

BRIEFING PAPER

COP28: WHAT TO EXPECT

INTRODUCTION

This year's annual United Nations climate conference known as COP28 will be held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE). Discussions at the summit are expected to focus on accelerating the switch toward clean energy sources and away from coal, oil and gas. Countries are expected to agree to the global goal of tripling renewable energy capacity by 2030. A growing number of countries will also call for a phase out of fossil fuels.

Many observers are cynical about the ability of a petrostate like UAE, as host of this year's talks, to deliver an agreement to move rapidly away from coal, oil and gas. This is a challenge Australia shares, having put up its hand to host COP31 in 2026 in partnership with Pacific island countries.

As this briefing paper affirms, Australia is a major contributor to the climate crisis. While UAE has copped well-deserved criticism for its plans to increase oil exports, Australia is approving new coal and gas projects. Today, Australia exports almost three times as much fossil fuels as the UAE does. Dozens of new coal and gas projects are in the development pipeline.

If you ask climate scientists what is needed to fix the issue (we did) they are crystal clear: a rapid phase out of coal, oil and gas. In a Climate Council survey of scientists from around the world, we asked them how well countries are tackling climate change, and a majority described efforts as falling "catastrophically short". Many also think their advice and knowledge is being minimised or overlooked in favour of fossil fuel corporations, which have a large influence over government policy.

To be a successful host of the UN climate talks in three years' time, Australia will need to stop adding fuel to the fire by approving new fossil fuel projects, and must commit to a phase out of fossil fuels.





This briefing also explains how the world has changed since last year's COP27 summit in Egypt. Over the past 12 months there have been terrifying climate-fuelled disasters and escalating conflicts around the globe. 2023 is on track to be the hottest year on record, with land and ocean temperature records shattered. The window for avoiding climate breakdown is fast narrowing and only decisive action can save us from catastrophe.

Yet there is hope. The global energy transition is now underway and we have mature technologies readily available to replace fossil fuels in electricity generation and transport. Global demand for coal, oil and gas is expected to peak before the end of the decade, and decline rapidly after that. Electricity from renewable sources like solar and wind is already cheaper than coal and gas in most of the world, and solar energy - already the cheapest way to generate electricity in Australia - is expected to be cheapest almost everywhere by 2027. Sales of electric vehicles are taking off in Australia and booming in parts of the world. Governments must manage these now-inevitable changes.

Finally, this briefing explains what Australia must do to successfully co-host COP31 with Pacific nations. The Australian Government has made clear it wants COP31 to be a truly Pacific COP. It has also made a commitment to elevate First Nations voices and priorities.

If it's to become a catalyst for stronger global action, the Australian Government will need to start championing the phase out of coal, oil and gas, in both its words and actions. It will also need to get squarely behind other long-standing regional priorities, such as funding to address loss and damage from climate impacts.

ADDING FUEL TO THE FIRE: AUSTRALIA Vs THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The United Nations' (UN) annual climate summit will this year be hosted by a major oil exporter - the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In the lead up to this year's climate talks, there has been a lot of focus on the fact that the president of the summit negotiations - UAE's Sultan Al Jaber - is also chief executive of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company.

Observers worry this dual role will influence the agenda for this year's climate conference and make it harder to progress negotiations to phase out fossil fuels, which are the chief cause of the climate crisis. Some have called it a clear conflict of interest, with the COP President in charge of a major corporation that profits from selling a product that worsens the very crisis that the summit is designed to address.

The UAE is not the only nation adding fuel to the fire. Australia produces nearly twice the amount of fossil fuels that the UAE does. We export nearly three times' as much fossil fuels (UNEP 2023a). At a time when the climate crisis is dramatically escalating - and coal, oil and gas need to be rapidly phased out - both countries are planning to *increase* fossil fuel production.

Under the UN 2015 Paris Agreement, all countries agreed to work together to limit global warming to 1.5°C above the long term average. Plans by Australia and the UAE to increase fossil fuel production are utterly incompatible with this goal (UNEP 2023a).

Australia continues to fuel the climate crisis through its enormous fossil fuel exports. Australia is the world's fifth largest overall producer of coal and seventh biggest producer of gas (UNEP 2023a). Most of this is not needed for our own energy needs, and is sold offshore. That's why Australia is the world's third largest fossil fuel exporter. Emissions from Australian coal and gas burned in other countries are more than double our domestic emissions (Climate Council 2022).

Phasing out coal, oil and gas is central to tackling the climate crisis. In October, the Climate Council surveyed a group of 30 leading climate and ocean scientists from six countries on their views on the current state of global climate action. Every single scientist surveyed (100%) said that global efforts to address the climate crisis are falling short, with a majority (60%) saying that today's efforts are falling "catastrophically short" of what is required.¹

Scientists ranked "rapidly phasing out fossil fuels" as the single most important action governments could take to address global warming. Unfortunately, they also feel it is an uphill battle because 93% think fossil fuel corporations have the ear of governments. By contrast, 60% of those surveyed said governments are mostly not, or not at all, listening to the scientific community.

To limit global warming and avoid the worst impacts of the climate crisis, governments worldwide need to stop expanding fossil fuel production and develop policy frameworks to manage a rapid phase out of coal, oil and gas. To be a successful host of COP31 in 2026 - in partnership with Pacific island countries - Australia needs to have stopped adding fuel to the fire by approving new coal and gas projects, and must be well on the way to phasing out fossil fuels.

¹ In October 2023 Climate Council undertook a survey of climate and oceans scientists, which asked for their views on the efforts of countries to tackle climate change. See Appendix for details.



HOW POLLUTING IS AUSTRALIA Vs THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES?

Every year, Australia exports almost three times as much fossil fuels as United Arab Emirates.

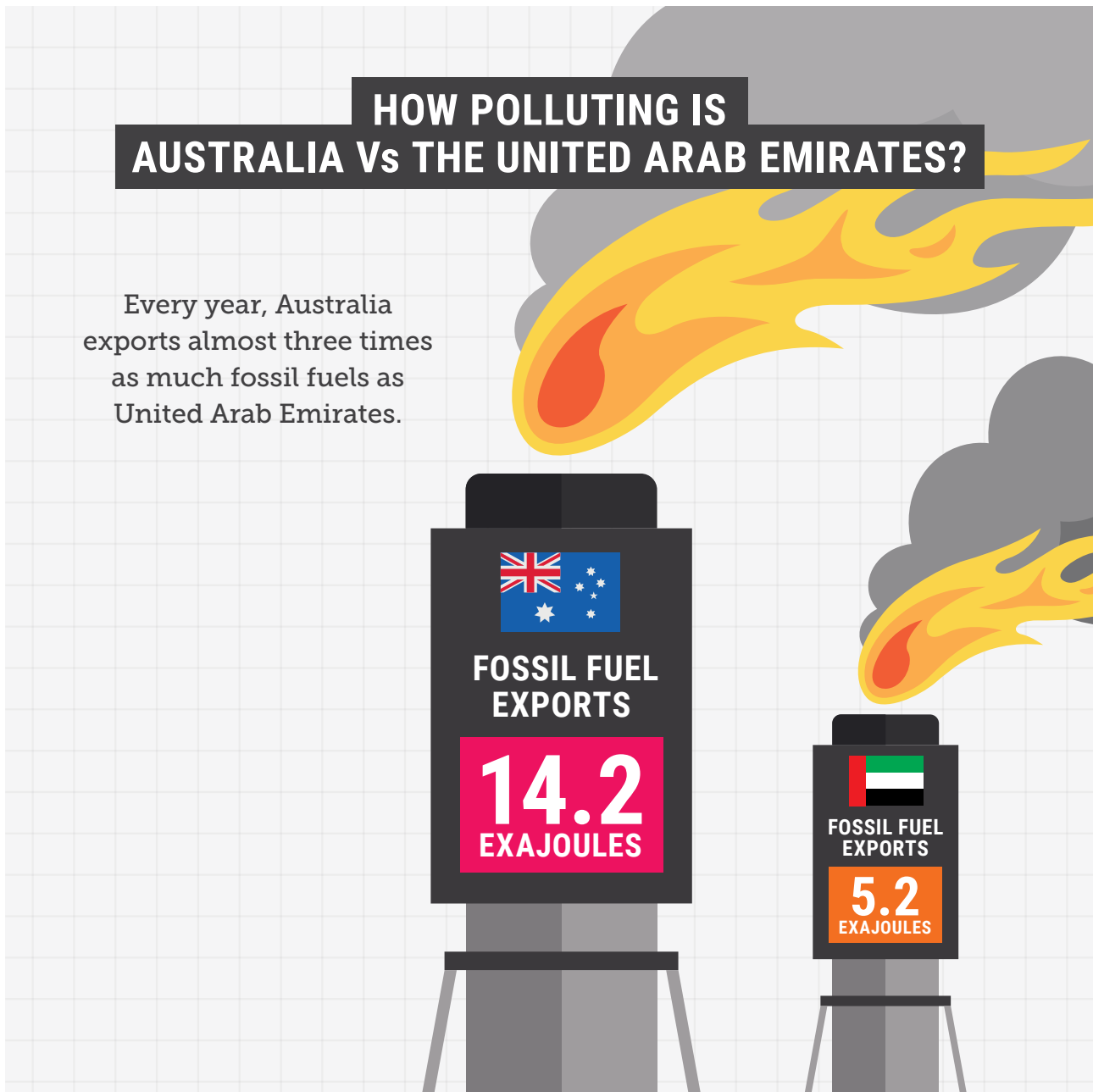


Figure 1: United Arab Emirates is a major exporter of oil, while Australia is a major exporter of coal and gas. Overall, in terms of energy content, Australia exports nearly three times as much fossil fuels as UAE (1 exajoule = 1×10^{18} joules). (Source: UNEP 2023a).

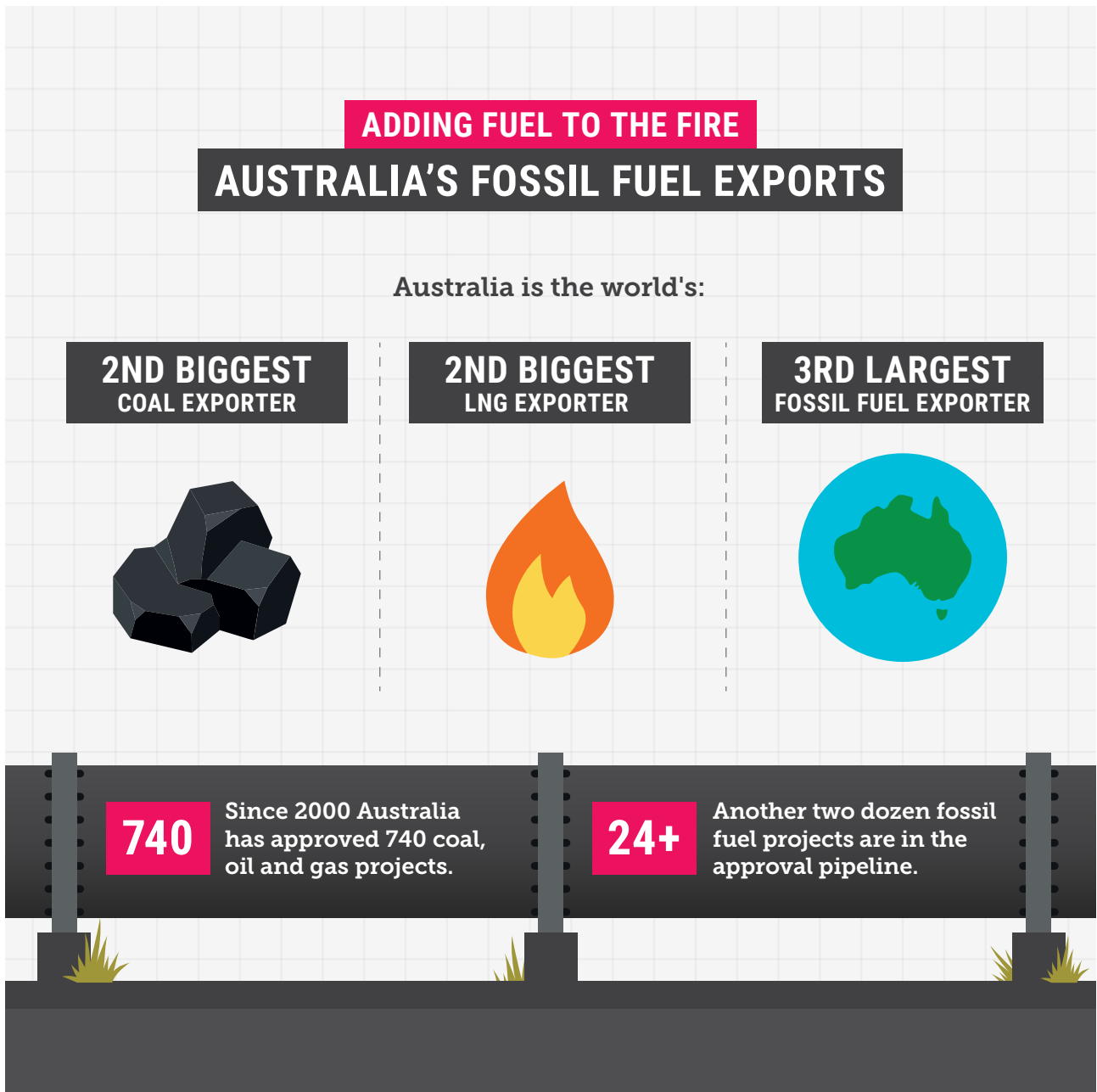


Figure 2: Australia continues to fuel the climate crisis through enormous coal and gas exports. (Sources: UNEP 2023a, Geoscience Australia 2023).



THE GLOBAL PICTURE: FIVE MAJOR SHIFTS IN 2023

The year since COP27 in Egypt has been marked by a frightening escalation in climate impacts upon communities worldwide, as well as by some seismic shifts in the world's energy transition.

In this section we highlight five of the most important developments in the lead-up to COP28 in Dubai.

Figure 3: Over 100 people perished when the town of Lahaina (Maui) was destroyed by fire. From deadly fires and heat to catastrophic floods, the 2023 Northern Hemisphere summer saw a tragic run of extreme weather disasters.



1. A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER: 2023 SET TO BE HOTTEST ON RECORD

Many climate records tumbled this year and, in many cases, the margins by which records were broken have themselves set records.

July and August each registered as among the two hottest months ever recorded globally. September continued the streak of new monthly temperature records, breaking the previous September record by a whopping 0.5°C, and coming in at 1.75°C warmer than the estimated average September temperature during the pre-industrial period (Copernicus Climate Change Service 2023a).² 2023 is almost certain to be the hottest year ever recorded, with the grim prospect that 2024 will be even hotter (Copernicus Climate Change Service 2023b).

Away from land, 2023 also saw sea surface temperatures heading into uncharted territory. Daily sea surface temperatures were broken for more than 200 days in a row (Climate Council 2023b). At the same time, sea ice around Antarctica was extraordinarily slow to refreeze after the southern hemisphere summer. By late June, the total area of sea ice was 1.33 million km² below the previous record low for that time of year. For perspective, that is around 20 times the size of Tasmania. These and other concerning changes in our ocean are starting to outpace what models had predicted, with climate and ocean scientists deeply worried (Climate Council 2023b).

Along with record land and sea temperatures, 2023 has delivered a terrifying run of extreme weather disasters, including intense heatwaves across North America, southern Europe and western China, and severe floods in eastern China, north India and South Korea. Canada suffered by far its worst fire season on record; a disaster on the scale of Australia's 2019-20 Black Summer. Over 100 people perished in Maui (Hawaii) when a ferocious fire - made worse by climate change - destroyed the town of Lahaina.

² Note that breaching 1.5°C over a single month or year 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). This goal is based on temperatures averaged over 20 or 30 years. (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.)

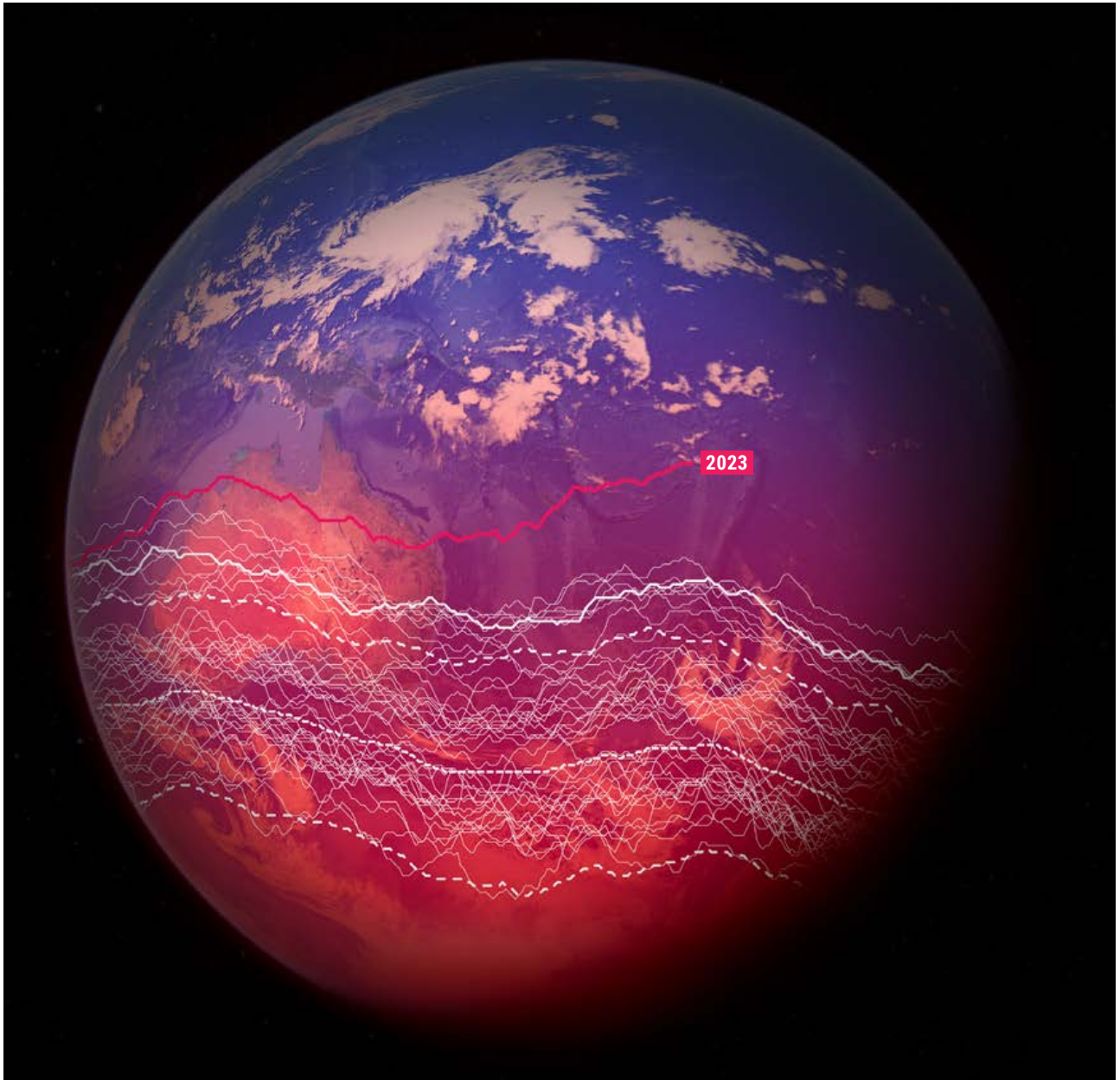


Figure 4: 2023 saw ocean temperatures enter uncharted territory. Daily sea surface temperatures were broken for more than 200 days in a row.

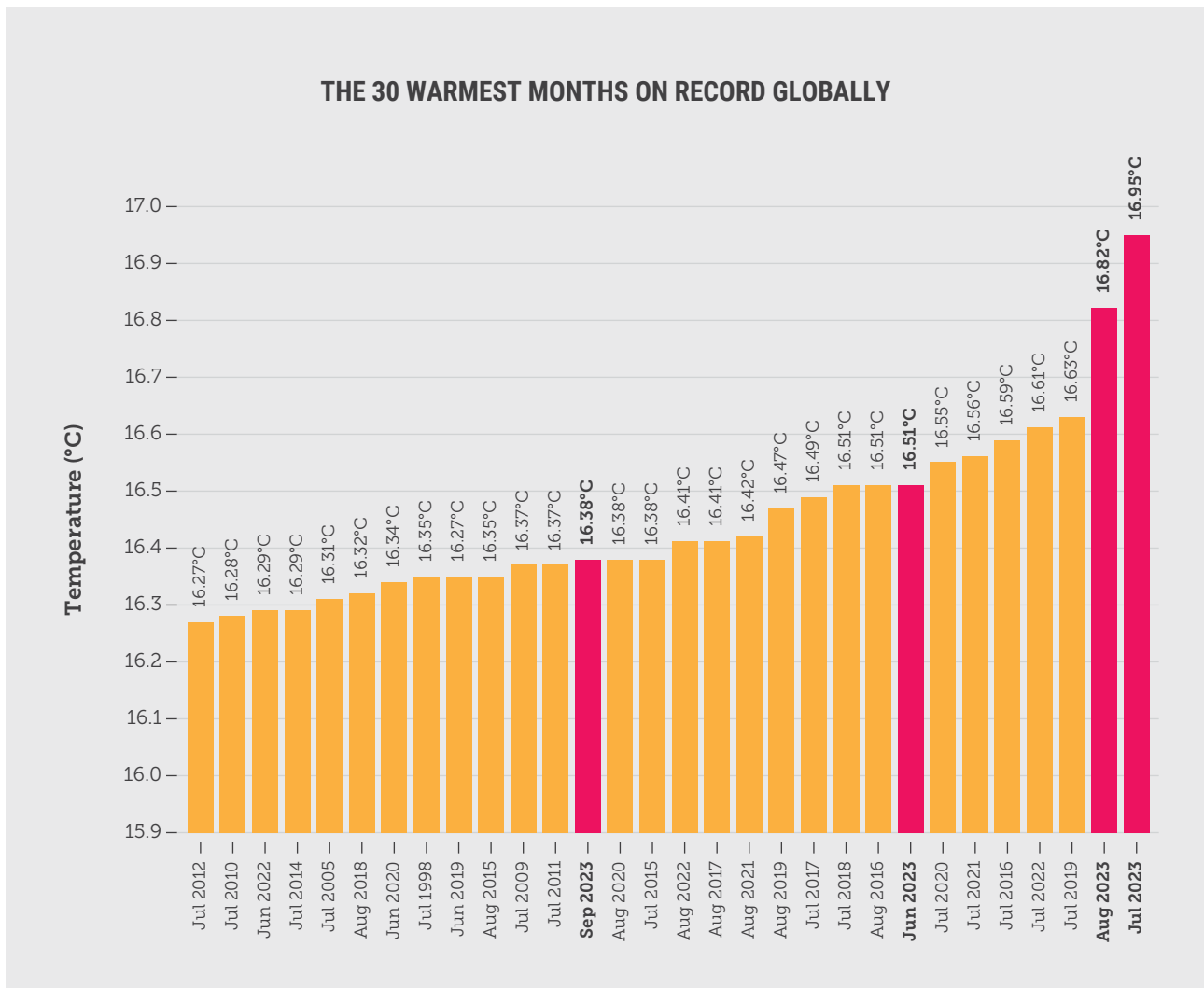


Figure 5: The 30 warmest months on record globally with months from 2023 highlighted in pink. Adapted from Copernicus Climate Change Service 2023a.

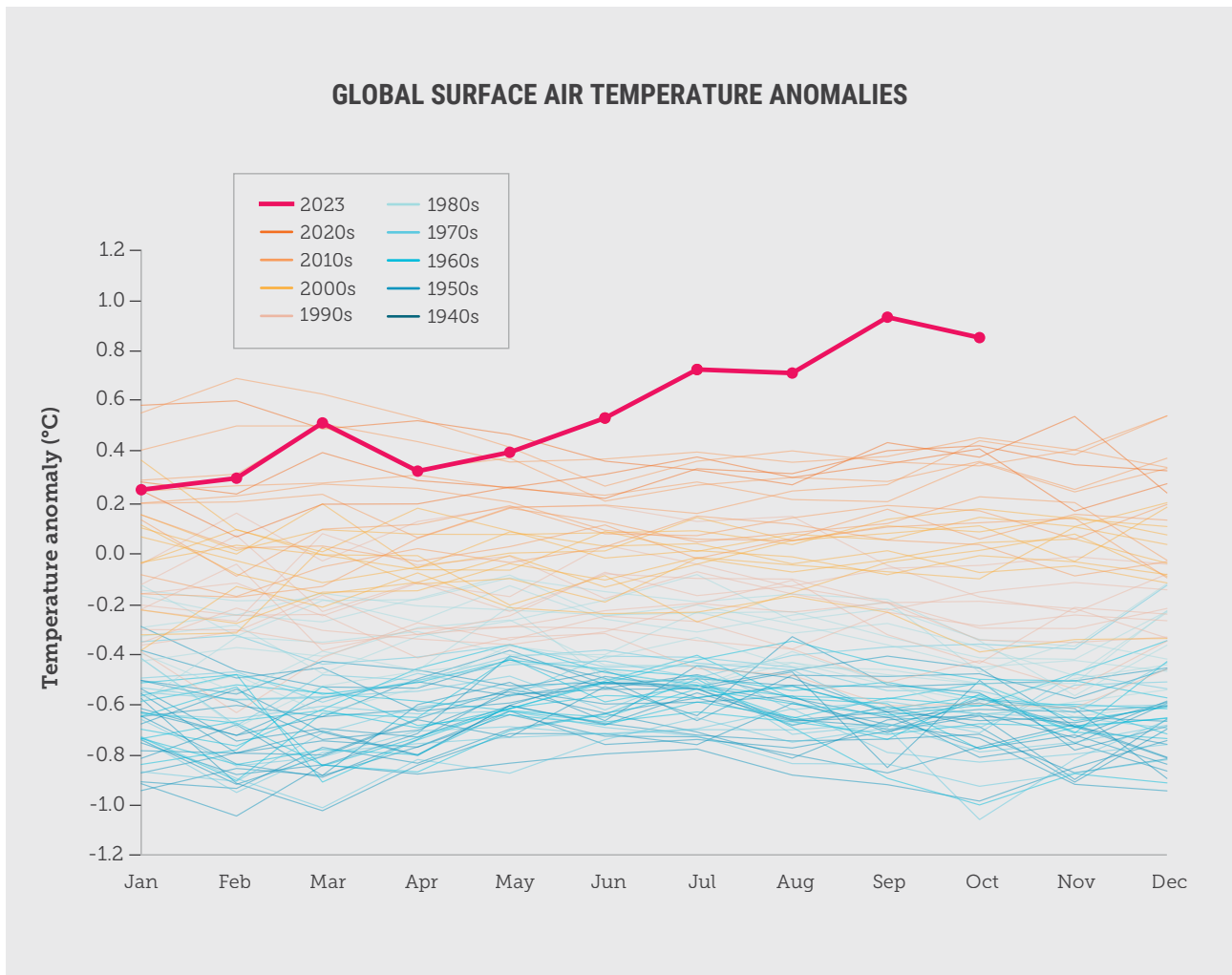


Figure 6: Monthly global surface air temperature anomalies (°C) from 1940 to 2023, relative to 1991–2020. 2023 is on track to be the hottest year on record. *Adapted from Copernicus Climate Change Service 2023b.*

2. THE USE OF COAL, OIL AND GAS IS ABOUT TO PEAK, WITH THE CLEAN ENERGY REVOLUTION WELL UNDERWAY

We now have the developed technologies needed to shift rapidly away from coal, oil and gas, including solar and wind energy, batteries and electric vehicles. As major economies invest in clean energy industries and consumers shift to clean energy technologies, demand for coal, oil and gas is expected to diminish. The International Energy Agency's 2023 *World Energy Outlook* report predicts that global demand

for coal, oil and gas will peak before the end of this decade (IEA 2023). Based on existing market trends, the world's leading energy agency now warns there is a risk of over investment in fossil fuels (Evans and Viisainen 2023). New analysis from Climate Analytics suggests fossil fuel demand may peak even earlier - before 2025 (Fyson et al. 2023).

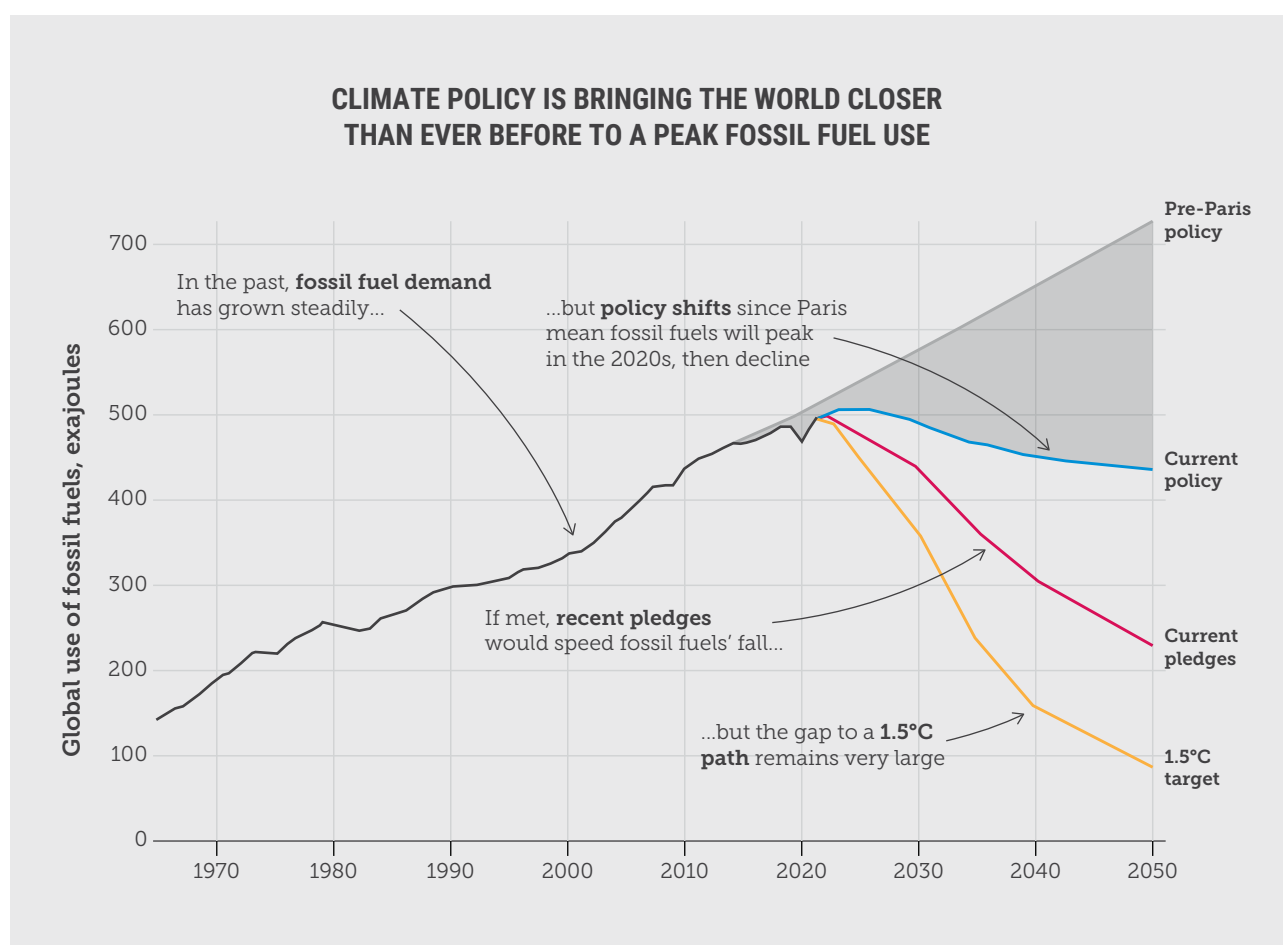


Figure 7: Maturing clean energy technologies and policy shifts since the 2015 Paris Agreement will result in demand for fossil fuels peaking before 2030 and declining. If they are met, recent country pledges would speed up this decline. However, governments need to do more than meet all their existing climate pledges to limit warming to 1.5°C. Adapted from IEA 2023; Evans and Viisainen 2023.



3. SOLAR SET TO DOMINATE GLOBAL POWER GRIDS

Electricity from renewable sources is already cheaper than fossil fuels and nuclear power in almost every country, even after accounting for storage costs (IRENA 2022; Nijjse et al. 2023). Today, wind power remains the cheapest option in a majority of regions, but it's about to be surpassed by solar. By 2027, solar energy – already the cheapest way to generate electricity here in Australia – is set to be the cheapest everywhere but northern Europe (Nijjse et al. 2023).

A solar-dominated future will create intense demand for solar photovoltaic (PV) panels. Australia is already a hub of solar PV expertise and innovation, and a producer of many of the raw materials in solar panels (ARENA 2023). Overall though, China continues to dominate the manufacturing of solar panels, producing more than 80 percent of the world's supply (IEA 2022).

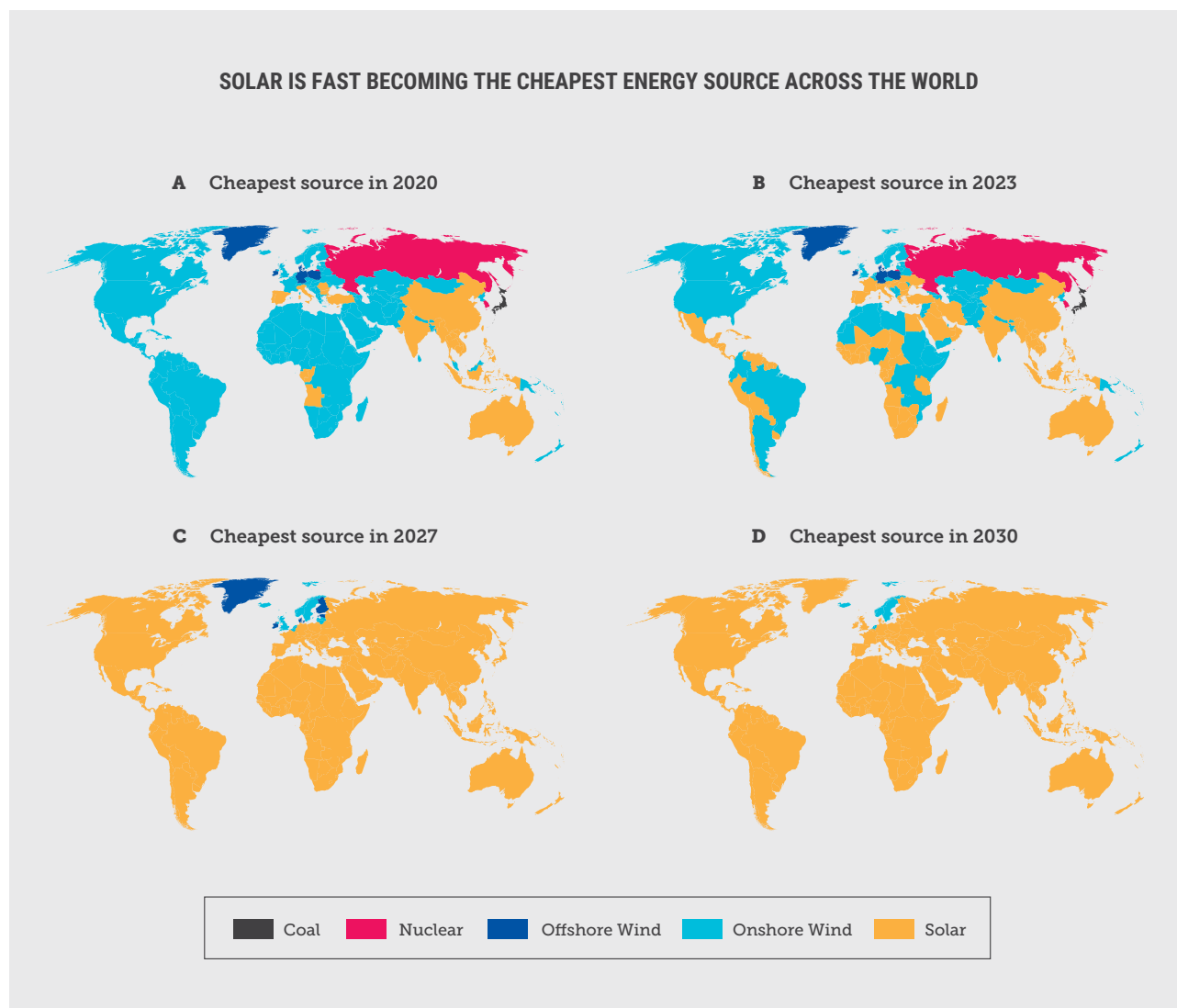


Figure 8: Already the cheapest way to get electricity in many countries, including Australia, solar will be cheapest almost everywhere by 2027. Adapted from (Nijjse et al. 2023).

“To achieve net zero, the world needs more reliable supply chains to meet surging demand for solar panels and Australia has what it takes to be a major supplier.”

— Hon Chris Bowen MP, Minister for Climate Change and Energy (cited in ARENA 2023)

Figure 9: Solar energy is already the cheapest form of electricity in Australia, and will soon be the cheapest almost everywhere.





4. A NEW ERA FOR TRANSPORT AS ELECTRIC CARS TAKE OFF

Sales of electric vehicles (EVs) are taking off in Australia, and booming worldwide. In the first six months of 2023, the number of electric vehicles sold in Australia was well above the total for all of 2022. EVs now make up 8.4 percent of all new cars sold in Australia – more than double the sales in 2022, and around a 400-fold increase over the past decade (Electric Vehicle Council 2023).

Importantly, 2023 saw sales of EVs in Australia pass what looks to be an important tipping point. For most successful new technologies, such as microwaves or smartphones, the rate of uptake tends to follow an S-curve: after a period of slow uptake during what's known as the 'early adopter' phase, there comes a point at which many more people starting buying a new product and sales skyrocket, before levelling off again after almost everyone has made the switch.

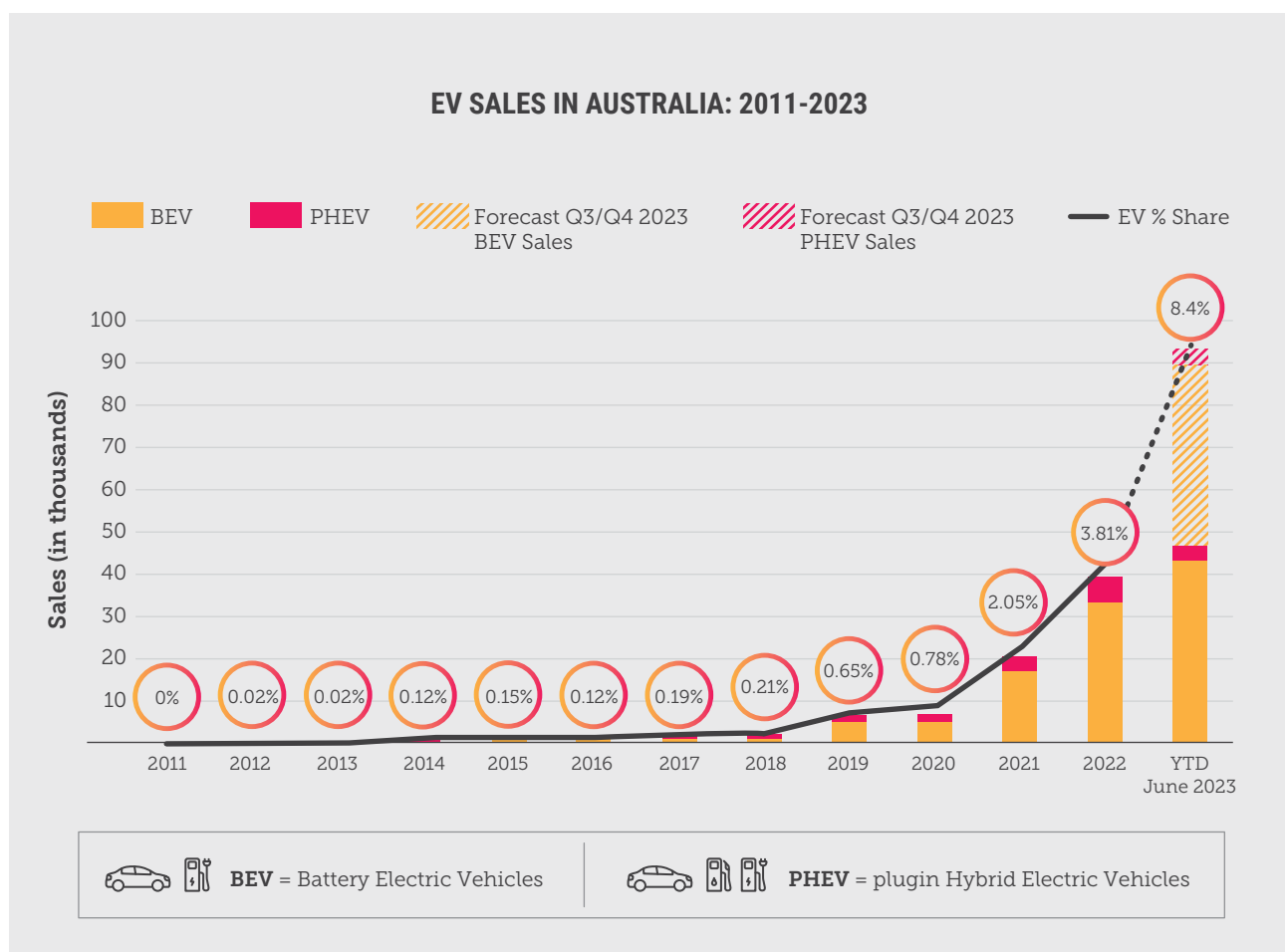


Figure 10: In 2023, electric vehicle sales in 2023 reached 8.4 percent - more than double the rate in 2022. Australia has now crossed the 5 percent 'tipping point' for electric vehicles, which heralds a rapid acceleration in uptake. *Adapted from Electric Vehicle Council 2023.*

Data from other countries demonstrates that once EV sales surpass 5 percent, it sparks a rapid acceleration in sales. In 2023, Australia joined 22 other countries which passed this all important acceleration point (Bloomberg 2023). China and the US - the two biggest car markets in the world - reached this mark in 2018 and 2021 respectively.

While an encouraging trend, EV sales are just one indicator of progress that needs to be made in decarbonising transport. We also need to greatly improve the infrastructure for active and public transport (Climate Council 2023a).

Figure 11: The rate of electric vehicle sales in Australia has doubled since last year.





5. SURGING INVESTMENT AND COMPETITION FOR CLEAN ENERGY INDUSTRIES

Over the past 12 months, surging investment in clean energy industries in the United States - sparked by the country's *2022 Inflation Reduction Act* (IRA) - has turbo-charged the global energy transition.

The largest climate spend in American history, the IRA allocates AU\$520 billion - that's around a quarter of Australia's entire GDP - to stimulate investment in renewable energy infrastructure and new solar, battery and electric vehicle manufacturing facilities. More than 270 clean energy projects were announced across 44 US states in the first year since the IRA was passed, representing more than AU\$400 billion in private sector investment with the potential to create 175,000 new jobs (Goldman Sachs 2023).

When the world's largest economy makes such a decisive move, it changes the game for everyone. The IRA has encouraged other major economies to increase clean energy spending, including government stimulus packages from the European Union, Japan and Korea. Australia will need to respond with targeted stimulus and policy initiatives to develop our own green export industries and replace exported fossil fuels (Climate Council 2023). The Australian Government has flagged that the 2024 federal budget will deliver a significant package of green industry initiatives, with targeted support for key industries like critical minerals, battery manufacturing, renewable hydrogen and ammonia, and green metals (Chalmers 2023).

WHAT WE CAN EXPECT AT COP28

A Conference of Parties (COP) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) consists of literally dozens of negotiating streams that aim to advance cooperation across a particular area of climate action: from phasing out fossil fuels and ramping up renewable energy, to working out how to support the world's most vulnerable countries to best cope with climate impacts.

It can be a painfully slow process, with all decisions being reached by consensus, and negotiations mired by long-standing divisions over matters such as a country's relative historical responsibility for climate change, and who should pay for the action required.

Nevertheless, agreed outcomes from the annual climate talks are powerful, because they set a shared agenda for all countries to work together to address the climate crisis and manage the switch to a net zero emissions global economy.

While there will be many issues up for negotiation, each COP has a handful of key areas where progress needs to be made and decisions reached. Here are some of the big ticket items for COP28.

Figure 12: Sultan Al Jaber is both President of COP28 and Chief Executive of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company.





A GLOBAL STOCKTAKE

Top of the agenda for COP28 is a stocktake of global progress against the goals of the Paris Agreement. The outcome of this stocktake will shape expectations for all countries - including Australia - to set stronger, national targets to cut emissions.

The 2015 Paris Agreement is the centrepiece of global cooperation on climate change. Under the agreement, all countries are required to set national targets to cut emissions, and to increase those targets every five years. The next round of national commitments are due in 2025. Ahead of setting new national targets, the Paris Agreement mandates that there will be a stocktake of global progress. The first of these global stocktakes will be completed in Dubai.

The global stocktake contains a technical aspect and a political one. The technical phase resulted in a synthesis report - released in September - which found countries had made significant progress since 2015 but were falling well short of the scale of action required to limit warming to as close as possible to 1.5°C. There is a "rapidly closing window" to meet that goal. It requires global emissions to peak by 2025 and rapidly decline after that. The synthesis report also says that meeting the Paris temperature goal will require "phasing out unabated fossil fuels" (UNFCCC 2023).

The political phase of the global stocktake will culminate in Dubai with a decision or declaration on what needs to be done next, with discussion likely to focus on accelerating the roll-out of renewable sources of energy like solar and wind and phasing out fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas.

Australia will need to take into account the outcomes of the global stocktake when setting our next national emissions target. To meet Paris Agreement commitments, Australia will set a new, higher, target as part of our next Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), which will be submitted to the UN in 2025 (DCCEEW 2023). This next NDC will need to set a target for cuts to emissions by 2035.³ This will likely be a major point of discussion ahead of Australia's next federal election, which is due before May 2025. The Climate Council's position is that Australia should be aiming to achieve net zero emissions by 2035 (Climate Council 2023c).

"The global stocktake synthesis report is a report card of our collective climate action. And not a good one. COP28 is our chance to make a dramatic course correction. Let's seize that chance."

- Simon Stiell, UN Climate Change Executive Secretary

³ At COP26 in 2021, countries agreed that there should be common timeframes for Nationally Determined Contributions and countries were encouraged "to communicate in 2025 a nationally determined contribution with an end date of 2035" (UNFCCC 2021).

TRIPLING RENEWABLES BY 2030

A likely headline outcome of COP28 will be an international pledge to triple global renewables capacity by 2030, and double energy efficiency by the end of the decade.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) says that renewable energy capacity must be tripled by 2030 to keep the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C temperature goal "within reach" (IEA 2023a). The UAE COP28 Presidency is supportive of this goal, and has partnered with the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) to urge countries to triple clean energy capacity by 2030 (IRENA 2023).

More than 60 countries, including Australia, have said they will back a draft pledge - spearheaded by the United States, European Union and the UAE - to triple renewables capacity by 2030 (Reuters 2023). Negotiations are ongoing with major developing economies like China and India. In September, G20 nations - including Australia, the United States, China and India - committed to triple renewables capacity by 2030 - providing a strong indication this will be a headline outcome from COP28.

Expanding renewables capacity on this scale would avoid around 7 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions between 2023 and 2030 - the equivalent of eliminating all current CO₂ emissions from China's power sector (IEA 2023a).

PHASING OUT FOSSIL FUELS

As well as accelerating the build out of renewables, a growing number of countries are calling for a global phase out of fossil fuels to be part of the decisions made at COP28.

At COP26 in 2021 countries agreed they would "accelerate efforts towards the phasedown of unabated coal power". This was the first time in decades of climate negotiations that a COP decision referred to any type of fossil fuel - which is striking in itself given that emissions from burning coal, oil and gas are the primary cause of climate change.

At COP27 last year, a coalition of more than 80 countries - including the EU, the US and India - pressed for the decision on coal to be broadened to a global phaseout of all fossil fuels (Green and van Asselt 2022). This did not make it to the final outcomes, but the broad support among countries suggests pressure for a fossil fuel phaseout is growing.

Ahead of the COP28 discussions, many countries are again calling for a fossil fuel phaseout - rightly arguing that global targets on renewables and energy efficiency should be paired with a commitment to phase out fossil fuel production and consumption. European countries have agreed to call for a phaseout of fossil fuels at COP28, after EU climate negotiators agreed to a common negotiating position in October (Reuters 2023a). Members of the High Ambition Coalition - a group of developed and developing countries that were important for securing the Paris Agreement - have similarly joined the call (HAC 2023). Some of Australia's Pacific island neighbours - including Tuvalu, which recently signed a climate mobility arrangement with Australia - are also calling at COP28 for a phase out of fossil fuels.

ADDRESSING LOSS AND DAMAGE

COP27 in Egypt last year ended with an historic breakthrough on the issue of addressing loss and damage from the impacts of climate change. After marathon negotiations, nations agreed to establish a new fund to address loss and damage, particularly for nations most vulnerable to the climate crisis.

Delegates at COP28 must now make practical arrangements to ensure this fund gets up running - including by deciding where the money should come from, which countries are eligible for support, and how they will access the funding.

A Transitional Committee on Loss and Damage has met five times over the year to develop a set of recommendations to be considered at COP28 for operationalising the fund.

We can expect loss and damage to again be one of the most contested issues at the COP. Vulnerable countries, including Pacific island nations, will be determined to ensure that the summit in Dubai succeeds in bringing to life the historic agreement on loss and damage that was so hard won this time last year.



Figure 13: A warming ocean provides more energy for tropical storms. Over the past decade Pacific island nations have been struck by a string of Category 5 Severe Tropical Cyclones that have killed dozens, left tens of thousands of people in emergency shelters, decimated food crops, and crippled sorely needed infrastructure.

CO-HOSTING COP31 WITH THE PACIFIC: WHAT AUSTRALIA MUST DO TO BE A TRUE CLIMATE LEADER

Australia is aspiring to be the host (President) of COP31 in 2026, in partnership with the Pacific.

However, nations are yet to agree on who will host next year's UN climate talks, which are scheduled to be held in Eastern Europe. A decision could be difficult amid geopolitical tensions in the region which could make it difficult for Australia and the Pacific to confirm they have secured the 2026 event by the end of COP28 in Dubai (Graeber 2023). The Australian Government - represented at COP28 by Ministers Chris Bowen and Jenny McAllister - will be working hard to shore up further support.

Following a lost decade, during which Australia became a global climate pariah, the Albanese Government has taken some positive steps including legislating a stronger 2030 emissions reduction target and passing legislation that requires big industrial facilities to start reducing their emissions through the Safeguard Mechanism. These modest steps have gone some way to repairing Australia's international reputation. However, we remain a major fossil fuel exporter and in the eyes of the global community have a lot of catching up to do when it comes to meaningful climate action.

So what would it look like for Australia to act in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement, and match the scale of transformation that the climate crisis demands?

Here are four key areas we must work on:

1. PLAN TO ACHIEVE NET ZERO BY 2035

Under the Paris Agreement, all countries are committed to holding warming to well below 2°C, and pursuing efforts to limit warming to 1.5°C. The latest science reaffirms the extreme dangers of warming beyond 1.5°C, and why every step we take to reduce pollution from coal, oil and gas helps secure our future.

Achieving this goal is the responsibility of all countries collectively. However, each country's 'Nationally Determined Contributions' (NDCs) towards the Paris Agreement should reflect their relative responsibility for the crisis, their capability to act, and their particular national circumstances. Moreover, every NDC must reflect each country's 'highest possible ambition'.

Based on a careful assessment of the latest science, and factoring in Australia's historical responsibility for climate change, our economic capability, and our natural advantages in renewable energy, the Climate Council has assessed that Australia should aim to reduce its emissions by 75 percent below 2005 levels by 2030 and reach net zero by 2035 (Climate Council 2023c). This is a mammoth task that requires the very best of all of us.



2. REFORM OUR NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT LAWS TO PREVENT NEW FOSSIL FUEL DEVELOPMENTS

Every new coal, oil or gas development increases the chances of crossing dangerous tipping points in the climate system, and endangers all of us.

Nonetheless, and in the face of ever more dire warnings from the world's scientists, the Australian Government keeps approving new fossil fuel projects. In fact since our national environmental law (Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act) came into effect in 2000, 740 fossil fuel projects have been given the green light (Climate Council 2023d).

The Australian Government must urgently fix our national environment law to put climate at its heart. This means setting the law up to say 'yes' to responsible projects in clean energy and green manufacturing, and 'no' to projects that harm us and our precious environment, and worsen climate change.

3. HELP COMMUNITIES ADAPT, AND ADDRESS LOSS AND DAMAGE

Australians are no strangers to climate-fuelled disasters, with over 80 percent of us having experienced some form of extreme weather disaster since 2019 (Climate Council 2023e). Government support is essential to help communities, both here and overseas, build resilience to the impacts of climate change already underway, recover from extreme weather disasters, and address loss and damage.

The latest *Adaptation Gap Report* from the UN Environment Program has highlighted the large and growing gap between the funding and action needed to protect vulnerable communities from worsening storms, fires, floods and droughts, and what is being delivered (UNEP 2023b). Achieving a rapid phase out of fossil fuels globally, and a tripling of renewable energy capacity, will also require a significant increase in financial support to developing countries in the Global South (Sieber 2023).

The Australian Government recently upped its overall contribution to international climate finance to AU\$3 billion over 2021-2025, restarted contributions to the Green Climate Fund, and announced contributions to the Pacific Climate Infrastructure Financing Partnership and the Pacific Resilience Facility - two initiatives designed to support Australia's island neighbours.

Notably, when it comes to climate finance, Australia provides grants, rather than loans, which is an important way to ensure countries are not saddled with future debt. Australia also prioritises funding that will support vulnerable communities to build resilience so they can better weather the impact of climate change. Globally, very little climate finance is allocated to adaptation and resilience-building, so Australia's contributions in this regard are positive.

There is, however, much more Australia should do to contribute its fair share towards a longstanding commitment from developed countries to mobilise US\$100 billion a year. To fulfil its commitments under the Paris Agreement, Australia will need to substantially step up its contributions to international climate finance. This should include making a pledge to the new loss and damage fund so it starts on a strong footing.

4. WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PACIFIC NATIONS TO SHAPE THE GLOBAL CLIMATE RESPONSE

Hosting COP31 in partnership with Pacific island countries is a chance for Australia to work with Pacific nations to address their key security challenge: climate change; and could help reaffirm Australia's place as a security partner of choice for the region. Pacific nations consider climate change their greatest threat (Pacific Islands Forum 2018; 2022) with sea level rise, stronger cyclones, marine heatwaves and ocean acidification posing existential threats to many islands - but especially for low-lying atoll nations like Kiribati and Tuvalu.

Pacific nations have led the way on climate action for decades. Pacific diplomats played an important role in helping to secure the 2015 Paris Agreement.

Today, Pacific island countries are spearheading a campaign to phase out coal, oil and gas. At the regional level, Pacific leaders have agreed to establish a new Energy Commissioner for a Just Transition to a Fossil Fuel Free Pacific (Pacific Islands Forum 2023a). At the global level, Pacific countries are leading a diplomatic campaign for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty that would help to govern the end of fossil fuel expansion and facilitate an equitable phase out of fossil fuels (Regenvanu and Paeniu 2023).

Australian climate minister Chris Bowen has told his Pacific counterparts he wants COP31 to be "truly and genuinely a Pacific COP". He told the media in Fiji: "I want people to leave COP31, if Australia hosts it, saying, 'wow, that really was a Pacific COP'" (Bowen 2023). For their part, Pacific leaders have formally welcomed Australia's bid to host COP31 and have said they will advocate for the joint bid together (Pacific Islands Forum 2023). However, Pacific countries also expect Australia to do more to move away from fossil fuels, and to work with them to accelerate a global phase out of coal, oil and gas. This is key to the survival of Pacific nations.

The COP31 summit will be held in the middle of this make-or-break decade for climate action. Countries are expected to bring new 2035 targets to COP30 negotiations in Brazil, but it is unlikely that these targets will collectively be ambitious enough. Australia and the Pacific will need to shape an agenda for COP31 that drives the course correction needed to limit warming to as close to 1.5°C as possible.

Figure 14: COP28 will see a large contingent of representatives from Australian and Pacific civil society, including First Nations-led organisations.





CONCLUSION

As the world comes together at COP28, many will be closely scrutinising what Australia brings to the negotiating table. How Australia shows up at COP28 will send a clear signal to international partners about our intent as a future COP president.

To be a successful host of the UN climate talks in three years' time, Australia will need to stop adding fuel to the fire by approving new fossil fuel projects, and must plan for a managed phase out of coal, oil and gas.

As Australia enters a dangerous, hot summer ahead, the impetus at home to address the root cause of the climate crisis - the burning of coal, oil and gas - will only escalate. And with additional pressure from our Pacific neighbours to back up political rhetoric with policy substance, it is an ideal time for Australia's leaders to take decisive action.

If we align our actions with our ambition to host COP31, Australia can emerge from COP28 as a beacon of hope for communities in Australia and the Pacific facing the brunt of the climate crisis.



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IMAGE CREDITS

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APPENDIX

A highly targeted online survey was designed by the Climate Council research team in consultation with climate scientists and distributed to climate and oceans scientists between the 27 September and 10 October, 2023.

It was delivered online via SurveyMonkey.

The survey attracted 30 responses from scientists in five regions: Australia (16), the USA (4), the UK (7), New Zealand (2), and the Pacific (1).

Many of these experts are from leading academic institutions, like Princeton University, CSIRO, the Bureau of Meteorology, University of Queensland, Macquarie University, University of Tasmania, University of Exeter, James Cook University, to name a few.

This survey included questions about the efforts of countries to tackle climate change. The survey questions - and responses - that are referred to in this COP28 briefing are as follows:

How would you describe global efforts to tackle the climate crisis?

- › On track: 0%
- › Falling a little short: 0%
- › Falling a long way short: 40%
- › Catastrophically short: 60%
- › Don't know/outside my area of expertise: 0%

Do you believe Governments are listening to the scientific community about warming?

- › Yes - to a large degree: 0%
- › Yes - to some extent: 40%
- › Unsure/don't know: 0%
- › No - mostly not: 60%
- › No - not at all: 0%
- › Don't know/outside my area of expertise: 0%

Do you believe Governments are listening to the fossil fuel lobby?

- › Yes - to a large degree: 66.67%
- › Yes - to some extent: 20%
- › Unsure/don't know: 6.67%
- › No - mostly not: 6.67%
- › No - not at all: 0%
- › Don't know/outside my area of expertise: 0%

The Climate Council is an independent, crowd-funded organisation providing quality information on climate change to the Australian public.

The Climate Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we live, meet and work. We wish to pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and recognise the continuous connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country.

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