

Cop26: Australia accused of ‘hiding’ while opposing deal needed to limit catastrophic climate breakdown

Australia does not support deal needed to keep alive chance of limiting global heating to 1.5C



Australia has been accused of ‘hiding behind others’ at the Cop26 Glasgow climate summit while opposing a deal needed to keep global heating below 1.5C. Photograph: John W Banagan/Getty Images

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Australia has been accused of “hiding behind others” at the **Cop26** Glasgow climate summit while opposing an agreement necessary to keep alive a chance of limiting global heating to 1.5C, the threshold above which scientists warn climate breakdown would rapidly become catastrophic.

Australia is one of several nations that does not support an agreement at the Cop26 talks requesting all countries to return to the negotiating table next year with stronger commitments to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.

The issue remains a key sticking point between the more than 190 countries at the talks, which extended past their Friday night deadline and will continue into Saturday, local time, as negotiators fight over the **details of a potential deal**.

The Australian government delegation has maintained a largely low-key public presence at the talks since the emissions reduction minister, Angus Taylor, returned home with a week to go at the summit.

But several sources told Guardian Australia the Morrison government was opposed to parts of an **updated draft negotiating text** released on Friday by the British hosts of the summit that would be crucial to maintain a chance of limiting global average heating since the industrial revolution to 1.5C.

Bill Hare, the chief executive of Climate Analytics, who has been attending climate summits for 30 years, said Australia was “hiding behind others” including Brazil, Russia and Saudi Arabia, which were all trying to weaken the negotiating text.

“The overall view of Australia is it’s the worst I have seen it in my career,” he said. “It’s not exposing its position publicly but it’s clear that it doesn’t want a process next year for all countries to come back and close the emissions gap for 2030.”

The draft document requests countries revisit and strengthen their 2030 targets so by the end of next year they align with the temperature goal expressed in the landmark 2015 Paris agreement – to hold global heating to well below 2C above pre-industrial times, and to “pursue efforts” to limit it to 1.5C.

It includes the caveat that those strengthened commitments should “take into account different national circumstances” – seen by observers as a potential get-out clause that underlines the non-binding nature of commitments at UN climate talks.

But it goes further than the Paris agreement in other ways. It says countries recognise – **based on work by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate**

Change – that the impacts will be significantly worse at 2C than at 1.5C, and that limiting heating to the lower level will require “rapid, deep and sustained” cuts in emissions. That includes reducing global carbon dioxide emissions by 45% by 2030 compared with 2010 and reaching net zero by “around mid-century”.

With an assessment this week having found under existing targets the world would actually increase emissions by 13% this decade, the text suggests countries should recognise that accelerated action is needed “in this critical decade”.

The Morrison government rejects that position. It was one of only a handful of significant emitters to refuse to increase its 2030 goal. Its official target, set when Tony Abbott was prime minister six years ago, remains a 26-28% emissions cut compared with 2005 emissions levels. Many comparable countries **have pledged to cut emissions in half by 2030**.

Australia’s **plan to reach net zero by 2050**, released two days before Morrison left Australia to attend the Glasgow talks, included no new policies and relied on voluntary action from business and consumers and technology development to reach the net zero goal. Cuts in emissions would largely be pushed back until after 2030 and 2040.

Scott Morrison’s net zero modelling reveals a slow, lazy and shockingly irresponsible approach to ‘climate action’

The modelling underpinning the plan, released on Friday, aligned with 2C of heating, not 1.5C. It **fell short of explaining how net zero would be reached** and assumed a long life for fossil fuel industries, including that the gas export industry would be bigger in 2050 than today.

Australia’s opposition to wording in the draft text that requested countries to increase 2030 targets next year is consistent with the position outlined by the prime minister before he flew to Glasgow – that the government **would not lift its 2030 goal now or at next year’s federal election** despite projections suggesting the country would exceed the target.

Whether and how countries will revise their national plans for 2030 – **known as nationally determined contributions (NDCs)** – are now at the heart of the talks,

with an updated draft negotiating text set to be released by the Cop26 president, Alok Sharma, at 8am Saturday in Glasgow. The text aims to clarify and build on the Paris agreement, and is meant to be the main outcome at the summit.



Australia lobbied Unesco to remove reference to 1.5C global warming limit to protect heritage sites

Some countries have tried to argue that revising 2030 targets next year is contrary to the Paris agreement, which requires revisions only every five years, but **others have argued the Paris treaty allowed for this to be escalated.** Research by the Climate Action Tracker found current NDCs presented by countries in Glasgow **would lead to at least 2.4C of heating.**

Rob Hales, director of the **Griffith University Centre for Sustainable Enterprise**, said the Morrison government appeared to be “sitting on its hands” at Cop26 while supporting positions consistent with 2C of heating, not 1.5C. He said the country’s reputation for supporting rule-based international relations would be “severely tested” if it were to play a part in watering down an outcome in Glasgow.

Using a “fair share” approach, Hales said Australia had already released 42% of its remaining allowable fossil fuel emissions since 2013, leaving only 58% between now and 2050. “Without increasing ambition in targets and plans to

reduce fossil fuel emissions, it is almost certain that Australia will overshoot its budget,” he said.

Erwin Jackson, director of policy at the Investor Group on Climate Change and a veteran observer of climate talks, said institutional investors responsible for managing more than half the world’s assets had called on governments to avoid a catastrophic temperature rise of more than 1.5C. Australia’s position did not match that. He said its 2030 target was well below the average of its competitors, major trading partners and allies, and even further below what the science demanded.

“Business as usual on Australia’s current 2030 emissions target remains an acute financial risk to the Australian economy,” Jackson said.

Taylor’s office declined to comment on Saturday. In a statement on Thursday, the minister said Australia was “an active and constructive participant in the negotiations to ensure a positive outcome”.

Guardian Australia revealed this week the Morrison government had also **tried to block a Unesco recommendation** that countries should aim to limit heating to 1.5C to protect world heritage sites from the impacts of the climate crisis.

As **reported by the Guardian**, other sticking points at Cop26 include:

- A shortfall in climate finance to help developing countries adapt. A long-promised US\$100bn a year from public and private sources was supposed to be delivered by 2020, but is not expected until 2023. Developing countries want discussions over a much bigger pool.
- How to deal with “loss and damage” from climate impacts that cannot be avoided through preparation or adaptation. The G77 + China bloc of developing nations wants to keep alive the potential for a “loss and damage facility” through which the wealthy would pay **compensation for climate disasters**.
- How countries measure and report greenhouse gas emissions.
- Article 6 of the Paris agreement, which deals with carbon trading. Some countries including Australia want to use carbon offsetting to meet commitments. **Others fear** a flood of cheap carbon credits that do not represent genuine emissions cuts.