Greenhouse gas emissions

Emissions on the rise from Australia's largest climate polluters, data shows

Australian Conservation Foundation report shows a 3.2% jump in emissions by the country's biggest polluters despite Coalition's climate target claims

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The Australian Conservation Foundation has called on the federal government to 'close Australia's coal-fired power stations in phases'. Photograph: Meredith O'Shea for the Guardian

Australia's biggest climate polluters increased their emissions in the year to July 2015, according to the latest data from Australia's Clean Energy Regulator.

Some of those companies have themselves called for stronger government policy to curb emissions, including calls from AGL for the government to mandate that the oldest or dirtiest coal-fired power stations should be shut.



AGL boss: regardless of climate science, it's time to drop the 'emissions business'

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In figures released last week, the regulator reported 322m tonnes of CO2-equivalent emissions were directly produced by Australia's big emitters and energy producers, a 3.2% jump from the previous year. Indirect emissions - mostly those produced from electricity bought by those companies - also rose in the period.

The Australian Conservation Foundation has compiled a report, Australia's 10 Biggest Climate Polluters, by combining direct and indirect emissions for each company. It shows that all but three of the top 10 polluters increased their emissions in the latest period.

AGL, which topped the list this year, more than doubled its emissions compared with the previous year, a result of purchasing coal-fired power stations in New South Wales as part of the acquisition of Macquarie Generation.

AGL has repeatedly called for the government to manage a transition away from coal by mandating the shutting of the dirtiest power stations, which would be likely to include some of theirs. AGL's chief executive, Andrew Vesey, recently told Guardian Australia the company needed "to be out of the CO2 emissions business".

"The federal government says it is meeting its climate targets, but there is clearly something wrong with those targets if they can be met while pollution is rising," said Geoff Cousins, president of ACF.

"If you listen to the federal government you'd be forgiven for thinking Australia's pollution levels were decreasing, when in fact Australia's pollution increased by 1.3% in 2014-15 - that's 7,200,000 additional tonnes of planet-warming pollution pumped into our skies in just one year," he said.

"ACF urges the federal government to close Australia's coal-fired power stations in phases, starting with the dirtiest plants, help affected communities with the transition and draw up comprehensive plans to clean up and rehabilitate old mine sites and power stations."



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Labor's environment spokesman, Mark Butler, said the government had failed to take effective action on emissions.

"This government has proven to be incapable of reducing emissions and taking any meaningful action on climate change," a spokeswoman for Butler said.

A spokesman for the environment minister, Greg Hunt, said the government was on track to beat its 2020 target by 28m tonnes.

The government's 2020 target is 5% below 2000 levels, which its own Climate Change Authority has described as "not credible" and not in line with what the science says is required to keep temperatures below 2C of warming.

Australia has pledged to the United Nations to reduce emissions by between 5% and 25% by 2020. A 5% cut is what it said it would do if the rest of the world did nothing.

Australia is also meeting the minimum goal via accounting rules and most forecasts show its emissions will rise by 2020.

"Australia's electricity sector is undergoing a significant transition with increased renewables and lower emissions, Hunt's spokesman said.

"Renewable energy under the Renewable Energy Target will double to 23.5% between over the next five years.

"By 2022, based on announcements already made, Australia's coal generation capacity is projected to be 19% below 2010 levels," the spokesman said.

The emissions figures reported by the regulator include those from companies that produce more than a certain amount of emissions, or more than a certain amount of energy. They cover about 60% of Australia's emissions, but do not include those from agriculture, residential property or private vehicles.

A report from the Wilderness Society has revealed that a land-clearing surge in Queensland is set to create more carbon dioxide emissions in just three years, equivalent to those the federal government claims it is avoiding by paying other farmers more than $670m to stop cutting down trees.

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kus art 19h ago 0

'A spokesman for the environment minister, Greg Hunt, said the government was on track to beat its 2020 target by 28m tonnes.' Working on the theory that by 2020 all this will be forgotten because by then we'll have moved on and focussed on some other problem. It also means the big polluters can pollute like crazy for the next couple of years because 'it's not 2020 yet'...

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HalfTheSky 1d ago 0

How does report this show that emissions have increased, as opposed to big companies just continuing to gobble up the smaller ones? Is a 3.2% increase in agglomeration out of the ordinary? The only explicit example given was of exactly that - AGL buying a few power statioins - that were emitting before, just not on AGL's books.
ACF is once again proving itself ineffectual at research - in contrast to the eminently policy-relevant Wilderness Society report on land clearing.

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