor Andrew MacIntosh”, <https://cer.gov.au/news-and-media/media/2022/march/cer-response-to-claims-professor-andrew-macintosh>

⁶⁴ Macintosh et al. (2024) “Non-compliance and under-performance in Australian human-induced regeneration projects”, <https://www.publish.csiro.au/RJ/RJ24024>

⁶⁵ Macintosh, Butler & Wilkinson (2024) “The great carbon offset scam”, <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/environment/2024/03/30/the-great-carbon-offset-scam>

⁶⁶ Clean Energy Regulator (2025) “Human-induced regeneration method – managing project risk to deliver carbon abatement for Australia”, https://cer.gov.au/document_page/human-induced-regeneration-method-managing-project-risk-to-deliver-carbon-abatement-australia

⁶⁷ CCA (2023) Setting, tracking and achieving Australia’s emissions reduction targets, Commonwealth of Australia (Climate Change Authority), <https://consult.climatechangeauthority.gov.au/australias-emissions-reduction-targets>;

CCA (2022) Review of international offsets, <https://www.climatechangeauthority.gov.au/publications/2022-review-international-offsets>;

CCA (2022) Review of international offsets, <https://www.climatechangeauthority.gov.au/publications/targets-progress-advice>

Wollemi Capital, while at the same time advising the federal government on carbon farming and emissions targets.⁶⁸

An Australia Institute report in 2023 found that the CCA was failing to meet its statutory obligations under its enabling legislation due to its focus on carbon markets, offsets and sequestration methods favoured by fossil fuel industries and other heavy emitters.⁶⁹

Specifically, the CCA failed its requirements to:

- Be environmentally effective,
- Support the development of an effective global response to climate change, and
- Take account of the matters set out in Article 2 of the Paris Agreement.⁷⁰

For example, despite the CCA's obligation to take account of the Paris Agreement, the Authority neglected to emphasize in its 2022 Issues Paper that:

- Australia's current NDC is insufficient to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement;⁷¹
- Australia has no clear pathway to its NDC of 43% reduction on 2005 emissions by 2030;⁷²
- Projections for Australian emission reduction targets rely on carbon offsetting, an industry in which many of the CCA's members have a material interest, and the efficacy of which remains in doubt;⁷³ and
- Global targets cannot be met if Australian fossil fuel reserves are extracted and exported.⁷⁴

In neglecting its statutory responsibilities by omitting the severity of Australia's climate failures from its public reports, the Climate Change Authority provides cover to Australian

⁶⁸ Karp (2025) "Matt Kean has 'material interests' in carbon credit schemes", <https://www.afr.com/policy/energy-and-climate/matt-kean-has-material-interests-in-carbon-credit-schemes-20250401-p5lo42>

⁶⁹ Climate Change Authority Act 2011; Ryan, Hemming & Campbell (2023) *Little Authority: Submission to the Climate Change Authority's Issues Paper 2023*, p7, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/little-authority/>

⁷⁰ Climate Change Authority Act 2011, s12 (a) (ii, vi, viii)

⁷¹ Climate Action Tracker (2022) 'Australia', August 2, <https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/australia/>

⁷² Hemming (2023) Time is running out to reach our emissions target and our path needs changing, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/time-is-running-out-to-reach-our-emissions-target-and-our-path-needs-changing/>

⁷³ Butler et al (2023) Correcting the Record: Response to Professor Chubb's Statement on Carbon Farming, https://law.anu.edu.au/sites/all/files/correcting_the_record_-_chubb_carbon_farming_23_march_2023.pdf

⁷⁴ International Energy Agency (2021) Net Zero by 2050: A roadmap for the global energy sector, Paris, https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/deebef5d-0c34-4539-9d0c-10b13d840027/NetZeroby2050_ARoadmapfortheGlobalEnergySector_CORR.pdf

governments' misinformation on their climate policies.

CSIRO

As Australia's national science agency, the CSIRO has produced reports that highlight the technical potential of CCS or nature-based offsets, but often without sufficient transparency around risks, permanence, or industry partnerships. These caveats are buried or omitted in public communications, allowing selective use of findings to support pro-fossil narratives.

The CSIRO's "Gas Industry Social and Environmental Research Alliance" (GISERA) is funded by the gas industry and has long been criticised for its potential to compromise the CSIRO's scientific independence.⁷⁵ Its research is often presented publicly as coming from the CSIRO itself, though GISERA is an alliance between the CSIRO and the five largest unconventional gas companies operating in Australia. The CSIRO lends legitimacy to a body with gas industry executives on its research management committees and that draws a third of its funding from the gas industry.⁷⁶ GISERA research has been frequently criticised to aligning to the needs of its gas industry funders, including:

- A 2020 study claiming that fracking had minimal impact on water and soil in Queensland's Surat Basin which used a sample of just six wells out of 19,000, all of which were chosen by Origin Energy,⁷⁷
- A 2023 report into development of the Beetaloo Basin which used "the most optimistic assumptions about emissions at every stage" to underestimate the climate impacts of fracking.⁷⁸
- Fracking information sheets for Indigenous communities which independent Senator David Pocock described as "straight out of the fossil fuel industry misinformation guide" in 2022.⁷⁹ The factsheets contained no mention of GISERA.

Together, these institutions provide the scaffolding for government misinformation. By presenting selective data through official channels, public information campaigns,

⁷⁵ Grudnoff (2016) "GISERA and the threat to independent science", <https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/gisera-and-the-threat-to-independent-science/>

⁷⁶ Ogge (2018) *GISERA and conflict of interest*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/gisera-and-conflict-of-interest/>;

Hislop (2022) "CSIRO accused of failing to disclose GISERA gas industry links in fracking information sheets"

⁷⁷ Ogge (2020) *CSIR...who? A closer look at recent research on coal seam gas environmental impacts*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/csirwho-a-closer-look-at-recent-research-on-coal-seam-gas-environmental-impacts/>

⁷⁸ Hare (2023) "The Beetaloo gas field is a climate bomb. How did CSIRO modelling make it look otherwise?", <https://theconversation.com/the-beetaloo-gas-field-is-a-climate-bomb-how-did-csiro-modelling-make-it-look-otherwise-215711>

⁷⁹ Hislop (2022) "CSIRO accused of failing to disclose GISERA gas industry links in fracking information sheets", <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-10-24/csiro-accused-of-sending-misinformation/101556858>

parliamentary testimony, and ministerial briefings, they lend bureaucratic credibility to claims that distort public understanding and shield fossil fuel expansion from scrutiny.

Conflicts of interest in independent and statutory bodies

Conflicts of interest in climate governance often arise where board members, advisers, or senior officials hold financial or professional ties to carbon offset markets, environmental services, or high-emission industries. In these contexts, regulatory or policy decisions can have direct commercial consequences for the very sectors to which individuals are connected.

The risk is not limited to biased decision-making. It also extends to public communications and advice issued by these institutions, which may reflect the interests of markets or industries they are meant to regulate. This undermines the reliability of climate information presented to the public and erodes confidence in the independence of government-appointed bodies.

Key concerns include:

- **Carbon/environmental market interests:** Financial or professional ties to the offset market (including companies that generate or trade credits, and consultancies advising project developers and investors) create the risk of regulatory capture. These conflicts are most acute where governance bodies are responsible for assessing credit integrity, approving new methodologies, or overseeing compliance frameworks.
- **Fossil fuel interests:** Connections to coal, oil, and gas producers or their peak bodies create a direct conflict when governance bodies influence climate policy, licensing, or export approvals. Such ties risk embedding fossil fuel expansion within “transition” policy settings and weakening the stringency of emissions regulation.
- **Union and workforce interests:** Appointees linked to unions representing fossil fuel and heavy-industry workers may influence transition planning in ways that prioritise protecting existing jobs and facilities over accelerating structural change. While legitimate in advocating for members, these interests can tilt transition policy towards preserving incumbent industries rather than designing pathways for new employment and decarbonisation.
- **Clean energy investment interests:** Board members or advisers with financial stakes in renewable energy, clean technologies, or investment funds may benefit from steering policy or financing decisions towards projects or sectors in which they hold interests. Even where aligned with decarbonisation goals, these conflicts risk distorting transition planning by privileging certain technologies or firms over a balanced, evidence-based allocation of public resources.

Strong conflict-of-interest standards are essential to ensuring decisions are impartial and maintain the credibility of the information provided to Parliament and the public.

Where such safeguards are absent, conflicts of interest can influence not only policy outcomes but also the way evidence is communicated, making them a structural driver of climate misinformation and disinformation.

Structural Reforms to ensure Government integrity in climate communication

As this report highlights, governments are not neutral players in the information environment: they have a duty to act honestly under democratic norms, professional codes applying to public servants, and international law.

Ministers and officials alike are entrusted with public authority, and their statements are treated as authoritative by citizens, the media, markets, and international partners. They also form the basis for Australia's compliance with international agreements such as the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement. When official communications are selective, incomplete or misleading, the impact is more damaging than misinformation from private actors, because it carries the weight of government authority and directly shapes policy outcomes.

The first section of this report has shown that successive Australian governments are not merely passive actors in the climate information environment: they are both beneficiaries and sources of misinformation. This raises the obvious challenge: why would the Australian Government voluntarily dismantle a system that serves their political and economic interests?

The answer lies in accountability. Governments can be forced to act when the costs of inaction become greater than the benefits of maintaining the status quo. That pressure comes from three directions: public exposure of misleading practices, international legal obligations, and the reputational and diplomatic risks of being seen as a climate laggard. Recognising and exposing the role of Australian Governments in spreading misinformation is not simply background context; it is part of the solution. Government's benefit from public debate suggesting that misinformation is a nebulous problem caused by "shadowy lobbyists," "fringe actors," or anonymous social media accounts. That framing conveniently absolves governments of responsibility. When the public instead sees clearly that governments themselves shape, amplify, and benefit from misleading narratives. And that governments also have the legal authority and regulatory tools to curb misinformation across the board, the problem becomes less abstract and more solvable.

This kind of exposure creates accountability. It forces governments to justify their own conduct in light of their obligations under democratic norms and international law. It also makes visible the fact that the same levers governments already use in other contexts

(regulating political advertising, setting media concentration rules, imposing truth standards in consumer law) could be applied to misinformation and disinformation. In other words, the act of exposing government complicity demonstrates both the problem and the pathway to fix it.

Recent developments in international law also offer significant potential in compelling governments to act. In its recent advisory opinion on climate change, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) confirmed that states have binding obligations under international law to prevent activities within their jurisdiction that cause significant transboundary environmental harm, including climate harm.⁸⁰

The Court made clear that governments are required to regulate, supervise, and hold accountable corporations and lobby groups whose actions—whether through direct emissions or through conduct that undermines mitigation, such as promoting false or misleading climate information—obstruct effective climate action.

For Australia, these obligations may mean more than regulating the private sector. The duty of prevention applies to public agencies and ministers themselves and could include binding rules for truthfulness, transparency, and independence across government climate communications and statutory bodies.

They require active oversight of fossil fuel companies, advertising agencies, industry associations, and carbon market participants whose campaigns promote misleading narratives about the science, economics, or urgency of climate action. They also require the imposition of due diligence duties on platform operators and media companies to mitigate the amplification of false or misleading claims that delay or weaken mitigation efforts. Equally important is the need to ensure that statutory bodies such as the Clean Energy Regulator, Climate Change Authority, National Reconstruction Fund, and Net Zero Economy Authority are free from conflicts of interest that could distort the information they provide to Parliament and the public.

Failure to take reasonable steps to prevent climate misinformation *including* misleading conduct by government itself risks exposing Australia to claims that it has not met its international legal obligations.

Exposing the role of government in spreading and benefiting from misinformation is not simply an exercise in critique; it makes reform possible. Once the public recognises that governments themselves shape and amplify misleading narratives *and* that they also hold

⁸⁰ ICJ (2025) “Advisory Opinion on the Obligations of States in Respect of Climate Change”, <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/187/187-20250723-adv-01-00-en.pdf>

the levers to correct them, misinformation and disinformation stop appearing only as nebulous, uncontrollable problems. They are revealed also as governance failures with clear remedies.

This recognition matters. Australia already has the tools to address misinformation: truth standards in consumer law, prohibitions on deceptive advertising, obligations of transparency in financial markets, and safeguards against conflicts of interest in corporate governance. The real question is not whether mechanisms exist, but why these protections have been deliberately withheld from political communication and climate policy precisely where integrity is most urgently needed.

If the Australian Government were acting in good faith, it would extend these principles into the climate and information space. Doing so would not only strengthen the integrity of climate communication but would also reduce the spread of misleading claims across other domains, from health to defence to economic policy.

TACKLING THE ROOT CAUSES OF MISINFORMATION

Overarching Truth and Transparency Standards for Government

Climate misinformation and disinformation cannot be treated in isolation. The same structural weaknesses, including selective presentation of facts, undisclosed conflicts of interest, and opaque policymaking underpin misleading narratives across Australia's public life. Reforms that enforce truth standards in government advertising, improve transparency of data and modelling, and constrain conflicts of interest in statutory bodies would not only address climate misinformation but would help rebuild integrity.

Addressing climate misinformation therefore means addressing the structural enablers of misinformation more generally.

Truth standards in political and government communications

Unlike consumer advertising, political and government communications are not subject to binding truth-in-advertising requirements. This allows ministers, agencies, and political campaigns to make claims such as overstating emissions reductions or presenting gas as a "transition fuel" without consequence.

Extending truth-in-advertising rules to political and government communications would apply the same principles of accuracy and non-misleading conduct that already protect consumers in the marketplace. A legislated truth standard would prohibit selective or misleading presentation of climate data, require disclosure of caveats such as land-use accounting, and allow an independent body to order corrections during campaigns.

Both South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory have truth in political advertising laws. In South Australia these have been operating for forty years. While differences between the two exist, each make it an offence to authorise or publish electoral ads that are “materially inaccurate and misleading”.⁸¹ The South Australian Electoral Commission can enforce these through the courts, with the ability to fine parties up to \$25,000.⁸² Australia does not have truth in political advertising laws on the federal level. Passing such laws was identified as a key reform to improve Australia’s democracy in the Australia Institute’s *Democracy Agenda for the 48th Parliament*.⁸³

In late 2024, the Albanese Government introduced the Electoral Communications Bill. If the bill were legislated, it would introduce a trusted body that can request misleading political advertising be withdrawn or retracted. The bill was “seemingly withdrawn” prior to the 2025 election,⁸⁴ though Albanese commented that he’d “like to have another crack” at truth in political advertising during the 48th parliament.⁸⁵ Independent Zali Steggall introduced a similar bill in 2022 and reintroduced it earlier this year.⁸⁶

Opaque modelling and data practices by government

Government projections and impact assessments often rely on hidden assumptions, such as ongoing demand for gas or optimistic rates of carbon sequestration. When these assumptions are not published, outputs can be selectively presented to support preferred policy positions.

⁸¹ Australia Institute (2024) “Truth in political advertising laws”, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/truth-in-political-advertising-laws/>

⁸² Australia Institute (2024) “Truth in political advertising laws”

⁸³ Browne (2025) *Democracy Agenda for the 48th Parliament*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/democracy-agenda-for-the-48th-parliament/>

⁸⁴ Dhanji (2025) “Crossbenchers urge Labor to act immediately on deepfakes and misinformation before next election”, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/jan/23/crossbenchers-david-pocock-kate-chaney-deepfakes-urge-labor-to-act-misinformation-deepfakes-aec-warning>

⁸⁵ Albanese (2025) “Press Conference - Perth”, <https://anthonyalbanese.com.au/media-centre/new-article-1746141971548>

⁸⁶ Steggall (2025) “Zali Steggall MP reintroduces the Electoral Communications Bill 2025 on Truth in Political Ads”, https://www.zalisteggall.com.au/zali_steggall_mp_reintroduces_the_electoral.communications_bill_2025_on_truth_in_political_ads

Mandatory disclosure of all underlying datasets, assumptions, and consultant contracts would prevent “black box” policymaking and enable independent scrutiny. Transparency would ensure that researchers, journalists, and civil society can test government claims, model alternatives, and hold policymakers to account across all sectors not just climate.

An example of how this could work can be identified in The Australia Institute’s response to the controversial BCG report on Australia Post. The Australia Institute called for a standing order for the production of documents. The order would require the appropriate minister for each Commonwealth Government department or agency to table the final reports and/or written advice received from a consultancy.⁸⁷ Similarly, revelations that PwC seemingly buried a report into Robodebt because it was unfavourable to the government prompted The Australia Institute to expand that call for draft reports to be published.⁸⁸

Guardrails for naming conventions in government legislation

Public understanding of climate policy is shaped not only by data but by the way policies are named and framed. Titles such as the “Safeguard Mechanism” suggest stringent emission limits while in reality permitting increases. This rhetorical inflation of ambition distorts public debate and weakens accountability.

Guardrails for naming conventions would make policy language reflect policy substance. An independent reviewer could assess climate and energy policy titles before they are tabled in Parliament or promoted publicly, ensuring that names do not imply protections or constraints that do not exist. This reform strengthens clarity, prevents misrepresentation, and ensures public and parliamentary debate is grounded in the reality of what policies deliver.

Stronger conflict-of-interest rules for government bodies

Whether in health, defence, or economic regulation, the same structural principle applies: public institutions must be free of vested interests if their advice and communications are to be credible. In this way, strengthening conflict-of-interest rules addresses not only climate misinformation but one of the core drivers of misinformation across Australian public life.

Clearer eligibility rules, independent vetting of appointments, and enforceable conflict-of-interest standards are essential to rebuild public trust. Disclosure alone is insufficient. Appointees with recent or ongoing ties to regulated industries should be deemed ineligible, not simply asked to declare them.

⁸⁷ Shields, Adhikari & Browne (2023) *Neither frank nor fearless*, p23,
<https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/neither-frank-nor-fearless/> Browne (2021) *Talk isn't cheap*,
<https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/talk-isnt-cheap/>

⁸⁸ Shields, Adhikari & Browne (2023) *Neither frank nor fearless*, p23

Revolving-door influence.

Ministers, senior officials, and agency heads frequently move into roles with fossil fuel companies, carbon market actors, or consultancies soon after leaving office. This practice creates incentives while in government to make decisions favourable to prospective employers, and it weakens the credibility of public communications. Enforceable cooling-off periods, combined with a transparent register of lobbying and post-employment roles, would reduce the influence of this revolving door. The same principle applies to other sectors such as defence procurement and health regulation.

Weak protections for whistleblowers

Individuals inside government departments, statutory agencies, or private corporations are often best placed to identify misleading climate claims, manipulated data, or conflicts of interest. Yet whistleblowers face serious personal and professional risks. Strengthening whistleblower protections, including for contractors and consultants, not just direct employees, would encourage disclosure of misconduct, improve transparency, and deter the use of misinformation as a policy tool.⁸⁹

Regulating greenwashing

One of the clearest examples of systemic misinformation is corporate greenwashing. It demonstrates how misleading advertising blurs the line between marketing and fact, creating public confusion while shielding harmful practices from scrutiny. While most visible in the climate space, where fossil fuel companies promote themselves as responsible “transition partners” while expanding production, the same logic applies across industries. Tobacco, gambling, pharmaceuticals, and defence contractors have all used advertising and sponsorship to cultivate legitimacy while obscuring the harms of their products.

To address this root cause, the same integrity rules that apply to consumer product marketing could extend to corporate image advertising and sponsorship. For climate, this means prohibiting fossil fuel advertising and sponsorship across Commonwealth-owned assets (airports, broadcasters), government-funded events and institutions (major sporting codes, cultural venues, universities), and regulated broadcast channels. The principle, however, is universal: public institutions should not be used to launder corporate reputations where core business practices cause demonstrable social or environmental harm.

While the fossil fuel sector is currently the most urgent case, the broader reform principle is that corporate advertising should not be allowed to mislead citizens about the impacts of products or business models in ways that distort democratic decision-making. Greenwashing is thus not just a climate issue; it is an archetype of how misinformation

⁸⁹ Browne & Predavec (2025) *A Whistleblower Protection Authority for Australia*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/a-whistleblower-protection-authority-for-australia/>

becomes embedded in public life when commercial interests are allowed to masquerade as neutral information.

From General to Specific: Why Climate is the Test Case

This report emphasises that systemic weaknesses that enable misinformation in Australia, including the absence of truth standards, opaque modelling and data, permissive conflict-of-interest rules, revolving-door influence, and weak whistleblower protections are not confined to climate. They affect governance across health, economic management, and national security.

This makes it the most urgent and appropriate test case for reform. Demonstrating that government claims can be subject to truth standards, that data and modelling can be made transparent, that conflicts of interest can be excluded, and that misleading campaigns can be held to account would show that integrity in public information is possible even where political incentives to mislead are strongest.

Climate reform is therefore not only urgent in its own right; it is proof of concept. Success here would establish a governance model that embeds accuracy, transparency, and independence as baseline conditions.

Finally, climate is administratively suited to trial these reforms. It already has established data series, statutory bodies, and international benchmarks against which compliance, integrity and outcomes can be assessed. Separating methods from politics (including ring-fenced emissions accounting rules and mandatory disclosure of modelling inputs), enforcing conflict-of-interest exclusions for statutory appointments, and legislating an independent corrective mechanism for misleading government claims would create a credible, testable governance architecture: a model that can then be extended across health, defence, economic policy, and other domains where misinformation currently undermines public trust.

Because the vectors of distortion in climate mirror those in other portfolios, success here provides a template that can be generalised—showing that accuracy, transparency and independence are not aspirational values but baseline operating conditions for public communication, regardless of topic.

Conclusion

Australia's vulnerability to climate misinformation is not unique, but it is systemic. The same weaknesses that allow misleading narratives in health, defence, and economic policy also underpin climate misinformation.

Successive governments are not just exposed to this problem; they are central to it. They have been consistent sources and beneficiaries of misleading narratives that exaggerate progress, erase exported emissions, and promote false solutions such as offsets and CCS.

These distortions lower public expectations, create political cover for approving new fossil fuel projects, and preserve the fiscal and diplomatic benefits of continued exports. Governments also benefit from the framing that misinformation is generated only by "powerful external forces."

Exposing this complicity is therefore part of the solution: it shows that governments are not passive victims of misinformation but active participants, and that they already hold the levers to correct it.

Furthermore, the International Court of Justice has made clear that passivity is not neutral. States have binding obligations to prevent foreseeable harm, which includes regulating corporations, lobby groups, platforms, and their own agencies when conduct undermines mitigation. Failing to regulate foreseeable misinformation and disinformation therefore risks breaching those obligations.

The pathway out is structural, not rhetorical. Reform must begin with systemic safeguards that strengthen integrity across all domains of public policy, from enforceable truth standards and transparency of modelling to robust conflict-of-interest rules, protections against revolving-door influence, whistleblower protections, and measures to reduce media concentration.

Climate provides the most urgent and visible test case. Applying these principles here would establish a credible framework for separating fact from spin, exposing exported emissions, ensuring independent scrutiny of official claims, and preventing misleading framings from being passed off as leadership.

None of this is novel. Comparable mechanisms already operate in peer jurisdictions. Their existence demonstrates that reform is administratively and legally possible. What remains is a political choice. If Australia intends to meet its domestic promises and international obligations credibly, it must embed accuracy, transparency, and independence as baseline

conditions, not aspirations, across government and the wider information environment. Climate is the urgent test case, and success here would deliver integrity gains that extend across public life.