

Australian politics

Greg Hunt's claim of 'peak emissions' attacked by climate experts

http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/mar/15/greg-hunts-claim-carbon-emissions-have-peaked-attacked-by-climate-experts

Australia's emissions will almost certainly rise under policies that don't put limits on increases from industry, experts say



The environment minister, Greg Hunt, told the ABC's AM program that Australia is 'unlikely' to surpass 2005 levels of greenhouse gas emissions. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

Experts have expressed deep scepticism at a prediction by the environment minister, Greg Hunt, that Australia's greenhouse gas emissions "peaked" 10 years ago.

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"I believe that we have reached what is sometimes known as peak emissions," Hunt told the ABC's AM program.

"My best estimate is that we are unlikely as a nation ever to surpass [2005 levels] ... In my best judgment, the advice, the information from the department, we reached peak emissions in 2005-06 ... and the course of history to come for Australia is that we will continue to be below that figure."

The government's most recent forecast, released in late December, only projected emissions until 2020 and do show emissions in that year slightly below 2005 levels.

They also show emissions rising from 560m tonnes in 2014-15 to 593m tonnes in 2019-20, a level that remains slightly below the 2005 highs.

But previously the government had made projections for the following decade, until 2030, which showed emissions rising. The latest data did not include those longer-term predictions taking into account the impact of the government's [Direct Action policies](#).

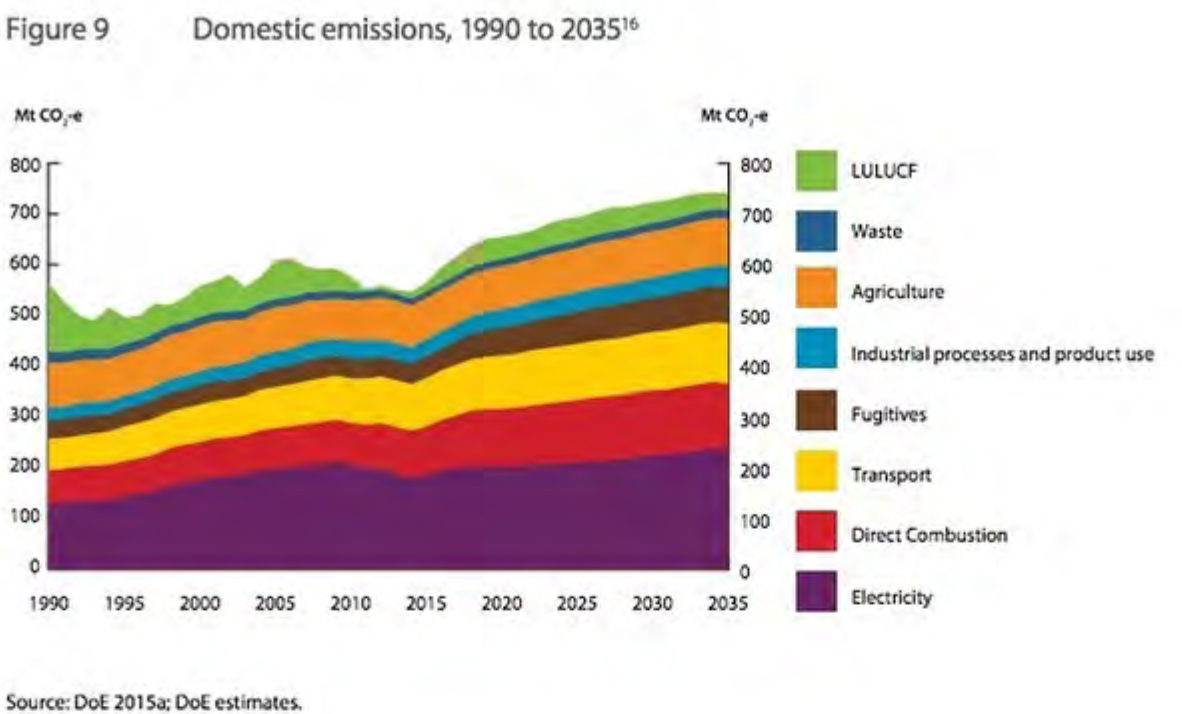
But independent experts predict Australia's emissions will almost certainly rise over that decade under current policies, which do not put limits on emission increases from industry, electricity generation or land-clearing. They were deeply sceptical of Hunt's "peak emissions in 2005" claim.

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Hugh Grossman, the executive director of Reputex, said his company's analysis of the government's own data showed Australia's emissions would continue to grow and that "there is no peak in sight".

He said the latest government figures, released just before Christmas, showed emissions were growing again and that "Australia's emissions growth rate is projected to be among the highest of all developed countries".



Graphic showing Australian carbon emissions 1990-2025. Photograph: Australian Department of Environment

"At a time when almost all developed economies have begun to cut their emissions, including China and the United States, Australia's national emissions are projected to remain on a growth pathway, with analysis indicating Australia is on track to exceed its historic 2005-06 high, with no peak in emissions expected to occur before 2030," a Reputex analysis of the government's figures concluded.

"The government's figures confirm national emissions growth will continue to rise despite current climate policies ... the emissions reduction fund is failing to purchase enough abatement to outpace Australia's projected emissions growth, resulting in a projected net increase in emissions through to 2020. This indicates a disconnect between Australia's calculated abatement task, actual national emissions and government policy, with the government's own updated estimates indicating a strong upward trajectory."

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The chief executive of the Climate Institute, John Connor, said: "These are extraordinary comments by Greg Hunt given the enormous credibility gap in the government's current policies.

"Australia's emissions have been rising for the past two years, land clearing is escalating in Queensland and New South Wales, there are big question marks over the future of the emissions reduction fund and we have a wet lettuce safeguards policy and no limits on coal-fired electricity generation. (The safeguards policy is supposed to stop increases in industrial emissions but actually imposes very few limitations.)

"We can see no reason for the government to have any confidence at all that emissions have peaked. We can see no reason for any confidence that they will decline under the government's current policies."

The government is spending \$2.5bn to buy emissions reductions under its Direct Action policy. It has said it will review the policy next year.



The panel on the ABC's science-themed Q&A episode discusses the consequences of climate science cuts at the CSIRO. Emma Johnston, a marine biologist from the University of New South Wales, says Nasa's announcement that February was the most anomalously warm month on record showed measurement and modelling needed to be increased, not cut back. She says the science has been settled on whether climate change is occurring, 'But what is a really active question is how climate change is going to play out'

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