

New Analysis: The Albanese Government's fossil fuel approvals

Despite championing climate action during the 2025 Federal Election, one of the re-elected Albanese Government's first acts was the proposed approval of a 45 year extension of Woodside's North West Shelf gas export project – Australia's second most polluting fossil fuel extraction project.

Now, as the Albanese Government prepares to set Australia's pivotal 2035 climate target, it has once again facilitated a flurry of fossil fuel developments.

Table: Fossil fuel projects approved during the Albanese Government's second term.

Date	Project	Time frame	Status	Estimated lifetime emissions ¹
28 May	Extending a major gas export project : Woodside's North West Shelf gas export extension.	Until 2070	<i>Proposed approval</i>	3,955 Mt CO ₂ -e
7 July	New offshore gas extraction near Victoria's Otways: Cooper's East Coast Supply Project	Until 2045	Approved	41 Mt CO ₂ -e
27 Aug	A major gas export project off the WA coast: Woodside's Goodwyn Area Infill Development	Until 2040	Approved	102 Mt CO ₂ -e
28 Aug	Expanding a thermal coal mine: Glencore's Ulan Coal Modification 6	Until 2035	Approved	42 Mt CO ₂ -e
Total climate pollution:				4.14 billion tonnes CO₂-e ~9.5 times Australia's current annual emissions

In their first term, the Albanese Government approved 27 new coal, oil and gas developments. The four approvals this term brings the total to 31.

Lifetime pollution from these 31 projects, directly and from combustion of the coal and gas they produce, is expected to exceed 6.5 billion tonnes of CO₂-e. That's equivalent to about one-eighth of [global annual emissions](#), about [15 years of Australia's current emissions](#), or 159 years of the emissions from all of Australia's cars and utes.

But there are even more projects seeking Federal government approval. There are currently 38 further new or expanded coal mines seeking Federal Government approvals, with a potential lifetime production of over 5.7 billion tonnes of product coal – equivalent to more

¹ Total emissions over approved project life in CO₂ equivalent terms. Estimates based on proponent documents – see appendix. Includes on-site emissions, emissions from coal or gas combustion in Australia and overseas, and other indirect emissions.

than 14 years of Australia's current coal production.² These projects present a substantial risk to achieving both Australia's climate targets and [global goals of keeping warming well below 2°C](#).

Australia's fossil fuel exports are a globally-significant source of pollution

Australia is the world's [third-largest fossil fuel exporter](#) based on energy content, and the second largest by climate pollution content. Each year, Australia [exports 2.5 tonnes of climate pollution](#) for every tonne of pollution released in Australia. These emissions – no matter where they're emitted – harm Australians by heating the global climate and exacerbating extreme weather events.

While most emissions from Australian fossil fuel projects occur overseas, these projects also represent a significant drag on Australia's domestic decarbonisation efforts. Fossil fuel extraction is one of Australia's most polluting sectors. Fossil fuel projects cause significant direct pollution, both from the diesel used for machinery and trucks, and the escape of 'fugitive' emissions previously locked in coal and gas deposits. In 2035 the sector is expected to emit [62 Mt CO₂-e](#), about 21% of our total emissions, or more than the emissions from every car, ute and truck in 2035.

A national target includes all sectors. If the fossil fuel export industry grows and takes up more of our national target, it means that other sectors need to do more work in meeting that target.

Impact on Australia's 2035 targets

Since forming government in 2022, the Albanese Government has approved coal, oil and gas projects which would **directly emit 12.8 million tonnes of climate pollution in 2035, or 9.8 million tonnes if expected on-site abatement occurs**.³ This pollution impact is [similar to all of Australia's domestic flights](#) in 2035, which are expected to release 11 million tonnes of pollution.

This excludes the emissions impact of five coal mines and four gas projects where proponent supplied emissions data could not be accessed. Disclosing expected emissions is not required under the current EPBC Act.

This pollution will have an impact on Australia's 2035 target. Currently, the target is expected to be set within a range of a 65% to 75% reduction on 2005 emissions, in-line with the Climate Change Authority's (CCA) interim advice. The climate pollution from these developments is equivalent to 1.6 to 2.1 percentage points in our eventual 2035 target.

Put simply, **the starting point for our 2035 emissions reduction target could be up to two percentage points higher** (i.e. closer to net zero), had the Albanese Government

² Black coal production, [Australian Energy Statistics 2024](#), Table i

³ On-site abatement is estimated based on current [DCCEEW](#) projections. By 2035, the Safeguard Mechanism is expected to incentivise reductions in direct emissions from oil and gas projects by 22.9%, and coal projects by 23.5% (including both fugitive emissions and on-site energy use). These projections are highly uncertain and based only on early post-reform data. Assuming this reduction applies homogeneously across relevant projects in 2035 would reduce the impact on 2035 emissions by 0.5 percentage points, to 1.6% of 2005 emissions.

followed [the clear scientific basis](#) and stopped approving new and extended fossil fuel production. The CCA has indicated it is considering its target advice on a [‘line-by-line’ basis](#), suggesting that the Albanese Government’s approvals are likely to weigh on its advice.

The Safeguard Mechanism doesn’t neutralise these emissions

The Albanese Government has often claimed that the climate impacts of new and expanded fossil fuel projects are managed under the Safeguard Mechanism, and therefore innocuous. In reality, the Safeguard Mechanism doesn’t address these project’s domestic emissions.

This analysis has included the impact of the Safeguard Mechanism, finding it would only **reduce the climate pollution released by these projects by less than one-quarter** in 2035. These new projects will **still represent more than 9.8 million tonnes of CO₂-e emissions in 2035**.

The Safeguard Mechanism does not properly address climate pollution from fossil fuel projects. In reality, it just requires projects to offset the share of their pollution which is above a certain ‘baseline’ level. It never requires projects to reduce their actual on-site emissions.

Australia’s climate laws do not govern project approvals. The Safeguard Mechanism only applies after a project is operating, and there is no federal law that allows a coal or gas project to be stopped because of its climate harm.

That’s why the Safeguard Mechanism cannot be used as a justification for approving fossil fuel projects. Every new coal and gas development adds more pollution — and more climate risk.

Appendix: Fossil fuel developments approved under the Albanese Government

Approved coal projects

Project	Type	Approval notes	Approval date	Proponent estimated 2035 emissions (‘000 tonnes CO ₂ e)	Approval source	Emissions source
Lake Vermont coal mine	Expansion	Approval extended to 2063	January 2023	Unknown	link	
Issac River coal mine	New	Approved with conditions	May 2023	Unknown	link	
Star coal mine	New	Approval not required	June 2023	Unknown	link	
Ensham coal mine	Expansion	Approved with conditions	July 2023	360	link	link
Gregory Crinum coal mine	Expansion	Approved with conditions	August 2023	Unknown	link	
Narrabri coal mine	Expansion	Approved with conditions	September 2023	1,360	link	link
Ashton and Ravensworth coal mine	Expansion	Approved with conditions	September 2024	174	link	link
Mount Pleasant coal mine	Expansion	Approved with conditions	September 2024	540	link	link
Caval Ridge coal mine	Expansion	Approved with conditions	December 2024	Unknown	link	
Boggabri coal mine	Expansion	Approved with conditions	December 2024	444	link	link
Lake Vermont Meadowbrook coal mine	Expansion	Approved with conditions	December 2024	445	link	link

Vulcan South coal mine	New	Approved with conditions	January 2025	107	link	link
Ulan Coal Modification 6 - Underground Mining Extension	Expansion	Approved with conditions	August 2025	49	link	link

Approved oil and gas projects

Project	Approval type	Type	Approval notes	Approval date	Proponent estimated 2035 emissions ('000 tonnes CO₂e)	Approval source	Emissions source
West Erregulla Field Development Program	Expanded extraction	Onshore conventional (2x new conventional wells)	EPBC approved with conditions	October 2024	Unknown	link	
Santos - Towrie	New extraction	Onshore - coal seam gas	EPBC approved with conditions	February 2023	Unknown	link	
Atlas Stage 3	New extraction	Onshore - coal seam gas	EPBC approved with conditions	June 2024	Unknown	link	
Santos - Dorado	New extraction	Offshore	Offshore project plan proposal	February 2023	732	link	link
Oil Field Carbon Capture Utilisation Storage (CCUS) Project (V2 04/07/2022)	Expanded extraction	Onshore (oil)	The Department determined this was not a controlled action, and therefore EPBC approval was not required, allowing the works to go ahead.	September 2022	Unknown	link	
Otway Offshore Gas Victoria Project	New extraction	Offshore	Offshore project proposal approved	April 2025	45	link	link

Woodside - North West Shelf (Karratha Gas Plant)	Extension	LNG processor	EPBC approval	May 2025	7,700	link	link
East Coast Supply Project OPP	New extraction	Offshore	Offshore project proposal approved	July 2025	41	link	link
Woodside – Goodwyn Area Infill Development OPP	New extraction	Offshore	Offshore project proposal approved	August 2025	53	link	link

Offshore exploration permits issued

[9 exploration permits](#) were issued by the Resources Minister:

- Esso (ExxonMobil): 3x Otway Basin, 1x Sorell Basin
- Beach Energy - 1x Otway Basin
- Chevron - 1x Northern Carnarvon Basin (WA)
- Melbana - 1x Northern Carnarvon Basin (WA)
- Woodside - 1x Northern Carnarvon Basin (WA)
- Inpex - 1x Bonaparte Basin (NT)