Pollution tipped to increase

Tom Arup
Environment editor

Australia's national greenhouse gas emissions are set to keep rising well beyond 2020, with the projected growth rate one of the worst in the developed world, a new analysis has found.

An assessment of recent government emissions data, carried out by the carbon consultancy firm RepuTex, finds that in the 2014-15 financial year Australia's carbon pollution rose for the first time in almost a decade when compared with the year before.

From there they say separate government forecasts, released late last year, show Australia's emissions are on track for a further 6 per cent increase to 2020.

RepuTex's own projections find that Australian emissions would still not reach a peak before 2030, taking pollution beyond the historical high set a decade ago.

RepuTex said this trajectory would put Australia's absolute emissions growth among the highest for developed nations. Only Finland, Sweden and Estonia are forecast to do worse between 2000 and 2020, with emissions falling in countries such as the United States, Germany and Britain.

The latest government emissions data — released in late December — recorded a 1.3 per cent increase in emissions across 2014-15 largely due to increased land clearing and a surge of brown coal power generation.

The national carbon price was repealed in July 2014, and replaced by direct action that aims to buy emissions cuts from businesses and farmers and set limits on industrial emissions.

However, the rise in emissions forecast by the government out to 2020 is significantly lower than had been previously projected. RepuTex argues these lower projections for 2020 are predominantly due to a reassessment of economic growth rates. A spokesman for Environment Minister Greg Hunt said it was due to a more efficient economy, greater take up of renewable energy and lower land sector emissions.

More broadly the spokesman hit out at RepuTex's track record, saying it had previously misforecast the results of auctions under direct action and whether Australia would meet its 2020 goal.

Although national emissions are rising, Australia will still almost certainly achieve its 2020 emissions reduction target of 5 per cent from 2000 levels.

At the Paris climate summit last year Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said Australia would “meet and beat our 2020 emissions reduction target.”

RepuTex executive director Hugh Grossman said the government would largely meet its goal by relying on “carry over” carbon credits it had received for bettering an earlier target under the Kyoto Protocol (which allowed Australia's emissions to rise to 2012) to meet the 2020 goal.

At the Paris climate conference five countries, including Germany, Britain and Denmark, announced they would cancel out their carry-over credits rather than use them to meet future targets.

“Meeting Australia's abatement task is largely just a victory in accounting terms,” Mr Grossman said.

“We have met our target, but we used a credit to get there, so it's not a sign of any progress to reduce emissions.”

Under the new climate agreement struck at the Paris conference Australia has also pledged a goal to cut emissions by 26 to 28 per cent by 2030 from 2005 levels.

Mr Hunt's spokesman said the government had laid out policies that would meet that goal.

Carriers back emissions limits

MITCHELL BINGEMANN
AVIATION EDITOR

Qantas and Virgin Australia have backed a landmark international agreement to set binding limits on carbon dioxide emissions to tackle greenhouse gas pollution created by the global aviation industry.

The deal, announced earlier this week in Montreal by the International Civil Aviation Organisation, was the product of more than six years of negotiations and follows on the heels of other international agreements that have been struck in the past 12 months to address CO2-induced climate change but which have not included the aviation industry.

The proposed rules will be the first time the aviation sector has been given emissions standards — just as cars and commercial trucks have — and will apply for all new aeroplanes delivered after 2028.

Under the new standards the aviation industry has agreed to a 4 per cent reduction in fuel consumption of new aircraft, starting in 2029, compared with 2015 deliveries.

The new rules — which must formally be adopted by the civil aviation council of 36 member states in June, and then endorsed by the council's assembly in October — mandate that the emissions standards must not only be applicable to new aircraft designs as of 2020, but also to new deliveries of current in-production aircraft types from 2023.

"The goal of this process is ultimately to ensure that when the next generation of aircraft types enter service, there will be guaranteed reductions in international CO2 emissions," ICAO Council president Olumuyiwa Benard Aliu said.

Significantly, the global standard will focus on larger aircraft that contribute the most pollution. It is estimated that aircraft weighing over 60 tonnes account for more than 90 per cent of international aviation emissions.

In total, commercial aviation accounts for about 2 per cent of the world's carbon dioxide emitted by human activities — which is on par with the whole of Germany's output.

But carbon dioxide output from the aviation industry could surge to between 3 per cent and 4 per cent, according to the ICAO, which has forecast a doubling of commercial aircraft to about 40,000 airliners over the next 15 years.

The new standards aim to cut carbon emissions by more than 650 million tonnes between 2020 and 2040, the equivalent to removing more than 140 million cars from the road.
Air pollution

Climate change Review recommends sweeping overhaul

State urged to set new and binding emissions targets

Tom Arup
Environment Editor

Victoria's climate change laws face a major overhaul, with an independent review recommending the state establish new targets to cut emissions, put in place a legally binding charter on government decisions and give the environmental watchdog powers to limit greenhouse gases, among other sweeping reforms.

But the Andrews government, which commissioned the review, has immediately ruled out setting up a state-based emissions trading system or adopting a "shadow carbon price" on government decisions, which were both floated in the review's recommendations.

On the other proposals, the Andrews government has largely kept its powder dry, promising a broader response in the coming few months.

"We went to the last election with a commitment to reintroducing an emissions reduction target and... to put Victoria back as a leader responding to climate change, and this is one of the first steps," Victorian Environment Minister Lisa Neville said yesterday.

The review looked at the Victorian Climate Change Act, which was first brought into effect by the Brumby government. It was later amended by the Baillieu government, which removed the state target to cut emissions by 20 per cent by 2020 following the recommendations of its own review that it would drive no extra national pollution cuts.

The latest scrutiny of the laws — headed by lawyer Martijn Wilder, a partner at Baker & McKenzie — put forward 33 recommendations that would significantly bolster climate law powers. The review recommended re-establishing state emissions targets in law, including a long-term goal for 2060 and interim targets every five years to that point.

The review did not spell out exactly what Victoria's climate targets should be, but said that it should focus on limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels, the ambitious target included in the recent Paris climate agreement, with support from Australia. That would imply cutting emissions to zero by the middle to latter part of the century.

Several recommendations also seek to ensure the state government considers climate change in all its decisions, including major infrastructure projects and government purchasing.

The review also recommends the government incorporate the financial costs of greenhouse gases in its purchasing and decisions. This would make clean technologies and climate-friendly projects more economically attractive to government, but Ms Neville ruled out this latest proposal on Thursday.

The Environmental Protection Authority would also have the power to restrict greenhouse gases from major industrial plants, the review argues, so that it can drive down emissions. In particular, the review says the EPA could issue or renew licences on major industrial plants to cut emissions. Or it could be allowed to regulate greenhouse gases as "waste" if a state-based emissions trading scheme was established.

But Ms Neville ruled out any prospect of a trading system, saying that should be the domain of Commonwealth policy.

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