

Australia's COP31 Leadership Test

Pre-COP Briefing



The stakes are high. Fossil-fueled disasters and price shocks are upending lives, killing people and spiking food and living costs. From catastrophic floods in the Himalayas to rising seas across the Pacific, loss and damage harms communities who contribute little to global pollution. Renewable and community-led solutions are scaling up – but are often blocked. Global climate cooperation matters at this moment more than ever.

Pre-COP in Fiji and Tuvalu is the preparatory meeting for the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP31). As COP31 President of Negotiations, Australia must urgently show leadership. Australia has been missing in action – issuing no proactive public statements on the substantive COP31 negotiations issues. While managing COP31 expectations downward and remaining in “listening mode,” the Albanese Government has approved new Australian coal and gas projects – including the enormous BHP-Mitsubishi Saraji coal mine extension during the Pacific Islands Forum. Disappointingly, Prime Minister Albanese failed to use UNGA and New York Climate Week to set ambition for COP31, despite launching a bid for a non-permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council.

With weeks left until COP31, Australian and global civil society are alarmed that negotiation priorities remain unclear and Australia is focused on side announcements. While the electrification agenda is welcome, it is undermined without clear guardrails on using renewables, displacing fossil fuels and increasing energy access. Time is running out for the Australian Government and Minister Bowen as President of Negotiations to demonstrate they are serious. **Success in Antalya rests on two issues Australia has sidestepped: delivering climate finance and accelerating a just and equitable transition away from fossil fuels.** Avoid them and COP31 will fail on Australia's watch. Tackle them and COP31 can succeed.

Pre-COP: Our Tests of Success

To be taken seriously as COP31 President of Negotiations and as a Pacific neighbour, the Albanese Government must deliver across three distinct arenas:

President of Negotiations	Lead By Example at Home	Across the Asia-Pacific
As the steward of negotiations, Australia must work to break the deadlock on climate finance and adaptation to set up COP31 for success.	Australia cannot lead abroad while expanding fossil fuel exports at home. The Albanese Government should reject Browse and Beetaloo gas and Hunter Valley Operations coal projects.	Australia must heed Pacific calls for a fossil fuel free Pacific and respect Pacific sovereignty and autonomy.
Implement the decision to transition away from fossil fuels by building momentum with national roadmaps from wealthy, high-polluting nations, and by ensuring strong inputs into the next Paris Agreement ambition cycle – limiting dangerous overshoot of 1.5°C .	By COP31, Australia must announce a formal call for advice from the Climate Change Authority on a 1.5°C-aligned national fossil fuel phase-out roadmap covering production and exports.	The Albanese Government must stop pretending that limiting overshoot of the 1.5°C temperature goal can coexist with Australian fossil fuel expansion.
A landmark COP31 outcome establishing a Just Transition Mechanism that can provide practical support to communities and uphold all rights, including the rights of Indigenous Peoples.	Make an international climate finance commitment of AUD\$11bn over five years with dedicated funding for loss and damage, adaptation and just transitions. Redirect \$14.5 billion in annual fossil fuel subsidies.	Appoint Pacific leaders to key COP31 high level ministerial and facilitation roles for COP31 negotiations tracks.
		It's time to shift Australia-Asia energy partnerships away from coal and gas exports to renewable trade supply chains with integrity.

COP31 President of Negotiations

Australia's job at Pre-COP is to lead and deliver the technical and political momentum COP31 negotiations need to succeed. By accepting the newly created President of Negotiations role in the co-hosting arrangement with Türkiye, the Albanese Government took responsibility to steward global climate cooperation beyond national interests. This requires political effort, determined diplomacy, fostering equity and accountability, and leading by example. Pre-COP must find common ground and unblock contentious negotiations. Leading negotiations means driving global progress.

Accelerate a Just and Equitable Transition Away from Fossil Fuels

Transition Away from Fossil Fuels & 1.5°C

Keeping 1.5°C in reach means addressing the primary cause of heating – burning coal, oil and gas. COP31 must implement and accelerate the COP28 commitment to a just, orderly and equitable transition away from fossil fuels. Building on COP30 and the Brazil Presidency roadmap initiative, wealthy, high-polluting nations must lead to phase out fossil fuels first by announcing credible national roadmaps. Developing nations require support to build clean energy sovereignty and remove financial blocks to equitable transition.

State of play: Political momentum has stalled as wealthy fossil fuel producers treat COP28 commitments as optional aspirations, expanding domestic production while avoiding binding phase-out plans. Significant momentum is building outside the COP, with Tuvalu and Ireland to host the Second International Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels in 2027. A global fossil fuel crisis underscores the urgency.

What needs to shift at Pre-COP: Reaffirm 1.5°C and establish an explicit political mandate for momentum from wealthy, high-emitting nations lead with fossil fuel phase-outs. Resolve the gridlock to continue the Mitigation Work Programme with an action-oriented agenda on overcoming barriers and delivering equitable mitigation outcomes.

Just Transition with First Nations Rights

Communities around the world need support to transition to a fossil free future in a way that respects their rights, helps communities get the resources they need, and gives them a say in decisions that impact them. At COP30, parties agreed to develop a Just Transition Mechanism with strong principles on human rights and community. COP31 must turn this commitment into reality and operationalise the principles. The Mechanism must secure the individual and collective rights of Indigenous Peoples to self-determination and free, prior and informed consent and include formal positions for rights holder constituencies within its governance.

State of play: While COP30 agreed to develop the Just Transition Mechanism, COP31 must establish it, with clearly defined functions, modalities, timelines and governance structures. This could be a flagship outcome of COP31.

What needs to shift at Pre-COP: Demonstrate Australia's political commitment to delivering the Just Transition Mechanism through public and high-level statements, facilitating high-level dialogue to build political support, and using bilateral processes to work through remaining issues to ensure a high ambition Mechanism is established at COP31.

Set Up the Next Paris Agreement Ambition Cycle

Every five years, the world takes stock of progress under the Paris Agreement and makes new, stronger commitments. The first step to set up the Second Global Stocktake (GST2) for success is to ensure it's informed by the best available science including the IPCC and UNEP Limiting Overshoot reports, integrates the Brazil Presidency roadmaps, national transition roadmaps and is aligned with the 2025 International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion.

State of play: While the first GST secured a global agreement to transition away from fossil fuels, the next Paris Agreement cycle must deliver on these pledges equitably.

What needs to shift at Pre-COP: To ratchet progress, the latest IPCC science and national transition roadmaps must be integrated. Pre-COP can agree on binding modalities incorporating the UNEP 1.5°C *Limiting Overshoot* report and ICJ Advisory Opinion legal obligations, evaluate domestic delivery against independent benchmarks, and tie mitigation progress directly to delivered climate finance, ensuring accountability across the process.

Deliver on Global Climate Finance and Adaptation

As the steward of negotiations, Australia must work to break the deadlock on climate finance and adaptation to set up COP31 for success.

Finance

Climate finance remains one of the key fault lines for COP31. Progress on all pillars of climate action — mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage — depends on adequate and accessible climate finance. COP31 must enable a step change in international climate finance, including by developed countries announcing ambitious, multi-year climate finance pledges as part of the global climate finance goal agreed at COP29. These pledges should prioritise increases in public, grant-based finance, ensure a strong focus on the multilateral climate funds, and make big polluters pay.

State of play: To avoid COP31 opening in an agenda fight, Parties must agree to a formal climate finance agenda item and a new work programme anchored in Article 9.1, the obligation of developed countries to provide finance.

What needs to shift at Pre-COP: Australia must break the deadlock on climate finance negotiations and build political momentum to close the finance gap. That means progress on tripling adaptation finance, transitioning the Adaptation Fund to the Paris Agreement, and ensuring new public funds are grants rather than debt-creating loans. Without this, COP31 risks a major blow-up on Australia's watch.

Adaptation

Adaptation is moving from planning to implementation. But in a world destined to overshoot 1.5°C, the challenge is becoming much harder. Yet despite this growing urgency, adaptation has not emerged as the political priority it needs to be at COP31.

State of play: Rule 16 at Bonn means negotiations will effectively restart at COP31, losing the first year of progress. While Parties continue on technical pieces, including the Belém–Addis Vision on Adaptation and the Baku Adaptation Road Map, major questions are unresolved, including the transition of the Adaptation Fund to the Paris Agreement and a lack of clarity around how the tripling of adaptation finance agreed at COP30 will be delivered.

What needs to shift at Pre-COP: COP32 may be seen as the “adaptation COP”, but its success will depend heavily on what happens at COP31. Australia's legacy will therefore also be shaped by whether it can help bring Parties back together and rebuild trust, amidst ongoing tensions on finance, and a lack of political prioritisation for adaptation.

Lead by Example At Home

- **Reject New Coal and Gas Projects:** Rebuild domestic credibility by rejecting pending mega-polluting projects, particularly Woodside's Browse gas development (projected to unleash 1.6 billion tonnes of climate pollution), Santos' Beetaloo Basin fracking (projected to unleash at least 1.2 billion tonnes of climate pollution), and Glencore's Hunter Valley Operations (HVO) coal expansion (the largest coal approval in NSW history, set to release over 800 million tonnes of emissions).
- **Develop a National Roadmap for Australia's Fossil Fuel Phase Out:** Task the Climate Change Authority (CCA) with providing formal advice on a 1.5°C-aligned fossil fuel phase-out roadmap including production and exports – and announce this plan by COP31. An Australian National Roadmap will give substance to Australia's signing of the Belem Declaration.
- **Deliver ambitious new Climate Finance target:** End annual public fossil fuel subsidies (\$14.5 billion) and make an ambitious AUD\$11bn five-year international climate finance commitment with dedicated funding for loss and damage, adaptation and just transitions. This should include multi-year gender-responsive funding that is accessible to NGOs and local CSOs.

Across the Asia-Pacific Region

- **Heed Pacific Leadership:** Align Australia's domestic actions with its commitments in Pacific-led declarations, including the Pacific Islands Forum [BELAU Declaration For Urgent and Inclusive Climate Action](#), the [Boe Declaration on Regional Security](#) – reinforced by the ICJ [Advisory Opinion on the Obligations of States in Respect of Climate Change](#) and the resolution to back this opinion led by Vanuatu and endorsed by 141 countries at the UN General Assembly.
- **Reunite 1.5°C with Fossil Fuel Phase-Out:** Stop divorcing 1.5°C ambition from fossil fuel extraction, and acknowledge that keeping 1.5°C alive requires a halt to fossil fuel expansion, led by wealthy industrialised states like Australia.
- **Fully Capitalise the Pacific Resilience Facility (PRF):** Champion Pacific-led adaptation, disaster resilience and loss and damage responses by securing new, grant-based public funds to meet the PRF's December 2026, USD \$500 million timeline and target, explicitly rejecting loan instruments that would only deepen the region's debt burden. Australia should lead by example with an additional \$100 million pledge to the PRF.
- **Transform Bilateral Energy Partnerships:** Shift bilateral energy relationships with major Asian trading partners away from coal, gas and uranium exports towards genuine renewable energy supply chains, explicitly ruling out false solutions like failed, expensive and discredited carbon capture and storage (CCS).
- **Align Regional Initiatives:** Pre-COP in Fiji will take place at the same time as the Japan-led Asia Zero Emissions Community (AZEC) ministerial meeting in the Philippines. Australia should progress the transition away from fossil fuels in both fora, and play an active role in reshaping AZEC towards genuine decarbonisation in its '2.0' phase. This includes ruling out further MOUs for gas infrastructure in Asia.

Key Initiatives

A number of key initiatives sit outside of the formal COP31 negotiations.

ELECTRIFICATION	Tests of success
Proposal: A global pledge to accelerate domestic electrification rates, building on COP28 targets to drive the global clean energy transition.	Electrification must effectively replace fossil fuel supply and demand, run exclusively on renewables, prioritise energy efficiency and people over data centres. It must enable energy access for people without electricity and guarantee human rights safeguards for transition mineral extraction. Non renewable electrification is a backwards step.
ACCESS TO FINANCE	Tests of success
Proposal: Australia is advancing a "COP31 Access to Finance Declaration for SIDS and LDCs," focusing heavily on reducing transaction costs and approval timeframes under the narrative that "the finance is available, it's just an access issue".	Addressing barriers to accessing climate finance is important for countries and frontline communities across our region, but this must be matched by adequate funding (the "quantum") needed to scale climate action. This declaration cannot be used as a smokescreen to dodge new financial obligations. Success requires Australia committing new, public, grant-based finance (not debt-creating loans), fully capitalising the Pacific Resilience Facility (PRF), as well as prioritising multilateral climate funds, and making polluters pay.
ROOFTOP SOLAR	Tests of success
Proposal: Leveraging Australia's domestic success (where rooftop solar powers 1 in 3 homes) to champion a "Global Rooftop Solar Pledge" that integrates distributed solar into national climate commitments.	Rooftop Solar is a key area where Australia can use its strong performance to build global momentum and community-led energy access. A credible initiative must reduce fossil fuel dependence, backed by ambitious battery storage targets, and uplift ambitious, equitable rollout for communities without energy access.