



WINNING BID: THE PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP THAT CAN POWER OUR SECURITY AND PROSPERITY

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The Climate Council acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live, meet and work. We wish to pay our respects to Elders, past and present, and recognise the continuous connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to land, sea and sky. We acknowledge the ongoing leadership of First Nations people here and worldwide in protecting Country, and securing a safe and liveable climate for us all.



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Foreword: Annastacia Palaszczuk

One of the biggest opportunities I had to navigate in my nearly nine years as Premier of Queensland was how to transform the state's energy future.

Initially I brought in a 50 percent renewable energy target by 2030 which helped capitalise on the jobs, industries, and exports of the future. But this was just the start. In 2021, I commissioned the Queensland Energy and Jobs Plan that's delivering secure and sustainable jobs, cheaper and cleaner power, real action on climate change as well as helping to protect the Great Barrier Reef.

The plan is intended to transform the Sunshine State into a global renewable energy superpower. Now the national government is following suit, with its Future Made in Australia plan.

In my new role as the International Ambassador for the Smart Energy Council, I have the privilege of taking Australia's renewable ambitions to the global stage. And there is no better opportunity than bringing that global stage to Australia.

The Australian Government has bid to host the United Nations climate conference (known as a Conference of the Parties, or COP) in 2026 in partnership with the Pacific. Having every nation in the world come to Australia (hopefully Brisbane!) is an opportunity to showcase our national transformation into a renewable energy superpower.

This report sets out how hosting a COP gives us an opportunity to showcase our advantages in abundant solar, wind, storage and innovation to service the big energy needs of our neighbours in Asia. It sets out how we can reaffirm Australia's place in the Pacific family and help secure a safer future for all. Hosting a COP is in our direct economic and security interest, but is also in line with the interests of the Asia-Pacific region.

The pathway to a net-zero world is not linear.

Hosting a COP gives us the greatest opportunity to shape that pathway, and capture opportunities in green hydrogen, green steel and critical minerals. Hosting a COP in partnership with the Pacific gives us the greatest opportunity to reinforce the essential global goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees.

The COP acts as the world's largest trade show on climate solutions and there is no shortage of interest from our smart energy companies to bring this event to our shores.

To make it successful though, the COP needs to focus on people: both the impacts that climate change is having on us, but also the role that people can play in providing the solutions and the many jobs and prosperity this can generate. Hosting a COP should be shaped by our first peoples, our indigenous Australians, the custodians of our land. This is not limited to adapting to climate impacts, but also ensuring there is space and a key place for First Nations-led solutions in energy and land management.

I hope the Australian Government successfully secures the bid in November this year at COP29 in Azerbaijan. Hosting a COP is not just a two-week negotiation amongst countries, it is a transformational journey that can shape and secure our place in the region and in a net-zero world.

I look forward to seeing that happen.



The Hon Anastacia Palaszczuk

International Ambassador
Smart Energy Council

Hosting a COP
is in our direct
economic and
security interests -
but also in line with
the interests of the
Asia-Pacific region.

Key findings

1 Climate change is a shared threat throughout the Pacific region – and no community is immune to the impacts. Our region’s collective wellbeing, safety and prosperity depends on how quickly we can drive down climate pollution this decade.

- › Pacific nations are on the frontlines of climate change. From Sydney to Suva, communities are being pushed to their limit by worsening extreme heat, bushfires, floods, storms and rising seas.
- › Many First Nations communities are being disproportionately impacted, such as in the Torres Strait, where rising seas are swallowing land and ocean changes are impacting traditional food sources. At the same time, First Nations peoples play a crucial role in driving climate solutions, drawing on practical knowledge honed over millennia of continuous connection to Country.
- › While the scale of exposure and capacity to cope varies, no household or community is immune from climate impacts. People are being displaced from their homes in Tuvalu and Lismore alike.
- › More than 80% of Australians report having lived through an extreme weather disaster, with the Black Summer fires of 2019-20 and east coast floods of 2022 devastating many communities.
- › More than one in three Australians worry that extreme weather may force them to permanently relocate their homes – a prospect many Pacific Island communities are also facing.

2 Australian and Pacific island diplomacy matters, and co-hosting the United Nations climate talks in 2026 is a critical opportunity to broker a new era of global climate action.

- › Pacific nations are often portrayed as small and isolated, but as large ocean states they make up more than 20 percent of the world’s territorial ocean and often punch above their diplomatic weight on the world stage.
- › As a responsible middle power, Australia has a strong history of galvanising global action to protect the environment, from supporting an international moratorium on commercial whaling in 1982 to championing a treaty to ban mining in Antarctica in 1989.
- › Working together as a regional bloc, Pacific island countries have shaped global climate action. They have earned a reputation for ‘sticking to the science’ and were instrumental in securing landmark global deals like the Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement.
- › Today, Pacific island countries are leading a diplomatic campaign for a global phase out of coal, oil and gas, calling for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty. By 2026, climate pollution will likely have peaked and fossil fuel use will be in decline with the focus on the pace of the phase out.
- › Co-hosting the United Nations climate talks in 2026 is an opportunity for Australia and Pacific island countries to form a genuine partnership to shore up global commitments and broker a new era of climate action.

3 Tackling climate change is central to safeguarding regional security – and hosting the United Nations climate talks will strengthen Australia’s standing in the region.

- › Pacific island leaders have made it clear that climate change is their primary security concern, issuing a regional security declaration in 2018 that climate change is “the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and well-being of the peoples of the Pacific”.
- › Australia’s engagement in the Pacific region tends to be driven by security interests. Policymakers in Canberra have invested heavily in maintaining a stable regional order with Australia being the region’s major aid donor.
- › The dynamics of the Pacific region have recently changed as China’s influence has grown. Australian Defence officials are increasingly concerned about China using infrastructure loans as leverage to secure a naval base or station missiles in the Pacific.
- › Hosting the United Nations climate talks will strengthen Australia’s place as the security partner of choice for Pacific island countries by demonstrating that it is serious about tackling the region’s greatest security threat.

4 Hosting the United Nations climate talks is an opportunity to recast Australia’s trading relationships in Asia and secure our economic future as a clean energy powerhouse.

- › The worldwide shift to clean energy has fundamentally reshaped trading prospects for Australia, which remains a major exporter of fossil fuels.
- › Key markets such as Japan, China and South Korea – which together account for more than two-thirds of Australia’s coal and gas exports – are rapidly changing their energy mix. Japan and South Korea plan to double their clean energy generation by 2030, and China commissioned as much solar in 2023 as the whole world did in 2022.
- › As demand for fossil fuel exports falls, our trading partners will continue to need Australian resources – including critical minerals, green metals and green hydrogen – as they shift to clean energy economies and look to shore up new and diversified supply chains. Today, an over-concentration of clean energy supply chains in China presents a security vulnerability for countries in our region. More than 80% of solar panel production is concentrated in China and this is expected to reach over 95% in 2025.
- › Hosting the United Nations climate summit is a key opportunity to signal Australia’s shift from being a fossil fuel heavyweight to becoming a clean energy powerhouse on the world stage, and showcase our potential as a clean energy supplier for the Asia-Pacific region.

5 A United Nations climate summit would be the largest diplomatic event ever held in Australia, delivering a de facto 'world trade show' and large financial windfall to the host city.

- › The 2026 United Nations climate talks (COP31) would be the largest and one of the most significant diplomatic events ever hosted in Australia, with 30,000 people expected to attend from nearly 200 countries for two weeks.
- › This would bring a significant economic boost of between \$100-\$210 million to the host city, equivalent to hosting up to four AFL Grand Finals.
- › The UK Government's assessment of the value of hosting the United Nations climate summit in Glasgow in 2021 found the net economic benefit was double that spent – around \$1 billion.
- › The de facto 'world trade show' that happens alongside the official climate talks would bring together major players in clean energy industries, providing a platform to attract global investment in local clean energy companies and projects.
- › A survey of the Smart Energy Council's 1,400 business members found that 93% of respondents were interested in exploring the 'world trade show' component of the event.
- › A number of Australian cities – including Brisbane, Adelaide and Sydney – are vying for the chance to host the climate talks, with bipartisan support at the state and city level.

6 Australia's bid to host the 2026 climate summit has strong support in the international community and at home – and if successful, presents six key opportunities for Australian and Pacific-led solutions.

- › Australia is part of the 'Western Europe and Other Group' that is scheduled to host the climate talks in 2026. Our bid has won public support from several members of the group including the US, UK, France, Germany, New Zealand and Canada.
- › 2025's host Brazil is featuring Indigenous culture and leadership by holding the event in the heart of the Amazon and aiming to increase Indigenous peoples' attendance tenfold. Australia can keep raising the bar by centering First Nations-led solutions on affordable energy, community-owned microgrids, programs that enable employment on Country and traditional land management to reduce fire risks and protect and improve biodiversity.
- › Pacific leaders have welcomed Australia's joint bid and the partnership is already delivering benefits, including Australian and Pacific academics joining forces to develop a shared research agenda.
- › Australia's bid also has widespread support at home: a recent Lowy Institute Poll found 70% of Australians support hosting the climate talks with Pacific island countries.
- › Business groups are enthusiastic too: two thirds of The Carbon Markets Institute's members back the bid, and major banks like ANZ, Commonwealth Bank and HSBC are working to unlock private sector investment in the lead up to the event.
- › If the bid is successful, Australia could use its agenda-setting role to advance international progress in six key sectors: green shipping corridors, green hydrogen, green iron and steel, forests and agricultural trade, health and critical minerals.



Figure 1: Australian Climate Change and Energy Minister Chris Bowen at COP28 in Dubai, 2023. In one of his many public engagements in Dubai, the Minister told his counterparts: “If we are to keep 1.5°C alive, fossil fuels have no ongoing role to play in our energy systems – and I speak as the climate and energy minister of one of the world’s largest fossil fuel exporters”.

1. Introduction

When scientific consensus on global warming emerged in the late 1980s, Australia was quick on the uptake.

In 1989, Prime Minister Bob Hawke declared that “Australia’s concern for the environment doesn’t end at our shores” and that Australia “will be taking the lead in developing international conventions on greenhouse gas emissions.”

Three years later, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was born. And just like Bob Hawke promised, Australia was one of the first nations to sign up and ratify the treaty.

However, that initial burst of Aussie enthusiasm and leadership didn’t last long.

In almost three decades of Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings since then – where members of the UNFCCC discuss progress on cutting climate pollution and negotiate new commitments – Australia has played a modest role at best. At worst, the Australian Government has been roundly criticised for its “dangerous addiction to coal”, with some of the most vocal detractors coming from within our own Pacific region.

Now, change is on the horizon.



Figure 2: Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese shakes hands with the Prime Minister of Vanuatu Charlot Salwai. A true partnership for COP31 must leverage the unique strengths that both Australia and Pacific island countries bring to the table.

“Australia is under new management”, declared Climate Change and Energy Minister Chris Bowen, as he announced Australia’s bid to host the United Nations climate summit in 2026, in partnership with Pacific island countries. It’s the first time that Australia has put its hand up to host the event and it’s a powerful international gesture of good will.

But hosting the United Nations climate talks isn’t just about symbolic gestures. It’s a major opportunity to safeguard our region’s security and ensure Australia’s economic future, too.

Pacific leaders have long been clear that climate change is their primary security concern – and hosting the climate summit would strengthen Australia’s standing in the region by demonstrating that it is serious about tackling the number one security threat.

As global demand for fossil fuel exports falls, hosting the UN climate talks is also a critical opportunity to recast Australia’s trading relationships in Asia and secure our economic future as a clean energy powerhouse, powered by the *Future Made in Australia* package.

The global climate summit would also bring major perks to the host city. As the largest diplomatic event ever held in Australia, the summit would bring in hundreds of millions of dollars from visitors as well as act as a de facto ‘world trade show’ on climate solutions.

Already, a number of Australian cities, including Brisbane, Adelaide and Sydney, are vying for the chance to host the climate talks, with bipartisan support at the state and city level.

In short, this could be a truly transformative moment. It can bring together communities across the country and the region to showcase Australia and the Pacific’s renewed efforts to combat climate change, and broker a new era of global climate action.

Australia will find out in November if its bid has been successful. In the meantime, it is worth exploring what a genuine partnership with the Pacific would look like and what benefits would come from taking on this opportunity.

Hosting the United Nations climate summit is a major opportunity to safeguard our region’s security and ensure Australia’s economic future as a clean energy powerhouse.

2. Why the United Nations climate talks matter

The 2026 United Nations climate summit (known as COP31) would be the largest diplomatic event ever held in Australia – and one of the most significant. Hosting the UN climate talks will enable Australia to play a leadership role tackling the global climate crisis – the unprecedented challenge of our times.

Hosting the conference is also an opportunity to establish a firm base for a clean energy future made in Australia, reset trading relations with countries in Asia and reaffirm our place as a security partner of choice in the Pacific. It is also a chance to bolster global cooperation in challenging times.

Australian diplomacy matters. We have history as a responsible middle power, galvanising action to protect the environment. In 1982, Australia supported a global moratorium on commercial whaling. In 1989, former Prime Minister Bob Hawke championed a treaty to ban mining in Antarctica (Stephens 2016).

With similar ambition today, and working with Pacific island countries as a regional diplomatic bloc, Australia can shore up global commitment to the Paris Agreement and broker a new era of climate action.

This is our moment to secure Australia's future as a clean energy economy, reaffirm our place in the Pacific family and broker a new era of global climate action.

BOX 1: INTRODUCING THE UNITED NATIONS CLIMATE TALKS

Tackling the climate crisis requires countries working together to cut greenhouse gas emissions and shift away from fossil fuels. When a scientific consensus on global warming emerged in the late 1980s, countries negotiated a United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which set out a shared goal of limiting dangerous interference in the Earth's climate system. Since 1995, a Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UNFCCC has been held each year (apart from 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic). During these annual talks, diplomats from around the world discuss progress against the overall UNFCCC goal of limiting greenhouse gas emissions and negotiate new measures to tackle the problem. The most important measure is the Paris Agreement, which was agreed at COP21 in 2015.

The Paris Agreement is now the central mechanism for countries to collaborate to avoid cataclysmic changes to our planet's climate system. Under the Paris Agreement, countries have agreed to hold warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and to pursue efforts to limit warming to 1.5°C (see Box 2) (UNFCCC 2015). To meet this temperature goal, countries are required to set national targets to cut emissions, and to

strengthen those targets every five years. The next round of targets (for emissions reductions by 2035) are due in early 2025 (UNFCCC 2024a). Countries also make commitments on how they will adapt to the impacts of climate change, and how they will support each other with achieving their commitments.

Formal discussions at the annual COP last about two weeks and are attended by government representatives from almost every nation and a host of non-government 'observer' organisations, including civil society organisations, business and industry bodies, financial institutions, unions, subnational authorities and local communities. The number of attendees has varied in recent years depending on the attendance of national leaders and the ambition of host countries. Around 40,000 people attended COP26 in Glasgow and a record 90,000 attended last year's COP28 in Dubai. A COP held in Australia and the Pacific would likely be closer to 20,000-30,000 people. Being focussed on the implementation of existing commitments, rather than on securing new commitments, COP31 would not require the same presence from world leaders as landmark COPs such as COP21 in Paris and COP26 in Glasgow.

AUSTRALIA'S BID TO HOST THE 2026 UNITED NATIONS CLIMATE SUMMIT HAS STRONG INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

The annual UN climate talks (COPs) are hosted by a different country each year, with the host country rotated among the five regional groupings of the United Nations: Africa; Asia-Pacific; Eastern Europe; Latin America and the Caribbean; and the Western Europe and Other Group. Within their respective groupings, countries bid to host future COPs, and if the bid is approved, that country assumes the COP Presidency for an entire year. Australia is part of the Western Europe and Other Group which is scheduled to host COP31 in 2026 and will need support from this grouping to host the COP.

Pacific island countries are part of the Asia-Pacific regional group. However, there is precedent for countries to collaborate between the UN groupings. In 2017, when Fiji was President of COP23, Germany acted as a co-host and logistical partner to Fiji, with the COP held at the UNFCCC Secretariat in Bonn. The timing – with Fiji securing the role of host just a year out from COP23 – and the insufficient number of hotel beds in Fiji, meant that the COP could not be physically held there. However, Fiji was the location for the important preparatory meeting known as the Pre-COP. In 2021, the United Kingdom and Italy were both vying to host COP26 and agreed the UK would physically host the meeting and undertake the COP Presidency 'in partnership' with Italy.

While these partnerships offer useful precedents, it is important to note that Australia is proposing a more substantive partnership for COP31. While Germany provided the necessary accommodation, transportation, venues and other physical requirements to host COP23, its role was logistical rather than political, with Fiji remaining President and responsible for the substantive aspects of the COP. That is, the role of setting a vision and priorities, bringing Parties together and steering the negotiations. Similarly, while Italy played host to the Pre-COP meeting ahead of COP26, and Spain's support was critical to enabling COP25 to proceed, in neither case were these countries equal partners to the President. The Pacific will not have the capacity to support COP31 in a logistical sense, nor can its role be purely ceremonial or symbolic. Rather, a partnership between Australia and Pacific island countries will need to draw upon the Pacific's long history of climate leadership and reflect longstanding priorities (see more in Section 3). New Zealand will also be an important player – as part of the Pacific islands community – and ought to have some input to the priorities and approach of an Australia-Pacific COP Presidency.

Virtually all of our Western allies – including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, France and Germany – support Australia's bid to host the United Nations climate talks in partnership with Pacific island countries.



Figure 3: Australia has already won support from many of the countries it will need to successfully secure the COP31 Presidency.

Australia has already won support from a number of countries in the Western Europe and Other Group to host COP31 in partnership with the Pacific. Countries that have publicly expressed support include the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, New Zealand, Canada and members of the Umbrella Group.¹

Switzerland, which was originally interested in hosting COP31, withdrew in light of an Australian bid in partnership with the Pacific “because of the strong impact of climate change on these countries, their bid would be more likely to be selected. In addition, Australia has never hosted a UN Climate Conference, unlike Switzerland” (SWI 2022).

The only other country that is still bidding to host in 2026 is Turkiye, which does not have any public support from other nations in the Western Europe and Other Group. Turkiye also bid to host COP26 in 2021, but bowed out to allow the UK to host.

Australia’s Climate Change and Energy Minister Chris Bowen says Australia is “bidding very, very strongly” to host COP31 and is confident – based on support already received – that Australia and the Pacific will win the bid (Bowen 2024). It is expected that the host of COP31 will be announced at COP29, which will be held in Baku, Azerbaijan, in November 2024.

Once Australia has successfully negotiated its COP bid through the Western Europe and Other Group and agreed on a ‘partnership’ structure with Pacific island countries, then it can put a formal proposal to the UNFCCC. To finalise the process for hosting, a formal expression of interest must include an outline of the logistical, technical and financial elements of hosting a COP.

The UNFCCC secretariat would run a fact-finding mission to confirm arrangements 18 to 24 months before the planned COP. Australia would need to sign a Host Country Agreement five to nine months ahead of COP, setting out the respective responsibilities of each party, including finance, security, participation and staffing (UNFCCC 2023a).

¹ During international climate negotiations, countries (or ‘Parties’) operate in groups or negotiating blocs. These include the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), the Arab Group, the African Group of Negotiators, and several others. Australia is part of the Umbrella Group – a somewhat disparate group of Parties that formed after the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol. Today it is made up of Australia, Canada, Iceland, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Kazakhstan, Norway, Ukraine, and the United States. Australia is the chair.



THE CLIMATE CONFERENCE COUNTDOWN

THE BASIC TIMELINE FOR EACH COP EVENT



Even while the bidding process is still underway, preparations are being made to host COP31 in Australia. In its 2024 budget, the Federal Government allocated \$76.2 million for engagement in international climate diplomacy, including for the COP31 bid and initial planning in the event of a successful bid (The Treasury, Australian Government 2024). In June 2024, the Australian Public Service advertised a Talent Register for COP31, calling for expressions of interest for a range of positions associated with hosting the UN climate talks, ranging from policy experts and event managers to security guards and drivers. This suggests the practical planning for hosting the event is already in progress.

AUSTRALIA'S BID HAS WIDESPREAD SUPPORT AT HOME

Australia's bid to host COP31 in partnership with Pacific island countries has widespread support at home. A recent Lowy Institute Poll shows 70% of Australians support hosting the 2026 COP with Pacific island countries (Lowy Institute 2024). There is bipartisan support at the state and local government level, with political leaders from both Labor and the Coalition putting up their hand to host the UN climate talks in their city (see Section 6).

Australian business groups are also enthusiastic and are working with the Federal Government to win the COP31 bid. At the announcement of Australia's COP bid, Business Council of Australia CEO Jennifer Westacott stated that it is "an opportunity to put ourselves at the frontier of new industries and supply chains that will deliver new opportunities for Australians" (BCA 2022). The Carbon Markets Institute polled its membership of Australian companies and found almost two thirds of respondents (65%) support the bid and wanted to see Australia adopt more robust climate policies to support the credibility of its climate diplomacy (CMI 2023).

A resounding majority (70%) of Australians support Australia hosting the United Nations climate talks in partnership with Pacific island countries.



Figure 4: Inaugural meeting of the COP31 Collaborative Committee was held at Parliament House in May 2023 – attended by a wide range of civil society organisations including WWF, Climateworks Centre, Australian Council for International Development, the Climate Council and the Smart Energy Council. The COP31 Collaboration Committee aims to put community at the centre of COP31 and supports cross-sector engagement to realise an Australia-Pacific co-hosted COP31 that delivers for people, planet, peace and prosperity.

In July, the Australian Sustainable Finance Initiative launched a COP31 workstream supported by members ANZ, Commonwealth Bank, CBus, HSBC, IFM Investors and Moodys (ASFI 2024). The organisation will develop initiatives to unlock private sector finance and investment into net zero aligned activities for COP31, in collaboration with government, financial institutions and other partners.

Civil society groups have also mobilised to support the Australia-Pacific bid to host the UN climate talks. In mid-2023, a COP31 Collaborative Committee was established with a range of civil society, business and community groups and centring First Nations and Pacific voices within that

(Community Council of Australia 2023). A COP31 'Base Camp' event was held in Sydney in August 2023, which saw hundreds of stakeholders from business and civil society discuss the potential for COP31 to transform climate ambition in Australia, and consider Australian and Pacific priorities for the road to COP31 (ImpactX et al. 2023).

Australian and Pacific academics are also organising to support the COP31 bid and develop a shared research agenda. A COP31 Universities Alliance was established in mid-2024 to "coordinate the efforts and contribution of the Australia-Pacific higher education and research sector towards COP31" (University of Melbourne 2024).

WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE CLIMATE CONFERENCE: NEGOTIATIONS (THE BLUE ZONE)

The COP is best known for the two weeks of formal climate negotiations between countries. The negotiations take place in a designated area in the host city called the 'Blue Zone', where access is limited to registered participants and policed by UN guards. This is also the space for additional work among Parties aimed at strengthening international cooperation. For example, it is where processes that ensure transparency and accountability of Parties' commitments, such as the Global Stocktake,² take place. Following the successful negotiation of the Paris Agreement in 2015, which provides the framework for collective international action, Blue Zone activities are today increasingly focused on the implementation of the Paris Agreement and holding Parties accountable for their obligations. Countries and international organisations such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change can also host pavilions in the Blue Zone to showcase their climate efforts and collaborations.

The host country is traditionally appointed COP President and oversees the many different streams of negotiations in the Blue Zone. The consensus decision-making amongst almost 200 countries results in a high-stakes finale, where the different strands of the negotiations are brought together and usually agreed upon as a package. This part of the process often goes overtime, sometimes by as much as 48 hours. Where the COP President has worked tirelessly behind the scenes in the preceding weeks (and years) to secure unity of political purpose, a package can come together – much like at COP21 resulting in the Paris Agreement.

The next major milestone in the UNFCCC negotiations is in 2025 at COP30 in Brazil. That meeting will focus on new climate commitments (known as Nationally Determined Contributions or NDCs) for 2035. The aim will be to generate sufficient ambition to curb global warming to no more than 1.5°C (see Box 2). For less wealthy countries, this will need to be supported by new financial commitments from wealthy, developed countries.

The focus of COP31 in 2026 will be to ensure there is sufficient implementation of these commitments – in terms of both emissions reductions and finance. While some COPs (such as COP21 in Paris) have involved major political decisions, been attended by over one hundred world leaders, and marked key inflection points in the world's response to the climate crisis – COP31 could be characterised instead as an 'implementation COP' that is focused on ensuring existing decisions and commitments are properly implemented. These COPs can have just as much impact on progress as the big milestone COPs. However, it can be harder to muster up the same sense of shared global purpose, and it requires a capable COP Presidency and strong diplomatic strategy to deliver the required outcomes. It is why the bid for COP31 should be agreed in November this year, to allow the Australian Government in partnership with Pacific island governments sufficient time and effort to deliver a successful negotiated outcome.

2 The Global Stocktake is a mechanism under the Paris Agreement for governments and other stakeholders to see how they're progressing collectively towards the Agreement's goals. Undertaken every five years, the Global Stocktake looks both at efforts to reduce climate pollution and efforts to adapt to the impacts of climate change, as well as support provided from developed to developing countries. The process is intended to then inform the next round of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the Paris Agreement.

WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE CLIMATE CONFERENCE: THE ACTION AGENDA (THE GREEN ZONE)

Alongside the UN-sanctioned 'Blue Zone' is the more accessible 'Green Zone'. The Green Zone plays a very important functional role alongside the formal negotiations, providing a space for many different actors including industry and civil society to engage with each other, build networks and partnerships, share lessons, and focus on accelerating the implementation of climate solutions. It is a vibrant space, including a large industry exhibition, presentations and workshops on a variety of topics from climate science to community-led adaptation, live performances and food. The Green Zone is the centre of the 'Action Agenda' – the collective action from the private sector, local governments, unions, investors, NGOs and individuals. This process results in new commitments, alliances, initiatives and advances across a broad range of issues. The Green Zone and Action Agenda have become an increasingly important and influential part of the COP, particularly at 'implementation COPs'.

The Action Agenda appears to be a key attraction of Australia hosting COP31. Australia's Climate Change and Energy Minister Chris Bowen maintains that COP31 is "an opportunity if we win the bid to show Australia's capacity to help the world as a renewable energy powerhouse" (Bowen 2022).

This vision is shared by the local renewable energy industry. A survey of the Smart Energy Council's 1,400 business members found resounding support for Australia's bid

to host COP31. Of those that responded, 93% were interested in exploring the trade show and expo component of the COP and over 60% were interested in Australia developing and launching new initiatives to fast-track climate action.

As one Smart Energy Council member explained: "Being the host of such a high-profile event will position Australia as a leader in the renewable energy sector, showcasing our commitment to sustainability and innovation. Plus, the heightened profile of the event can attract top talent to the industry, helping us build a skilled workforce committed to the energy transition."

Journalist and COP veteran Hans van Leeuwen also remarked that the UN climate talks "shape a \$10 trillion-a-year challenge, and for corporate chiefs COP has become the new Davos" (Van Leeuwen 2022a). The Action Agenda provides a space for a growing spectrum of actors beyond nation states to enrol in climate action.

The UK Presidency of the Glasgow COP used their leadership to shape an Action Agenda around four themes – cash, cars, coal and trees. They then worked with a wide range of industry partners and stakeholders to launch major global initiatives aligned to these themes: global financing for climate action, fast-tracking electric vehicle uptake, phasing out coal power and halting deforestation. The opportunity stands for Australia and the Pacific to shape an equally effective Action Agenda (see Sections 3 and 4).

A survey of Smart Energy Council's business members reveals thumping support for Australia's bid, with local industry keen to embrace the economic opportunities it can bring.



Figure 5: Members of the 2022 Climate Champions Youth Fellowship. (l-r Natalie Mangondo, Baliqees Salaudeen-Ibrahim, Maria Alejandra Aguilar. The Climate Champions play an important role in driving the COP's 'action agenda'.

APPOINTING AUSTRALIA'S CLIMATE CHAMPIONS

At COP21 in Paris, countries decided to appoint two individuals every year as UN High Level Climate Champions. These individuals are selected by the current and the incoming COP Presidents, with the mandate to enhance ambition, strengthen the engagement of non-State actors, and help deliver the goals of the Paris Agreement. Their role includes connecting the work of governments with the many voluntary and collaborative actions taken by cities, regions, businesses and investors (UNFCCC 2024b).

As incoming President, the Australian Government would have an opportunity to appoint its own Champion in late 2025.

While most Champions come with private sector backgrounds, they can be selected from any part of society. Australia could also look to appoint multiple Champions around specific outcomes or sectors. The United Arab Emirates President of COP28 expanded the role to include a Youth Champion, for example. Australia could also appoint a First

Nations Champion – one of many ways it can make elevating First Nations voices a defining feature of COP31 (See Section 5).

As noted above, a meaningful partnership between Australia and Pacific will require Australia to approach the Pacific as an equal partner, with a substantive say over the vision and delivery of the COP. The appointment of a Champion or Champions would therefore also need to be negotiated with the Pacific, which may have their own 'Champions' for different issues that work across the region.

The Australian Government is currently undertaking six sectoral plans in: electricity and energy; transport; industry; agriculture and land; resources; and the built environment (DCCEEW 2024a). These sectors are both of global and local interest when it comes to decarbonisation and one idea would be to appoint a representative from each sector to support the Champions.

REINFORCING GLOBAL COMMITMENT TO THE PARIS CLIMATE AGREEMENT

Hosting the UN climate talks will come with international expectations. As President of COP31, Australia will be expected to maintain global momentum toward climate action and to reinforce global commitment to the 2015 Paris Agreement.

The COP31 climate summit falls in the middle of a make-or-break decade for the Earth's climate system (See Box 3). Actions this decade will define human history for the next millennia. The science is clear: to meet the Paris Agreement goal of limiting warming to 1.5°C above the long-term average, global emissions must be roughly halved by 2030. The task is monumental, but possible. To avoid the worst impacts of global warming, countries will need to accelerate the shift away from fossil fuels and the roll out of clean energy.

While COP31 will be held in late 2026, Australia will be expected to take up the mantle for ushering in more ambitious climate action much sooner than that.

In 2024, the Presidencies of COP28 (United Arab Emirates, UAE), COP29 (Azerbaijan) and COP30 (Brazil) are working together as a 'troika' of COP Presidents to ensure a multi-year agenda for global climate action. These COP Presidencies have set out a vision for "Mission 1.5" – a shared plan to drive more ambitious national climate targets and keep 1.5°C within reach. The next round of national climate targets under the Paris Agreement are due in early 2025. However, the current COP Presidents' troika (UAE, Azerbaijan and Brazil) want early movers to bring ambitious national targets to the United Nations General Assembly in September 2024 (COP Troika 2024).



Figure 6: In 2015 the world reached the Paris Agreement, and agreed to pursue efforts to limit warming to 1.5°C.

If Australia's bid to host COP31 in partnership with the Pacific is announced at COP29 this year, expectations for Australia's climate action will grow immediately. Australia will be expected to set an ambitious national 2035 target that is aligned with the 1.5°C temperature goal. As a very large fossil fuel producer and exporter, Australia will also need to demonstrate it is serious about replacing fossil fuel exports with clean exports and supporting other countries on their decarbonisation journey.³

Between 2024 and 2026, Australia will be expected to work with the next troika of COP Presidencies – especially Brazil, as host of COP30 in 2025 and current host of the G20 – to bolster global ambition in this crucial decade. There are signs that this collaboration is already underway: Australia's Ambassador for Climate Change Kristin Tilley joined Brazil's Ambassador for Climate Change Luiz Luiz Alberto Figueiredo Machado at the iX Summit in Sydney in April 2024, to set out priorities for COP30 and COP31. Ambassador Tilley explained that the troika model was "a positive way to hand on the baton from past, to current, to future COP Presidencies".

BOX 2: LIMITING GLOBAL WARMING: HOW ARE WE TRACKING?

Under the Paris Agreement, countries agreed to hold warming to well below 2°C and to pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5°C, recognising that limiting warming to 1.5°C would "significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change" (UNFCCC 2015).

The world has recently experienced many days and months above 1.5°C of global warming (see Box 3). However, this does not equate to exceeding the 1.5°C temperature goal as defined by the Paris Agreement and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), as the goal is based on temperatures averaged over 20 or 30 years.*

Based on a 30-year average, we have already reached 1.28°C of warming. If current trends continue, we would likely reach 1.5°C of warming in the early 2030s (Copernicus 2024e). It is still

technically possible to limit warming to 1.5°C by the end of the century, however this will now almost certainly involve a period of temporary 'overshoot'. In other words, seeing temperatures exceed 1.5°C for a period, before eventually being brought back down. Achieving this outcome will require not only very deep cuts to global emissions this decade, but also removing large quantities of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere over the coming decades.

Importantly, there is no 'safe' level of warming, and every fraction of a degree of avoided warming matters. We must strive to hold warming to as close to 1.5°C as possible.

*30 years is the standard reference period used by the World Meteorological Organisation. However, the most recent IPCC assessment used a reference period of 20 years.

3 Under the UNFCCC rules, countries are only responsible for "territorial emissions" – that is, the greenhouse gas emissions produced within their borders. However, much like the pressure brought to bear on other COP hosts with major fossil fuel exports (Azerbaijan in 2024, the UAE in 2023, Egypt in 2022, the UK in 2021, Poland in 2017, 2013 and 2008, Qatar in 2012, South Africa in 2011), Australia would undoubtedly face increased pressure over its fossil fuel production and exports.

BOX 3: THE 'MAKE-OR-BREAK' DECADE FOR ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

The future safety, prosperity and wellbeing of communities in Australia, the Pacific and worldwide depends on our collective success in driving down climate pollution this decade by accelerating the shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy.

COP31 will fall at the midpoint of this make-or-break decade in the world's response to climate change. Taking on the role of COP President at this time would place Australia and the Pacific in a powerful position to help catalyse the urgent progress that the whole world needs.

By 2026, global emissions will likely have peaked and fossil fuel use will be in decline (Fyson et al. 2024). However, the gap between the world's emissions trajectory and what is required to avoid truly catastrophic levels of warming will still be immense. The challenge will be to build

rapidly on progress to date and ensure a virtuous cycle of progressively stronger action.

Pacific island countries were instrumental in securing a global commitment under the Paris Agreement to pursue efforts to limit global warming to 1.5°C (Morgan et al. 2024). In the years since, the latest science has only further reinforced the importance of the 1.5°C goal, and that every fraction of a degree of avoided warming matters.

Today, with warming of around 1.28°C⁴ above pre-industrial levels, we have already entered very dangerous territory. We are seeing critical ecosystems like our Great Barrier Reef and tropical forests suffer immense damage (Climate Council 2023a). We are seeing many communities pushed to their limit by extreme heat, fire, storms and floods.

Figure 7: Kalisi holds her son Tuvosa, 3, in the remnants of her house in Ra province, Fiji, after category 5 Tropical Cyclone Winston – the strongest tropical cyclone recorded in the Southern Hemisphere – struck in February 2016. A warming ocean provides more energy for tropical cyclones.



4 Based on the 30-year average (Copernicus 2024e).

 **BOX 3: CONTINUED**

Most worryingly, we appear perilously close to crossing multiple tipping points in the climate system – thresholds which if crossed, may lead to abrupt and irreversible impacts that imperil all our futures (Armstrong McKay et al. 2022).⁵

Crossing one or two tipping points could trigger further warming and cause other tipping points to be crossed. For example, the thawing of Arctic permafrost would result in additional release of greenhouse gases, amplifying warming. This might then lead to a collapse of ocean currents that distribute heat, carbon, oxygen and nutrients around the planet, with further knock-on effects. Once such a cascade is set in motion, the Earth would keep on warming until it reaches a new equilibrium, or stable state. This would be one much hotter than the climate of the past 12,000 years or so – the stable period we call the Holocene (Steffen et al. 2018). Our modern interconnected human societies and large global population developed during the Holocene and, for all we know, remain dependent on its stable conditions for their survival.

The last 18 months have seen land and ocean temperature records shattered. 2023 became not only the hottest year on record, but broke the previous record by a staggering margin (Copernicus 2024a). 2024 is likely to be even hotter. By the end of January, the world recorded the first 12-month period over which the global average temperature exceeded 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels (see Box 2) (Copernicus 2024b). June 2024 became the 13th consecutive month to set a new global average temperature record (Copernicus 2024c). Sunday 21 July 2024 set a new record for the warmest day on record, only for the record to be broken again the very next day (Copernicus 2024d). Meanwhile, ocean

surface temperatures have been similarly off the charts, with every day between March 2023 and June 2024 setting a new global average sea surface temperature record for that day of the year.⁶ All this has been accompanied by an alarming uptick in extreme weather events around the world, from deadly heatwaves and fire seasons to extreme downpours and flooding.

The latest science, including our understanding of tipping points in the climate system, combined with an extraordinary run of broken temperature records and climate-fuelled disasters, have highlighted the urgency of our climate crisis and why we must limit additional warming as much as possible. The world must aim to roughly halve climate pollution by 2030. Australia, as a wealthy, high-polluting country with some of the world's best renewable energy potential, should aim to cut climate pollution to 75% below 2005 levels by 2030 and reach net zero by 2035 (Climate Council 2023a).

The age of climate consequences is upon us, and we will need to work far harder to adapt to the impacts that – owing to past inaction – can no longer be avoided. However, without far deeper cuts to climate pollution this decade, we will be setting ourselves up for a future to which it is impossible to adapt.

The 2026 United Nations climate summit will fall in the middle of the make-or-break decade for global climate action – placing Australia and the Pacific in a powerful position to help catalyse urgent progress to secure a safer future.

⁵ It is possible we have already crossed a tipping point for the Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets and for tropical coral reefs. At warming of between 1.5°C and well below 2°C – that is, within the Paris Agreement temperature goal – these and some other tipping points, including widespread and abrupt thawing of permafrost, become not merely possible but likely (Armstrong McKay et al. 2022).

⁶ Based on data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), accessed through www.climatereanalyzer.org – a project of the Climate Change Institute at the University of Maine.

3. Forging a genuine partnership with the Blue Pacific

Hosting the UN climate talks with Pacific island countries could help Australia demonstrate that it is serious about tackling the region's number one threat: climate change. In doing so, it can reaffirm Australia's standing in the region and cement our place as the security partner of choice for Pacific island countries.

Australia's Minister for Climate Change and Energy Chris Bowen has told his Pacific counterparts he wants the UN climate summit to be "truly and genuinely a Pacific COP" (Bowen 2023a). He told journalists in Fiji: "I want people to leave COP31, if Australia hosts it, saying, 'wow, that really was a Pacific COP'" (Bowen 2023a). Pacific leaders have welcomed Australia's bid to host the UN climate talks and have said they will advocate for the joint bid together (PIF 2022; PIF 2023a). However, it is also clear that Pacific island countries expect Australia to set an ambitious agenda for the UN climate talks. Accelerating the shift toward clean energy, and away from fossil fuels, is crucial for the survival of Pacific nations.

Figure 8: Penny Wong visited the Pacific Islands Forum in her first week as Foreign Minister, announcing Australia would stand "shoulder to shoulder with our Pacific family" to address the climate crisis.



SECURING AUSTRALIA'S PLACE AS THE SECURITY PARTNER OF CHOICE IN THE PACIFIC

Working together on climate change is key to Australia's regional strategy in the Pacific islands. Hosting COP31 in partnership with Pacific island countries is a chance to demonstrate practical cooperation to tackle the region's greatest security threat. Australian engagement in the Pacific tends to be driven by a security imperative to maintain influence in the region and control access to Australia's maritime approaches. Policymakers in Canberra have invested heavily in maintaining a stable regional order in the Pacific – including by supporting cooperation through the Pacific Islands Forum. Australia is the region's major aid donor and seeks to be the security partner of choice for Pacific island countries.

In recent years, China has developed a growing presence in the Pacific. This has changed the dynamic of a region that has – notwithstanding Pacific concerns about decolonisation and the legacy of nuclear testing – long been aligned with the West. China has become a major provider of aid for Pacific island countries, especially for much-needed infrastructure projects (Keen and Tidwell 2024). China is also seeking new security arrangements. In April 2022, for example, it signed a security deal with Solomon Islands. The details were not made public. However, a leaked draft contains provisions allowing for Chinese military presence and ship resupply (Tuilaepa-

Taylor 2022). China has also sought regional security arrangements with other Pacific island countries (McCarthy and Yee 2022). Defence officials in Canberra are increasingly concerned about the prospect of China using infrastructure loans as leverage to secure a naval base in the Pacific, or even to station missiles in the region (Kilcullen 2023).

For their part, Pacific island countries have long been clear that climate change is their primary security concern. Compared to geostrategic competition between major powers, Pacific leaders regard the impacts of climate change – stronger cyclones, devastating floods, rising seas, dying reefs and ocean acidification – as more immediate and tangible threats. When Pacific Islands Forum leaders issued a regional security declaration in 2018, they declared that climate change is “the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and well-being of the peoples of the Pacific”. The Forum launched a ‘2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent’ in 2022, which again reaffirmed climate change as the region's single greatest security threat. That same year, Fiji's defence minister Inia Seruiratu told a regional security dialogue that “machine guns, fighter jets, grey ships and green battalions are not our primary security concern. Waves are crashing at our doorsteps, winds are battering our homes, we are being assaulted by this enemy from many angles” (Atkinson 2022).

Hosting the United Nations climate talks in partnership with the Pacific will reaffirm Australia's place in the region, and our status as security partner of choice.



Figure 9: January 2021, the Australian Defence Force provided assistance to disaster response and recovery efforts in Fiji following category 5 Tropical Cyclone Yasi. Pacific leaders have repeatedly identified climate change as the “single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific.”

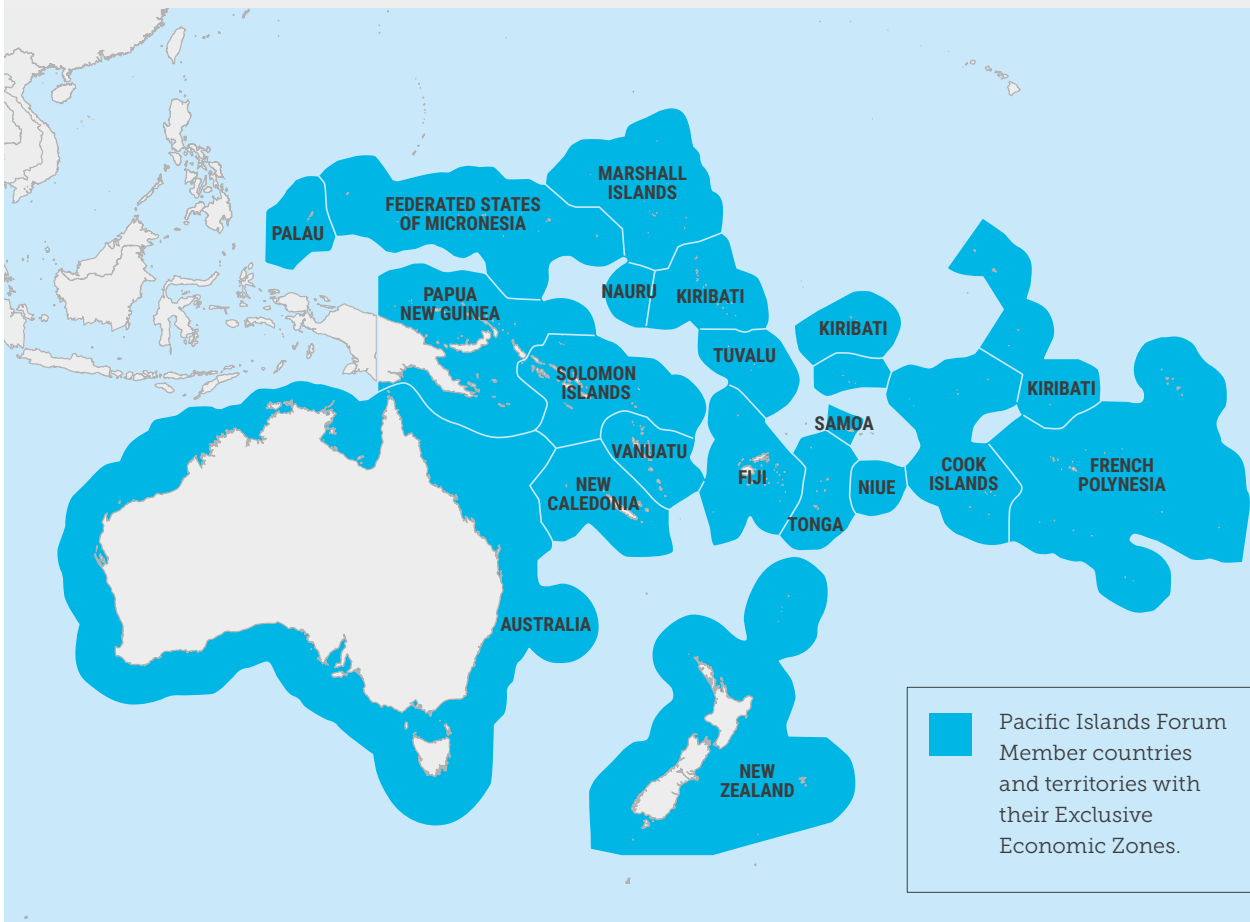
Hosting COP31 in partnership with Pacific island countries will strengthen Australia’s place in the region as a security partner of choice, by demonstrating a greater willingness to address the region’s key security threat. However Australia will need to set an ambitious agenda. A merely symbolic approach will not be enough to convince Pacific nations that Canberra is serious about tackling climate change.

Already a group of former Pacific Island presidents and prime ministers are calling on the Australian Government to step up its ambition, including ending the use of fossil fuels (Pacific Elders 2023). Australia should work with Pacific island countries to develop a shared diplomatic strategy towards COP31 to bolster cooperation under the Paris Agreement and accelerate the global shift to clean energy.

BOX 4: WHAT IS THE BLUE PACIFIC?

The Pacific Ocean is the world’s largest entity, taking up a third of the Earth’s surface. Across this vast ocean are thousands of inhabited islands that make up 14 independent Pacific nations, which together comprise the ‘Blue Pacific’. Pacific island countries are often portrayed as small, isolated and uniquely vulnerable. Yet Pacific island countries are better thought of as ‘large ocean states’, with unique cultural connections to the sea and sovereign rights and exclusive economic zones across a large part of the Earth. Together, Pacific nations make up more than 20% of the world’s ocean that is under national jurisdiction (Govan 2017).

In recent times, Pacific island leaders have agreed to work together as a single, consolidated, maritime continent – the Blue Pacific – and to pursue regional diplomacy to achieve shared goals. In 2017, Pacific island countries endorsed ‘a long-term foreign policy commitment to act as one Blue Continent’ (PIF 2017). Since then, the Blue Pacific concept has been central to the region’s strategic narrative and has provided the basis for assertive collective diplomacy by Pacific island governments. Pacific leaders have endorsed a regional ‘2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent’ which sets out a long-term approach for working together as a region, and as countries and territories, communities and peoples of the Pacific (PIF 2022).



PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES HAVE SHAPED GLOBAL CLIMATE ACTION

Pacific island countries are on the frontlines of climate change. But they are not just victims of a warming planet. Through determined diplomacy, Pacific island countries have shaped global efforts to address the climate crisis. Working together as a bloc of nations – and in coalition with other countries – Pacific island countries have shaped global rules to cut climate pollution. Pacific island countries have also earned a reputation for ‘sticking to the science’, by consistently calling for action to avoid climate harm and ensure the survival of vulnerable islands and ecosystems (Morgan, Carter and Manoa 2024).

Pacific leadership on climate action dates back to the late 1980s, when a scientific consensus on the problem first emerged. Pacific island countries were quick to realise the serious implications of global warming and sea-level rise, which represent an existential threat for atoll nations that rise just metres above the waves, including Kiribati, Marshall Islands and Tuvalu.

In 1990, Pacific island countries formed a diplomatic alliance with other island nations in the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean – the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) – which now represents 39 countries. The first draft of the Kyoto Protocol, which required wealthy nations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, was put forward by Nauru on behalf of AOSIS.

Pacific island countries were also crucial for securing the Paris Agreement in 2015. The Marshall Islands played a critical role by stitching together a coalition of countries that spanned traditional negotiating blocs in the UN climate talks. The ‘High Ambition Coalition’ that was formed and led by the Marshall Islands foreign minister, the late Tony de Brum, grew to more than 100 countries, including the United States and the countries of the European Union. It was this coalition that secured the final terms of the Paris Agreement. When he met with Pacific leaders in Hawaii in 2016, US President Barack Obama told them “we could not have gotten a Paris Agreement without the incredible efforts and hard work of island nations” (Obama 2016).

Since 2015, Pacific island countries have gone on to play an important role in the implementation of the Paris Agreement, by upholding the integrity of the regime and pushing for accountability. Pacific island countries have played a key role in negotiations on carbon markets (Article 6 of the Paris Agreement) and the creation of a new fund to address loss and damage from climate change.

From being among the first to draw attention to the dangers of climate change, to helping secure the 2015 Paris Agreement, Pacific island countries have a long and impressive record of climate leadership.

BUILDING A RESILIENT AND FOSSIL FUEL FREE PACIFIC

Australia and Pacific island countries have set shared priorities for decades, primarily through the Pacific Islands Forum – a regional body which brings together Australia, New Zealand and 14 island nations. Countries of the Pacific Islands Forum are working toward a shared vision for dealing with the impacts of climate change and accelerating the clean energy transition across the whole region. Pacific Islands Forum leaders formally declared a Pacific climate emergency in 2022 (PIF 2022). All Pacific nations – including Australia and New Zealand – also committed to achieving net zero emissions as part of a long-term 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific. At the 2023 Pacific Islands Forum, leaders committed to transition away from coal, oil and gas in their energy systems, and said they “aspire to a just and equitable transition to a fossil fuel free Pacific” (PIF 2023b).⁷ They also agreed to establish a regional energy commissioner to guide the transition to a fossil fuel free Pacific.

For its part, Australia is rapidly rolling out renewables – such as wind and solar – to replace coal-fired power in the nation’s energy system. Today, 40 percent of Australia’s main national energy grid is powered by renewable sources, a figure that has doubled in the past four years (Climate Council 2024c). By 2030, Australia is aiming to generate 82% of its electricity from renewables. Australia is also supporting clean energy projects in the Pacific islands, including a grid-scale solar power plant in Palau and transmission lines for a hydropower project in Solomon Islands (AIFFP 2024a). A new \$75 million project has also been launched to support off-grid and community-scale renewable energy in rural and remote parts of the Pacific (AIFFP 2024b).



Figure 10: (Above, top) 53rd Pacific Islands Forum, August 2024, Nuku’alofa, Tongatapu, Tonga.

Figure 11: (Above, bottom) Solar energy is a triple win in the Pacific - reducing climate pollution, increasing electricity access in remote communities, and providing more affordable electricity by reducing reliance on expensive diesel imports.

⁷ Not to be confused with the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, which is covered in the next section. Support for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty is significant and growing within the Pacific, though it does not yet have support from all Pacific island countries.

Australia's private sector will play a role in the Pacific's shift to clean energy as well. In May 2024, the Smart Energy Council – an independent body for Australia's clean energy industry – signed up its first Pacific member, Whitesands Pacific. Fiji has set a target of 100% renewable energy by 2035, and the Smart Energy Council aims to help with training and support for the roll out of clean energy infrastructure.

Australia also has a clear responsibility to help Pacific island communities adapt to the growing impacts of the climate crisis, including sea-level rise, changing fish distribution, stronger cyclones, marine heatwaves and increasingly acidic oceans. In 2023, Australia provided \$100 million to kickstart a new Pacific Resilience Facility (PRF). This facility – which is Pacific-led, owned and managed – was proposed by Pacific leaders as a regional fund that would help island communities build resilience to climate impacts. It was established in response to concerns that other large multilateral funds are difficult for Pacific island countries to access and are not geared to support community-scale projects. The PRF is intended to support locally-led, small-scale projects (PIF 2024).

LEADING THE GLOBAL SHIFT AWAY FROM FOSSIL FUELS

Today, Pacific island countries are spearheading a diplomatic campaign for a global phase-out of fossil fuels. A number of Pacific nations – including Fiji, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu – have called for the negotiation of a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty that would help govern the end of fossil fuel expansion and facilitate the equitable phase out of fossil fuels (FFNPT 2024).

At COP28 in Dubai, governments from nearly 200 countries agreed to transition away from fossil fuels in this critical decade (UNFCCC 2023b). Australia's Minister for Climate Change and Energy Chris Bowen told COP28 delegates: "We must face this fact head on: if we are to keep 1.5°C alive, fossil fuels have no ongoing role to play in our energy systems – and I speak as the climate and energy minister of one of the world's largest fossil fuel exporters" (Morton 2023).

With the world's eyes on Australia and the Pacific, COP31 will be a key moment to reaffirm and accelerate the global phase out of polluting coal, oil and gas. This is key to the survival of Pacific nations.

A TIMELINE OF PACIFIC CLIMATE LEADERSHIP ON THE WORLD STAGE

- 1990** Pacific island countries form the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) with island countries in the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean
- 1991** Pacific leaders declare “the cultural, economic and physical survival of Pacific nations is at great risk” and call for a global convention to cut greenhouse gas emissions
- 1992** Pacific diplomats play a key role in negotiations for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
- 1995** At the first meeting under the UNFCCC (COP1), Pacific island countries propose a binding protocol to reduce emissions
- 1997** The first draft of the Kyoto Protocol is put forward by Pacific climate negotiators
- 2007** Pacific island countries call on the UN Security Council to address climate change
- 2009** Pacific diplomats successfully sponsor the first UN General Assembly resolution on climate change and security
- 2015** Pacific diplomats are key to securing the breakthrough Paris Agreement, and shape the agreement’s goal to limit warming to 1.5°C
- 2018** Pacific leaders issue regional security declaration, reaffirming climate change is the “single greatest threat” to Pacific island countries
- 2023** In discussions at the International Maritime Organisation, Pacific nations call for a carbon levy on international shipping
- 2023** Pacific island countries sponsor the UN General Assembly resolution requesting the International Court of Justice clarify state obligations on climate change and human rights
- 2024** At the request of Pacific island countries, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea clarifies countries are obliged to cut climate pollution under the UN Law of the Sea
- 2024** Pacific island countries spearhead the campaign for a new global treaty to manage the phase out of fossil fuels
- 2026** Pacific island countries are set to partner with Australia to host the annual UN climate talks (COP31)

BOX 5: CLIMATE IMPACTS ACROSS THE PACIFIC: OUR SHARED THREAT AND COMMON FUTURE

Pacific island countries have long understood climate change to be an existential threat, with Pacific leaders sounding the alarm on sea level rise and other climate risks since the late 1980s (Morgan et al. 2024).

For much of this period, Australians tended to see the climate crisis as a more distant threat and less likely to materially impact their lives in the near term. However, for many this changed dramatically with the Black Summer fires of 2019-20, or with the devastating 2022 east coast

floods. Today, more than 80% of Australians report having experienced some form of extreme weather disaster at least once since 2019 (Climate Council 2023b, 2024a).

Today, many Australians find themselves facing the same anxieties and difficult choices that have long confronted vulnerable communities throughout the Pacific. More than one in three Australians worry they may have to permanently relocate their homes due to extreme weather (Climate Council 2024a).

Figure 12: (Below, top) Flooding from Cyclone Pam in Tuvalu, 2015. While Tuvalu lies outside of the range of tropical cyclones, it was still badly affected by the storm surge from Cyclone Pam. Sea level rise and more destructive storms pose a truly existential threat to the atoll nations of Tuvalu, Kiribati and the Marshall Islands.

Figure 13: (Below, bottom) Flooding, Lismore, 2022. More than one in three Australians fear they may one day be forced to relocate their homes due to escalating impacts of climate change.



 **BOX 5: CONTINUED**

The prospect of forced relocation due to climate change is not new to many Pacific Island communities, with Fiji and Vanuatu having prepared detailed guidelines for managed relocations. Today, in echoes of conversations that were happening in the Pacific over a decade ago, we likewise find calls for Australia to have a strategic plan for the relocation of communities most at risk from climate change (ANU 2024).

Already a land of extremes, and with our coastal population, large agricultural sector, climate-sensitive ecosystems, and dependence upon the stability and security of our wider region, Australian communities have no less skin in the game than their Pacific neighbours. Extreme heat threatens to render some areas of Australia uninhabitable. Shifting rainfall patterns may cause havoc with food production, further driving up prices. Warming oceans threaten our marine ecosystems and fisheries (Climate Council 2023c). Rising sea levels and increasingly destructive storms threaten our coasts. Growing risks from both fire and floods may leave many more homes uninsurable (Climate Council 2022). Stronger action today may be the difference

between a level of impact that is possible – albeit with great effort – to adapt to, and one that overwhelms us (Climate Council 2023a).

The picture is undeniable: climate change is a shared threat throughout the Pacific and Australia. While our relative exposure and our capacity to cope can vary considerably from one location to another, no household or community is immune from the impacts of climate change. People are being displaced from their homes in Tuvalu and in Lismore alike. Increasingly, we see offers of friendship and support across borders, from Fiji's offer to provide troops to support Australia's bushfire response in 2020, to the Falepili Union between Australia and Tuvalu (Minister for Foreign Affairs, 2020; DFAT 2023). We are in this together.

Put simply, we are all dependent on rapid progress in the world's response to the climate crisis. From Sydney to Suva, Majuro to Mildura, every fraction of a degree of avoided warming will be measured in lives and livelihoods saved, fewer families forced from their homes, and a safer future for our children.

More than one in three Australians worry that extreme weather may force them to permanently relocate their homes – a prospect many Pacific Island communities have long confronted.

4. Economic opportunities in Asia and beyond

Hosting a COP will bring almost every nation in the world to Australia. The question is: what version of Australia will they find on their arrival? As of 2024, Australia remains a major exporter of fossil fuels – the greatest source of climate pollution.

However, there are two winds of change. The first is an almost global commitment to net zero emissions. The second is the global race, backed by government subsidies and tax credits, to build and export climate solutions.

Hosting the world's climate summit is a key opportunity to recast trading relations with major economies in Asia, as demand for fossil fuels falls and clean energy exports grow. With an investment in economic diplomacy, Australia can work with trading partners to develop a shared vision for our region's clean energy future, and to manage the accelerating shift away from polluting fossil fuels. With the world's eyes upon us, COP31 will be the moment to signal Australia's shift from our past as a fossil fuel heavyweight to our future as a clean energy powerhouse.

Hosting the United Nations climate talks can mark Australia's shift from being a fossil fuel heavyweight to becoming a clean energy powerhouse.



Figure 14: More than 80% of solar panel production is concentrated in China and this is expected to reach over 95% in 2025.

THE GLOBAL SHIFT TO CLEAN ENERGY HAS RESHAPED TRADING IN ASIA

As the Commonwealth Treasury Secretary Steven Kennedy recently explained, the “engines of global growth have shifted from west to east”, and Asia now accounts for the majority of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions and the majority of the world’s energy demand (Kennedy 2024; IRENA 2019).

Australia is uniquely placed as a major energy exporter to growing economies in Asia. Today, Australia is a supplier of coal and gas, and emissions-intensive commodities like iron ore. This trading profile is going to change dramatically. The shift to clean energy – which is well underway and accelerating – has fundamentally reshaped trading prospects in our region. Key destination markets such as Japan, China and South Korea – which together account for more than two-thirds of Australia’s coal and gas exports – have set targets to cut climate pollution this decade and have pledged to achieve net-zero emissions by mid-century.

Countries in Asia are rapidly changing their energy mix. Both Japan and South Korea plan to double the share of clean energy used in power generation by 2030, while cutting their use of coal and gas (METI 2021; IEEFA 2024a; IEEFA 2024b). In China, solar, wind and storage are booming. China commissioned as much solar in 2023 as the whole world did in 2022 (IEA 2024). China is now expected to meet its 2030 Paris Agreement target of 1,200 GW of wind and solar *this year* – six years ahead of schedule (IEA 2024). The rapid build-out of clean energy means that coal power generation is playing a declining role in power generation in China (Myllyvirta 2024)

Even as demand for fossil fuel exports falls, Australia will remain the lucky country. Commonwealth Treasury Secretary Steven Kennedy recently noted that “too many people believed that we had to choose between economic growth and meeting our climate goals” (Kennedy 2024). That

belief no longer stands. Australia has many of the resources that our Asian trading partners need to power their economies with clean energy. And we are well-placed to make use of our abundant natural and mineral resources to develop future-focused industries. We can supply green metals, critical minerals for batteries and renewable energy components, green ammonia for fertilisers and chemical feedstock, and green hydrogen⁸ for transport and industry.

The Federal Government's policy package for building climate solutions, the *Future Made in Australia Act*, is ultimately a future tied to Asia. In its 2024 federal budget, the Australian Government made landmark new investments in critical minerals, green hydrogen and advanced clean energy manufacturing as part of a *Future Made in Australia* agenda (The Treasury, Australian Government 2024).

"Australia can be a primary beneficiary of a changing and churning global economy just like we were primary beneficiaries of the calm that preceded it.

"But only if we make ourselves indispensable to the net zero transformation, only if we align our economic and security interests more tightly, and only if we invest and engage, not just protect or retreat."

Treasurer Jim Chalmers, May 2024

This agenda will need to be matched by an investment in economic diplomacy in Asia.

The lead up to COP31 in 2026 is an opportunity to promote a new generation of fit-for-purpose Clean Energy Partnerships with countries in our region (see Box 6). Australia has only just begun to integrate clean energy goals into our trade and diplomatic strategy. In recent years, Australia has signed a range of clean energy initiatives with countries in our region, including Japan, China, South Korea, Singapore and India. These initiatives include 'low emissions technology partnerships' that are intended to develop supply chains for critical minerals, clean energy industrial goods and green hydrogen, as well as memorandums of understanding that are intended to promote cooperation on climate change policy (DCCEEW 2024b).

From these beginnings, in the lead up to COP31, Australia will need to put climate and clean energy goals at the heart of our engagement with countries in the region. This will mean tasking our diplomatic network in Asia with actively promoting Australia's future as a clean energy powerhouse and showcasing opportunities for investment in our clean energy industries.

⁸ Green hydrogen means hydrogen created with renewable energy such as solar and wind. It excludes all hydrogen created using fossil fuels. Only 'green' or 'renewable' hydrogen can play a major role in our energy and industrial future.

 **BOX 6: WORKING WITH ASIAN TRADING PARTNERS TO DELIVER A CLEAN ENERGY FUTURE MADE IN AUSTRALIA**

Our trading partners will continue to need Australian resources – including critical minerals, green metals and green hydrogen – as they shift to clean energy economies. Countries in our region will also be looking to develop more diversified and resilient clean energy supply chains (Bowen 2023b). This represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity for Australia to grow new export industries for tomorrow’s economy, replacing the fossil fuels we sell today.

The Australian Government can establish new Clean Energy Partnerships with trading partners in our region, including Japan, China and South Korea. Such partnerships would reinforce Australia’s reputation as a reliable trading partner, enable cooperation on cutting climate pollution, grow markets for clean energy exports and promote investment in Australian resources and industry. Clean Energy Partnerships would also enable cooperation on the phase out of polluting fossil fuels.

This approach would ensure that our domestic and foreign policy agendas are pulling in the same direction. Developing new gas projects and

opening new coal mines does the opposite, as this works against Australia claiming our place in the growing global market for zero emission goods. New fossil fuel projects divert investment, workforce and supply chain capacity away from the future-focused new industries we could be building now. With chronic labour shortages in key sectors of the economy already, new coal and gas projects will only undermine the workforce we need for tomorrow’s clean industries (Kohler 2024).

In June 2024, the Australian Government signed the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPE) Clean Economy Agreement along with Brunei Darussalam, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, the United States and Vietnam. The novel agreement will accelerate the deployment of clean technologies and facilitate investment in the Asia-Pacific region with specific targets to catalyse at least US \$20 billion for renewable energy and US \$120 billion for clean energy storage, all by 2030 (IPEF 2024).

Developing new coal and gas projects works against Australia claiming its place in the growing global market for pollution-free goods.

BUILDING NEW CLEAN ENERGY SUPPLY CHAINS

As the global energy transition accelerates, energy security will increasingly be about clean energy supply chains. This has far-reaching strategic implications, with power likely to shift from ‘petrostates’ (countries whose economies are heavily dependent on the extraction and export of oil or natural gas) to ‘electrostates’ (countries that supply energy transition materials such as critical minerals, or renewable energy products, or both). Today, an over-concentration of clean energy supply chains in China presents an energy security vulnerability for countries in our region, especially as Beijing has shown a willingness to use its market power to

coerce other nations to make decisions in its favour. Hosting the COP31 summit is a chance to showcase Australia’s potential as a clean energy supplier and to work with strategic partners in the region to build more diversified and resilient clean energy supply chains.

Providing energy security in a warming world depends less on the supply of coal, oil and gas and more on clean energy supply chains – including access to critical minerals and component parts of batteries, wind turbines, solar panels and electric vehicles. China currently dominates global production

Figure 15: Providing energy security in a warming on the supply critical minerals and component parts of batteries, wind turbines, solar panels and electric vehicles.



of clean energy technologies. More than 80% of solar panel production is concentrated in China and this is expected to reach over 95% in 2025 (IEA 2023). China has also moved faster than many nations to secure international supply of critical minerals that are essential for clean energy technologies.

Australia can work with partners, including our key security ally the United States, to develop diversified and resilient supply chains for clean energy technologies. Australia and the United States are already collaborating on secure supply chains for rare earth metals that are important for magnets used in electric vehicle motors and wind turbines (and in advanced defence equipment). Consultations on the Federal Government's *New Roadmap for Australia's Economic Engagement with India* shows a strong turn towards the clean energy economy. This is supported by local industry: a Smart Energy Council trade delegation of 30 businesses to India in 2023 resulted in approximately \$1.4 billion in commercial partnerships between Australian technology and Indian manufacturing.

The United States is also working with Japan and India to develop new supply chains and expand clean energy manufacturing capabilities in the Asia-Pacific. India, Japan, the United States and Australia have formed a Quad working group on climate change and issued a joint statement of principles on clean energy supply chains in the region (PM+C 2023).

Hosting COP31 in partnership with Pacific island countries will be a key opportunity to promote a shared regional vision for energy security in the Asia-Pacific. As countries in the region shift from fossil fuels to clean energy technologies, they will need to collaborate to ensure secure and diversified supply chains. This will help ensure a region where countries are less vulnerable to economic or political coercion.

Hosting the United Nations climate talks will be a key opportunity for Australia to showcase our potential as a supplier of critical minerals and renewable energy components for the Asia-Pacific region.

DELIVERING AN AMBITIOUS 'BREAKTHROUGH AGENDA'

The UK example

To take COP26 in Glasgow as an example, the rationale for the UK to host was for three broad reasons. Firstly, the British Government saw significant climate risks to the UK. Secondly, they saw substantial economic opportunity for the UK in the global energy transition. Thirdly, elements of the electorate wanted to see action on climate change, so hosting COP was seen as a potential vote-winner. There was also an element of wanting to show UK leadership on the global stage post-Brexit.

What the UK learned is that political capital and diplomatic bandwidth gets spread very thinly, very quickly. With COP26, the British started out with too many objectives, and quickly narrowed it down to four campaigns on finance, power, road transport and land use – Prime Minister Boris Johnson's spokesperson later coined these into a mantra of 'cash, coal, cars and trees'.

A fifth objective was around collaboration – recognising that the real power of the COP Presidency lies in convening power and getting nations to work together on specific projects that they would not otherwise do. COP President Alok Sharma set this out at the end of the Climate Ambition Summit in December 2020:

"Finally, we need enhanced international collaboration. Among policy makers, investors, business and civil society. That is the only way to deliver the transition at the pace required... By working together, we can innovate faster, we can create economies of scale, and drive stronger incentives for investment. But we will only access those gains, if we tailor our approach to every challenge, and to each sector. And our COP26 campaigns aim to do just that.... All [are] aimed to help reduce emissions while

meeting other needs, like affordable energy, clean transport, and green jobs. Targeted practical collaborations like these are vital. And they should form a central theme to our efforts over the next decade." (Sharma 2020)

The vehicle for this programme of engineered collaboration became known as the *Breakthrough Agenda*. Its goal was to focus international attention on the most important things that countries need to do *together* in each sector, to make transitions faster, less difficult, lower cost and greater gain (Sharpe S (2023) *Five Times Faster*, Cambridge University Press).

There are a number of ways that Australia will be able to leverage the Breakthrough Agenda process to accelerate progress. This could be in the form of:

- › Countries that are already co-leads or supporters of a Breakthrough objective giving active diplomatic support to Australia's specific objectives.
- › The International Energy Agency, International Renewable Energy Agency, and High-Level Climate Action Champions (see Section 2) can use their mandate as co-authors of the annual Breakthrough Agenda Report to recommend that governments and businesses support work on specific areas under Australia's leadership.
- › The meetings of the most active countries and initiatives in each sector are used to discuss the specific steps they can take to support Australia's leadership, and the announcements they can collectively work towards for COP31.

For Australia, using its COP Presidency to catalyse action in the following suggested sectors would be an opportunity to set the direction, stimulate investment and position themselves as a thought and policy leader.



Figure 16: Progress in green shipping requires internationally coordinated investment in the enabling infrastructure. As COP President, Australia could help drive progress in green shipping and across many other areas of decarbonisation.



Green shipping corridors

Getting near-zero emission ships into the water on maritime routes requires internationally coordinated investment in infrastructure, so that the same fuel is accessible at either end of a route, and coordinated policy measures, so that these shipping services are commercially viable and not undercut by fossil fuelled shipping. There is a crucial role for groups of countries working together to make this happen.

There is considerable political and industry support for the idea of establishing green shipping corridors. Australia was one of 27 countries that committed in the Clydebank Declaration at COP26 to work together to establish six green shipping corridors by the middle of this decade. Other countries, cities and ports have made similar commitments. Over 100 industry actors throughout the value chain, including eight companies representing over 85% of global container shipping capacity, plan to participate in these efforts. The Global Maritime Forum (GMF) is at the centre of efforts to coordinate industry activity, and also appears well-placed to support cooperation on green shipping corridors between governments.

The countries that lead efforts to establish green shipping corridors are likely to have disproportionate influence in setting standards for the global industry in fuels, infrastructure and associated technologies.

Earlier this year, the Department for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts released an issues paper on its Maritime Emissions National Action Plan which noted that “Green shipping corridors can provide a tangible mechanism for Australia to participate and influence decarbonisation efforts in international shipping, whilst also promoting Australian innovation and jobs” (DITRCA 2024).

The paper also outlined a number of areas of potential cooperation which would benefit Australia, including green shipping corridors across the Tasman Sea and between Australia and Singapore, Japan and Korea. A COP Presidency campaign would not only help to push forward international progress, but also bolster Australia’s international profile as a leading maritime nation.

Green Hydrogen

With our abundance of sun, wind and water, and experience in building large-scale infrastructure, Australia is well-placed to be a large producer of non-polluting, green hydrogen.

Hydrogen has a range of uses. The most economically promising is its use in the production of green iron, in combination with electricity produced from renewable sources (see next section). Hydrogen could also be exported to places where it is uneconomical to produce it locally, be converted to ammonia and used as a fuel in shipping.

Hydrogen has long been touted as a future fuel, but hasn't truly taken off, due to the high costs involved in developing the hydrogen production and storage infrastructure. Hydrogen was one of the areas agreed at COP26 in Glasgow as a topic for a Breakthrough Agenda. Since then, 44 countries (including Australia) plus the European Union have signed up to an action plan on agreeing international standards, to increase the use of green hydrogen, to dramatically increase the number of hydrogen demonstration projects and leverage more financing into the sector.

The Australian Government is investing \$4 billion in the Hydrogen Headstart program and claims that there is now a \$127 billion pipeline of announced hydrogen investment in Australia (DCCEEW 2024c).

A COP Presidency push would focus global attention and could set targets for the production of green hydrogen. It would also focus on creating a transparent open international market for green hydrogen, with Australia well placed at the centre.

Figure 17: Australia has enormous potential to help reduce global emissions from steel production. A COP Presidency push on green steel would enable Australia to shape global standards and increase its competitiveness and market share.

Green iron and steel

Australia has enormous potential to reduce global emissions from the steel supply chain, given we supply around three-fifths of the iron ore used in primary steelmaking in China. If Australia could use renewable electricity and hydrogen produced from renewables to convert that iron oxide into iron metal and steel, that could reduce global emissions by around 2% (Garnaut 2022).

The bilateral relationship with China will be key to delivering economic success for both countries as well as delivering lower emissions.

Australia is already collaborating with the UN High Level Action Champions on the Steel Breakthrough Agenda which identified a series of six recommendations at COP28, including the need to support the trading of pollution-free steel (Breakthrough Agenda 2023).

As one of the world's pre-eminent producers in this supply chain, a COP Presidency campaign on this agenda would enable Australia to shape standards and increase its international competitiveness and market share as the sector makes the transition to near-zero emissions technologies.



Forests and agricultural trade

The problem of deforestation has strong international aspects. Much of the deforestation that takes place in regions with the greatest forest carbon stores is driven by the production of internationally-traded agricultural commodities such as soy, palm oil, beef, and cocoa. The value of these international trade flows is around a hundred times greater than the value of finance directed at forest protection. It is extremely difficult for any country to protect its forests if the forces of global markets are not aligned with its domestic policies. No country can change global markets on its own. There is a clear need for a coordinated international approach.

Australia has a strong economic interest in ensuring international market access for its agricultural products, at the same time as pursuing its objectives for action change and biodiversity. These interests may be threatened if other major economies pursue unilateral approaches to this problem (such as the European Union's Regulation on Deforestation-free products). A fragmented approach in which each consumer market sets different standards risks imposing a burden on producer countries at the same time as failing to solve the underlying problem.

Consumers also want to be able to trust that the products they consume have a climate and nature positive supply chain. Australian beef, pork, poultry, dairy and lamb exports to Japan, the United States and the European Union are worth \$6.3 billion. Consumers believe these food types have the most negative impact on the environment (Macdoch Foundation 2022).

Australia's economic importance in this sector, especially working hand-in-hand with the preceding COP Presidency of Brazil, would make it a highly credible and influential leader of collaborative international action.

There is a foundation of national experience and international collaboration on which to build. The Forest, Agriculture and Commodity Trade Dialogue, established under the UK's Presidency of COP26, is one existing plurilateral forum where foundations for cooperation have been laid.

A COP Presidency campaign on natural capital could boost Australia's international reputation, attract investment to Australian companies and bring much needed momentum. Australia could drive forward an agreement on sustainability and trade, raise the profile of support for smallholder farmers and the need to balance production with sustainable resource management. Further actions would be to improve standards in carbon markets, expand market coverage and stimulate international investment into training on improved soil and forest management and degraded land recovery.

As Janet Yellen, US Treasury Secretary, said on her recent visit to Brazil, 'Neglecting to address climate change and the loss of nature and biodiversity is not just bad environmental policy. It is also bad economic policy.'





Hosting COP31 is an opportunity to bring the world's attention to the direct effects that climate change is having on people in the Pacific region, and the necessary solutions. This includes the impact on our health from extreme heat, bushfires, loss of homes and livelihoods, disease spread, availability of traditional foods, and other factors. The impact of climate change on our health also damages our economy through lost productivity and higher health costs.

Pacific governments have traditionally seen climate and health as a priority. The Fijian COP Presidency (COP23) was the first to bring a strong focus onto climate and health. Under the UK's Presidency of COP26, an ambition was set out to build climate resilient and sustainable health systems. To drive this forward, the Alliance for Transformative Action on Climate and Health (ATACH) was convened by the UK, along with Egypt (President of COP27), with the World Health Organisation (WHO) as its secretariat. COP28 was the first COP to feature a health day and 151 countries (including Australia) signed up to the UAE Climate and Health Declaration.

Health is closely linked with other systems such as water, infrastructure, mobility, agriculture and the environment. Collaboration across sectors is essential. A COP presidency campaign could build momentum towards climate resilient and sustainable health systems. It would also help to make COP31 a people-focussed COP. A focus on direct impacts on human health would also help reinforce the need for far more rapid progress in driving down climate pollution by moving beyond fossil fuels.



The International Energy Agency estimates that on its net zero pathway, the total value of critical metals will exceed that of the global coal trade as early as 2030 and that demand for lithium in particular will grow 30-fold to 2030 and more than 100-fold by 2050.

Currently, Australia is responsible for around 40% of the world's lithium supply – essential for EV batteries – and is the second biggest supplier of manganese ore, also used for batteries and as an additive to steel. Australia has significant reserves of other minerals such as cobalt, scandium, neodymium and dysprosium.

Almost all of these metals are exported from Australia as ore, and refined overseas. The carbon emissions embodied in the processing of Australia's critical mineral ore exceed 1 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent per year – many times Australia's total own emissions (Garnaut 2022).

The Federal Government recently announced \$556.1 million (to be allocated over the next ten years) to progressively map Australia's potential for critical minerals. Its The Critical Minerals Strategy committed to reduce the sector's environmental footprint by adopting renewable fuel and reducing energy requirements (Australian Government 2023). It should go further and use some of this new funding to develop domestic refining facilities that harness Australia's abundant renewable energy supply. This would reduce emissions – and set a new standard across international supply chains as a result. This also has the potential to create Australian jobs and other benefits such as reduced dependence on critical minerals being produced in areas with acute concerns around human rights or environmental damage.

Critical minerals have not been a focus of a COP action agenda until now, but Australia is already an agenda-setting figure when it comes to critical minerals. For example, the US initiated the Minerals Security Partnership in 2022 which includes Australia, the European Union, South Korea, and several other countries aiming to secure critical mineral supplies.

A COP Presidency campaign would help bring international focus on the critical minerals industry as a catalyst for accelerating the clean energy transition. It would set an ambition to reduce supply chain emissions, while encouraging responsible stewardship of the natural environment and committing to meaningful participation for communities – in particular Indigenous communities – that host or may be affected by minerals projects.

Australia will never out-produce China in critical minerals, but by helping set standards for reducing emissions in the refining process, it will help clean up the global supply chain and help to boost its own market share in the process.

While these six areas – green shipping corridors, green hydrogen, green iron and steel, forests and agricultural trade, health, critical minerals – have been identified as particular areas where an Australia-Pacific COP Presidency could set the agenda, there are many other areas in need of leadership, including but not limited to: strengthening action under the Global Methane Pledge, an agreement on reducing emissions of nitrous oxide – a potent and neglected greenhouse gas), action across 'hard to abate' sectors including cement, and a global early warning system for extreme heat.

Figure 18: The solar farm for Sun Metals Zinc Refinery near Townsville, QLD. By harnessing our unrivalled renewable energy potential, Australia can help reduce emissions from the production of critical minerals. As COP President, Australia can also help set global standards for reducing emissions in clean energy supply chains, and for responsible stewardship and community participation.



5. Elevating First Nations voices

Indigenous culture and leadership are fundamental to a successful COP.

This continent is home to the oldest continuous cultures on Earth – to First Nations peoples who have thrived for thousands of generations, adapted to changes in their environment, and who hold practical knowledge honed over millennia of continuous connection to land, waters and their communities. Elevating the voices and priorities of First Nations from across Australia, the Pacific and beyond can and must be a defining feature of an Australia-Pacific COP Presidency.

COP 30 host, Brazil, is set to raise the bar, harnessing its Presidency in 2025 to place a strong focus on its Indigenous peoples.⁹ Brazil will be locating the conference in the heart of the Amazon, and is aiming for a tenfold increase in the number of Indigenous participants compared to previous COPs (increasing to more than 3,000). It has flagged a focus on advancing Indigenous peoples' rights and giving operational effect to First Nations' interests within the global climate regime. That is, ensuring they are met with commitments and adequately reflected in Parties' policies and actions.

First Nations tend to be disproportionately harmed by climate change, as well as by the direct impacts of fossil fuel extraction. In the Torres Strait, communities face an uncertain future as rising seas swallow land and ocean changes impact traditional food sources. In the centre of the continent, communities face ever more extreme heat; their vulnerability compounded by poor quality housing. These changes impact not only health and physical security, but age-old connections to Country, including impacts on totemic species and, at worst, risk of forced displacement. The impacts of climate change, and the direct impacts of extractive industries including coal and gas mining on Country, come on top of the long history of injustice and entrenched disadvantage.

At the same time, First Nations play a crucial role in driving climate solutions. Moreover, First Nations-led solutions can bring important benefits to their communities, from affordable energy through community-owned microgrids to good jobs on Country utilising traditional land management to manage fire risks and protect biodiversity.

Elevating First Nations voices and priorities can and must be a defining feature of an Australia-Pacific hosted climate summit.

⁹ Note that in this section we have both the terms "First Nations" and "Indigenous peoples", as well as the specific term "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples". "Indigenous peoples" is the term most commonly used globally, including within the UN system. First Nations is the term most commonly used in Australia to refer to the many Indigenous peoples of this continent.

ADVANCING FIRST NATIONS' RIGHTS AND PRIORITIES UNDER THE PARIS AGREEMENT

In 2023, the Albanese Government established the Office for First Nations International Engagement and appointed Justin Mohamed as the inaugural Ambassador for First Nations People, thereby ensuring dedicated First Nations representation in Australia's international engagement. The Ambassador's responsibilities include embedding First Nations perspectives into Australia's foreign policy, and helping progress First Nations rights and interests globally (DFAT 2023).

As COP President, Australia can work with First Nations-led organisations to ensure that First Nations' rights and priorities receive greater focus in the implementation of the Paris Agreement. This includes areas such as the function of carbon markets, access to finance for clean energy and climate change adaptation, addressing loss and damage from climate change, and supporting a just transition.

IMPROVING HOW GOVERNMENTS ENGAGE WITH FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES ON CLIMATE POLICY

Beyond implementation of the Paris Agreement, there are even greater opportunities when it comes to how national governments engage with First Nations peoples on climate policy.

By any measure, First Nations communities are major stakeholders in Australia's energy and industrial transformation. A majority of critical minerals projects in Australia are located on formally recognised Indigenous lands (Burton et al. 2024). Many of the large-scale wind and solar projects and supporting infrastructure required for Australia's energy and industrial transformation will also be located on land under various forms of Indigenous ownership. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have won some of the strongest land rights of Indigenous peoples globally, and so have the right to input on industry and supply chain policy and regulation.



Figure 19: Lachlan Mitchell (21, on boardwalk), Matthew Skeene (20) and Ashlyn Skeene (21), Yirrganydji rangers collecting mud samples for research investigating the blue carbon storage potential of mangrove systems. First Nations leadership is fundamental to securing a safe and liveable climate.

First Nations communities have continued to present solutions to the Federal Government on everything from closing the life expectancy gap to ensuring First Nations benefit from Australia's energy transformation. While the current Federal Government has made multiple commitments regarding First Nations' rights, it has made little movement on these commitments after the referendum loss in 2023.

The 'no' vote has hampered the recognition agendas of subnational governments that were previously gaining momentum: most governments are walking back processes or delaying commitments altogether. On the back of this recent history, First Nations advocates have an opportunity to work in collaboration globally, using the opportunity of COP31 to improve how Australian governments engage with First Nations peoples on climate policy, deliver outcomes for First Nations people in Australia, and help shape better outcomes for Indigenous peoples globally.

Australia has endorsed the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and committed to take actions to implement the Declaration. The Government must walk the talk on this commitment. As COP President, it would need to work to ensure genuine progress on Indigenous rights here and worldwide.

SUPPORTING FIRST NATIONS-LED ORGANISATIONS IN THE LEAD-UP TO THE GLOBAL CLIMATE SUMMIT

There will be considerable work involved for Indigenous-led civil society organisations in Australia, the Pacific and around the world to identify common priorities and participate effectively in the lead up to and during COP31, including at the preceding COPs in Azerbaijan and Brazil. This will require support and funding from many sources to enable relationship building, collaboration and capacity building within and across Indigenous-led organisations locally and internationally.

6. Benefits for the host city

A UN climate summit would be the largest and one of the most significant diplomatic events ever hosted in Australia – which would bring considerable economic benefits to the host city. Tens of thousands of delegates can be expected to attend from nearly 200 nations worldwide, including official negotiators, business people and civil society representatives.

In addition to the official climate negotiations, the annual UN climate summit (COP) has become a de facto ‘world trade show’ that brings together major players in future-focused clean energy industries. For the host city, the COP provides a pre-eminent platform to showcase Australia’s renewable energy transformation and attract investment for clean energy projects.

Events would also be held in the Pacific islands, bringing global attention (and thousands of visitors) to the region.

The benefits of hosting COP31 would last for years after the event itself. For example, when Glasgow hosted COP26, it helped the city council to secure a new Green Deal (Glasgow City Council 2023). Paris adopted an Adaptation Plan for the city before hosting COP21 (Woodrooffe 2022). These measures have changed these cities for the better. Hosting the UN climate talks would enhance the context for climate and energy policymaking and drive lasting change.

At the state and city level there is bipartisan support for Australia to host the United Nations climate talks, with political leaders from both Labor and the Coalition supporting the bid.

Hosting is not just about providing a location for the event, but also about the people of the host city or state engaging with the COP. In addition to spotlighting challenges throughout Australia and the Pacific, aspects of the program can also highlight challenges facing the particular city or state, as well as its progress on solutions. For example, hosting COP31 in Brisbane could bring a helpful focus onto the challenges facing

the state's agricultural sector, the action required to protect the Great Barrier Reef, flooding and coastal erosion, bushfire risks and many other issues that matter deeply to Queenslanders.

Hosting COP31 has bipartisan support at the state and city level in Australia, with both Labor and Liberal politicians expressing support for hosting the summit.

BOX 7: AUSTRALIAN CITIES ARE VYING FOR THE CHANCE TO HOST

A number of Australian cities are vying for the chance to host the UN climate talks in 2026.

Brisbane

Brisbane Lord Mayor Adrian Schrinner attended COP27 in Egypt in 2022, where he put his hand up to host COP31 "on behalf of Brisbane". Schrinner told media that there was "no better place" to host, given Queensland is the closest Australian state to Pacific island countries (Levingston and Nally 2022). South-East Queensland is home to the largest Pacific islander community in Australia. More than 185,000 people who were born in the Pacific now live in Australia, with around a third of this diaspora calling Queensland home (Chalmers 2024). Mayor Adrian Schrinner argues that hosting COP31 would also be good preparation for Brisbane's 2032 Olympic Games, when Brisbane is committed to achieving the first ever 'climate positive' games,

which will require the city to embrace lasting zero carbon solutions (Stevenson and Kleyn 2021).

Senior Queensland Government figures have also signalled openness to hosting COP31 in Brisbane, as a chance to road-test logistics for the Brisbane Olympics in 2032 (van Leeuwen 2023). Queensland Labor premier Steven Miles attended COP28 in Dubai in 2023 with officials from the Queensland Department of Infrastructure and Queensland Trade and Investment Commission (Miles 2024).



Figure 20: South-East Queensland is home to the largest Pacific islander community in Australia. Brisbane is a gateway city to many Pacific island countries.

BOX 7: CONTINUED**Sydney**

New South Wales' then Treasurer Matt Kean attended the COP27 summit in Egypt, where he lobbied behind the scenes for Australia's bid for COP31 and pushed the barrow for Sydney to host. Kean argued: "This is not just about Australia, this is also about the Pacific. Pacific nations are at the forefront of climate change. And Sydney would be the destination that could bring everyone together in one spot"... Given the challenges being faced by Pacific nations, and given some of the forward-leaning policies that we're now seeing coming out of Australia, it's the perfect place, it's the perfect opportunity to seize the moment" (van Leeuwen 2022b).

More recently, New South Wales Shadow Climate and Energy Minister James Griffin backed Sydney for host city at the finale event at Sydney Climate Action Week 2024. "We should be really proud to try and secure it for Sydney. Setting aside the fact that it would fill every single hotel in the city and the state, it would create amazing opportunities for advocates and groups to be able to have discussions, come together and really nut out a set of solutions that will help get us to where we need to get to."

Adelaide

Both the Labor government and Liberal opposition in South Australia are pressing for Adelaide to host COP31. Deputy premier Susan Close attended COP27 in Sharm-El-Sheik, where she argued that South Australia's renewable energy profile makes Adelaide a "great location as a potential host city" (Government of South Australia 2022).

South Australia's opposition leader David Speirs has written to Prime Minister Albanese suggesting Adelaide would be the "perfect" city to host, and pledging bipartisan support. He said COP31 "presents an excellent opportunity to showcase our leadership in renewable energy generation and attract international business interest" (Richards 2022).

Perth

The Perth City Council has also shown interest in hosting the annual UN climate summit, with councillors proposing COP31 would be a major economic development opportunity for the city (McKenzie 2022). Western Australia Minister for Environment and Climate Action Reece Whitby attended both COP27 in Egypt and COP28 in the United Arab Emirates.

Melbourne

Melbourne City Council has shown interest in hosting COP31, and Melbourne Lord Mayor Sally Capp attended COP28 in Dubai (Rees 2023). However, the Victorian state elections are scheduled to be held at the same time in November 2026, suggesting Melbourne is less likely to host.

DIRECT ECONOMIC BENEFITS FOR THE HOST CITY

Hosting major global events can result in a large financial windfall for the host city. Direct economic benefit comes from spending on accommodation, food and hospitality during the event.

Hosting a COP is unlike the major global sporting events that are familiar to Australians. There is a relatively low cost when it comes to the infrastructure needed for the event. No new stadiums or transport lines would be required. Due to the nature of the event as a sanctioned UN meeting, attendees and delegates are often paid by their respective governments or organisations to attend.

Assuming it is a modestly sized 'implementation COP', we can expect around 30,000 people to attend COP31. The likely composition of attendees, using figures from previous COPs, is 5% UN officials, 50% government officials, 15% industry representatives, 8% media, and 22% non-government organisations. Of the total, roughly 5-10% will be domestic attendees. Participants will spend on average two weeks in the host city, and there will be many preparatory meetings occurring before (especially for government officials), as well after the COP itself.

The average international business visitor coming to Australia spends \$224 per night. For domestic business travellers in Australia, it is \$360 per night. However, this international average of \$224 is well below the standard government and organisational allowances provided for travellers visiting Australia for work. The International Civil Service Commission for the UN set the Australian Daily Subsistence Allowance "which is intended to account for lodging, meals, gratuities and other expenses of United Nations travellers" at over AU\$500 (US\$327) for Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney. Locally, the Australian Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority sets employee travel allowance rates at around \$325 per day for staffers' domestic travel to capital cities.

The host city would therefore be looking at a boost at least \$100m, not including venue hire. Taking into account the higher expense allowances, the direct economic impact for a host city would be up to \$210 million.¹⁰ This may be equivalent to up to four times the value of hosting the AFL Grand Final.

This is still a modest calculation. Some COP participants will choose to stay in Australia for some extra days for tourism, visiting other cities and some of our many natural wonders, adding further to their spending.

Hosting the United Nations climate summit would bring a significant economic boost of between \$100-\$210 million to the host city, equivalent to hosting up to four AFL Grand Finals.

¹⁰ Based on a 2020 estimate of the cost to the Victorian economy of moving the Grand Final interstate (Hancock 2020).

EVENTS AROUND AUSTRALIA

A single city will host the two weeks of official negotiations for COP31. However the COP is a whole-of-nation undertaking with events held in the lead up and after the COP, noting Australia and the Pacific will hold the COP Presidency until the first day of COP32 in November 2027.

With Australia in the global spotlight, COP31 is a chance to showcase the country's accelerating clean energy transition. When the UK hosted COP26 in 2021, the UK COP Presidency supported a 'Regional Roadshow' with a programme of events held across the country to demonstrate emerging clean energy industries and motivate climate action. A similar approach for COP31 would be an opportunity to build a national consensus around Australia's shift to a clean energy future, including by showing the transition is already well underway in key energy communities.

The UK Government commissioned an assessment of the economic impact of hosting COP26 in Glasgow. The report found that every pound spent in the UK (from the host, participants and exhibitors) led to a rise in UK economic output of just under two pounds. The net economic benefit to the UK from hosting COP was over 500 million pounds (around one billion Australian dollars). The benefits were shared around the UK, with the greatest share in Scotland.

In June 2024, the Australian Public Service advertised for a 'Talent Register' for a wide range of positions associated with COP31, ranging from policy and executive support positions to event management, catering, and security guards. These positions are advertised for every capital city in Australia.



Figure 21: Australia's renewable energy industry is strongly supportive of the COP31 bid, recognising the enormous potential to attract new interest and investment into Australian businesses.

EVENTS IN THE PACIFIC

As a partnership with Pacific island countries, events associated with COP31 will also be held in the Pacific. This will likely include the preparatory meeting known as the 'pre-COP', held one to two months ahead of the COP, that helps to set the agenda for the formal negotiations.

There are precedents for this approach. When the UK hosted COP26 for example, it did so in partnership with Italy, and a pre-COP event was held in Milan. When Fiji took on the Presidency for COP23, the main climate conference was held at the UNFCCC

Secretariat in Bonn, Germany, as there simply weren't enough hotel beds and conference rooms in Fiji. However a pre-COP meeting was held in Nadi with more than 300 delegates from around the world attending.

A pre-COP event in 2026 may similarly be held in a Pacific island country. Samoa's capital Apia is a possibility. Samoa is hosting the Commonwealth Heads of Government (CHOGM) meeting in October 2024. Samoa is also home to the Secretariat of the Regional Environment Program (SPREP) and hosts a Pacific Climate Change Centre.

Figure 22: 53rd Pacific Islands Forum, August 2024, Nuku'alofa, Tongatapu, Tonga.



7. Conclusion

Each COP President brings a unique set of attributes to the task of advancing global cooperation on climate change. The UK, host of COP26, leveraged its status as an old-world economy and birthplace of industrialism that was now well on the path to decarbonisation. Fiji, host of COP23, drew on the moral authority of a nation on the frontlines of the global climate crisis. France, host of the landmark COP21, drew on its world-leading diplomatic capabilities.

Australia is an energy giant and pivotal player in the world's energy transformation: a major fossil fuel producer now on the path to a renewable energy powerhouse. It is home to the oldest nations on Earth, whose knowledge and wisdom are more important now than ever. The Pacific has a long legacy of skilful climate leadership, and the standing of a region that knows more than any other about the challenges of climate change.

A true partnership between Australia and the Pacific that leverages this unique set of attributes can be the powerful catalyst for the progress in international climate cooperation upon which all our futures depend.

At the same time, hosting COP31 is a chance to help secure Australia's economic future through prosperous new clean energy partnerships, to reaffirm our place in the Pacific family, and to deliver an attractive economic windfall to the host city.

A majority of Australians support their Government's bid to host COP31 in partnership with Pacific island countries. Unsurprisingly, the bid also enjoys resounding support from the local renewable energy industry and the wider business community, who recognise this special opportunity to put Australia at the forefront of new industries and supply chains, delivering good jobs to Australians for generations.

Australian and Pacific diplomacy and leadership matters. We have proud histories as responsible and influential international actors that have helped galvanise action to protect the environment and helped uphold the rules-based global order. Working together, we can be a force for good in these uncertain times, while ensuring our own future prosperity and security.

This is a moment to shine.

A true partnership between Australia and the Pacific can be a powerful catalyst for the global progress upon which all our futures depend.

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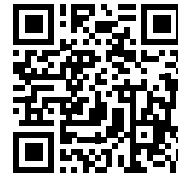
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The Climate Council is a fearless champion of the climate solutions that Australia needs. People power got us started and we are proudly community-funded and independent.

The Climate Council acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live, meet and work. We wish to pay our respects to Elders, past and present, and recognise the continuous connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to land, sea and sky. We acknowledge the ongoing leadership of First Nations people here and worldwide in protecting Country, and securing a safe and liveable climate for us all.

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