# Australia’s Coalition disputes emissions rise claims compared to Labor government



Australia’s Coalition government has challenged claims that greenhouse gas emissions would rise under its leadership compared to a returned Labor government. The debate centres on the emissions record from 2013 to 2022 under the Coalition and the recent trends during Labor’s three years in office.

Speaking on ABC’s RN Breakfast program on Monday, Ted O’Brien, the Coalition's climate change and energy spokesperson, stated: “under the former Coalition government you saw emissions fall” – highlighting a reduction from 12% to 29% below 2005 levels. O’Brien contended that emissions “have flatlined” during Labor’s term, suggesting the ALP had “failed” in its climate efforts.

However, a detailed examination of the emissions data reveals more complexity behind these claims. While it is true that emissions decreased during the Coalition’s period in government, much of this reduction was driven by changes in emissions from the land and forests sector rather than government policy, according to the Australian climate department’s greenhouse gas inventory.

Between the Coalition’s election and its departure from office, annual emissions fell by approximately 113.8 million tonnes of carbon dioxide. Of this, 100.4 million tonnes were attributed to changes in land and forest emissions alone. When the Coalition won office, the landscape was estimated to emit a net 12 million tonnes of CO₂, but by the time it left, the land and vegetation were reportedly absorbing 88.4 million tonnes more CO₂ than they emitted.

Experts note there is significant uncertainty in historic land-sector emissions data and frequent revisions, making these figures less reliable than emissions data from sectors like electricity, industry, or transport. Moreover, this shift in land-sector emissions occurred with little or no direct policy intervention from the Coalition government.

It is important to differentiate between emissions reductions resulting from direct climate policies and those due to changes in natural carbon absorption. Some argue that relying on land-sector emissions to mask ongoing or rising fossil fuel use is problematic since this sector’s accounting can obscure true progress in reducing greenhouse gases.

Aside from the land and forest sector, the Coalition government did oversee a reduction of 27.2 million tonnes in pollution from the electricity grid. This decline was primarily driven by the expansion of renewable energy projects incentivised by a national renewable energy target originally set by the previous Labor government. The Coalition’s role here was more about maintaining this target amid internal opposition—then Prime Minister Tony Abbott notably sought to abolish it but ultimately reduced the target with bipartisan support.

Conversely, emissions from other major sectors such as transport and heavy industry continued to rise during the Coalition’s tenure, as it opted not to introduce or enforce stricter emissions limiting measures in these areas. Emissions reductions towards the end of the Coalition’s term were also temporarily affected by the economic slowdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The government rejected proposals for a “green recovery” stimulus aimed at accelerating climate action, instead advocating for a “gas-fired recovery” to bolster fossil fuel use.

Since Labor returned to power, emissions have remained relatively stable, with data available for just over two years. Officials estimate a modest 1.4% decline in emissions over this period, which falls short of the rate of reduction needed to meet Australia’s climate goals. This slight decrease is partially attributed to economic reopening following pandemic restrictions.

Looking ahead, the differences in the major parties’ climate policies are significant. Labor has introduced measures designed to reduce emissions across electricity, major industry, and transport. Criticism remains that the party has not done enough, pointing to only one climate-related policy released during the current election campaign—subsidies for household battery storage—and delays in announcing more substantial policies, including a 2035 emissions reduction target.

Meanwhile, the Coalition proposes to dismantle most of Labor’s climate policies. It has not put forward its own plans for significant emissions cuts over the coming decade. Rather, the Coalition intends to slow the development of large-scale renewable energy projects and increase reliance on coal and gas-fired electricity until new nuclear power plants could be built, projected mostly after 2040 with government funding.

The Climate Change Authority has estimated that following the Coalition’s current plans could result in an additional 2 billion tonnes of emissions compared to Labor’s policies, a substantial figure when considering Australia’s annual emissions are around 440 million tonnes.

In an interview on Sunday, ABC’s David Speers questioned Nationals frontbencher Bridget McKenzie on what the Coalition would do to reduce emissions in the next decade. McKenzie responded with laughter but did not provide a direct answer.

This ongoing discourse highlights the complexities and differing approaches to Australia’s climate policy as the country faces crucial decisions about its environmental and energy future.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1014951/australia-yearly-greenhouse-gas-emissions/> - This link supports the general trends in greenhouse gas emissions in Australia, including their recent levels and changes over time. It also highlights sectors like electricity and transportation as significant contributors to emissions.
* <https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/australia/> - This URL provides context on Australia’s emissions reduction targets, specifically its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) that aims for a 43% reduction below 2005 levels by 2030. It helps understand the broader climate policy framework in Australia.
* <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/measuring-what-matters/measuring-what-matters-themes-and-indicators/sustainable/emissions-reduction> - This Australian Bureau of Statistics link offers detailed historical data on net greenhouse gas emissions, showing a decline over time and how these emissions compare to baseline years like 2005.
* <https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_departments/Parliamentary_Library/Research/Quick_Guides/2024-25/EmissionsReports> - This resource provides an overview of how emissions data is reported in Australia, which is relevant to understanding the methodologies and challenges in tracking emissions reductions.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greenhouse_gas_emissions_by_Australia> - This Wikipedia page offers historical and current insights into Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions, including its per capita emissions and cumulative contributions globally. It helps contextualize Australia’s role in global emissions.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - Although this is the source article itself and not external validation, it provides the foundational narrative about Australia’s climate policy debates and emissions trends under different governments.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/apr/29/coalition-emissions-claims-australian-election-facts> - Please view link - unable to able to access data