

# WINEVVS

## Climate data release again delayed by Government, FOI documents show

Exclusive by national environment, science and technology reporter Michael Slezak

Updated Thu 4 Oct 2018, 4:56am

**A report showing Australia is failing to rein in its greenhouse gas pollution was sat on for nearly two months by the Federal Government, before being released late on a Friday afternoon of a long weekend when footy finals fever and banking royal commission findings were dominating headlines, the ABC has learned.**

The delay is revealed in documents obtained under freedom of information laws by the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF).

The Government has released this quarterly report under similar circumstances in the past, leading to calls for it to be controlled by an agency and not politicians.

"There is a clear trend here that the Government is hiding climate data from Australians," ACF chief executive Kelly O'Shanassy said.

A spokesperson for Environment Minister Melissa Price told the ABC, "Ministers routinely and appropriately consider briefs for a period of time".

The latest report — the Department of Environment's quarterly Update of Australia's National Greenhouse Gas Inventory — showed, after adjustment for seasonal variation, in the three months of this year Australia had the highest levels of carbon pollution since 2011.

It also revealed a continuation of the trend of upward annual emissions since 2013.

And excluding controversial data about emissions from tree clearing and regrowth, Australia's emissions reached an all-time high in the 12 months to March this year.

### Data sat on for seven weeks

The documents show on August 9 — seven weeks before the data's release — it was sent to the offices of both the current Environment Minister Melissa Price, in her role as assistant minister, and the then-environment minister, Josh Frydenberg, along with a ministerial briefing.

Assistant secretary of the Department of Environment Rob Sturgess said to representatives of the two offices:

"Gday. Not sure how busy you are this week ... but attached is the quarterly update."

Later that month, there was a cabinet reshuffle after Scott Morrison took over as Prime Minister.

And on September 6, the Department of Environment sent it again to the office of the new minister, Ms Price. Three weeks later, on a Friday afternoon, the report was publicly released.

That day was a public holiday in Victoria and preceded a long weekend in several other states marked by celebrations for the NRL and the AFL grand finals.

It was also released immediately after the banking royal commission



PHOTO: In Paris, Australia committed to reducing emissions to 26 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030. (AAP: Julian Smith)

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### Key points:

- Australia failing to rein in greenhouse gas pollution in line with Paris agreement
- Government sat on most recent emissions report for two months
- Advocates accuse Government of 'hiding climate data from Australians'

### A brief history of seven killings



handed down its interim report.

A spokesman for Ms Price said: "The Department of Environment and Energy provided the Minister for Environment with advice on the Quarterly Update of the National Greenhouse Gas Inventory on September 3, 2018."

In a press-release published a few days before the report was released, the Climate Council anticipated it happening at a time that would minimise attention on it.

"This has become a worryingly familiar scenario," Climate Council acting chief Dr Martin Rice said.

"The Federal Government not only delays releasing climate information, it also tries to bury it. We've seen emissions data quietly released on Christmas Eve, or on a Friday evening, at a time it's least likely to attract attention or scrutiny."

Ms O'Shanassy said it was time to take the release of the data out of politicians' hands.

"We think climate data should be treated like jobs figures and GDP figures that are released by a government agency, not politicians, so they can't hide it," she said.

"You can imagine the uproar if they hid jobs or economic figures. But hiding climate figures is reckless because climate change is here now and affecting every Australian."

## 'People choose and pick their figures': PM

After the report was uploaded to a government website, the office of Ms Price sent out a media release with the subject line: "Australia on track to meet emissions targets" and headlined "emissions intensity at lowest levels for 28 years".

The release did not mention emissions had gone up, but instead focused on comparing the current figures to those from 2005 and 2000 — years when emissions were higher than they are now.

It also focused on emissions per head of population, which have declined.

Two days later, Prime Minister Scott Morrison was asked about the emissions data on the ABC's Insiders.

"I know people will want to use that one figure and ignore the fact that emissions per capita are at the lowest level in 28 years," he said.

"So people choose and pick their figures to make their political arguments. We're going to meet those in a canter, our 26 per cent target."

But the documents released under FOI laws show the "key points" highlighted by the experts at the Department of Environment and delivered to the Minister also focused almost exclusively on the rising emissions.

Ms O'Shanassy said the total figure was the only one that mattered.

"The climate doesn't care if you're pumping out less pollution per population or relative to GDP," she said.

## Is Australian on track to meet Paris deal?

On Insiders, Mr Morrison repeated his earlier claim Australia was on track to meet its commitment made at the Paris summit to reduce emissions to 26 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030, "in a canter".

"All of the issues are pointing to that outcome so I'm comfortable with our 26 per cent," he said.

He was reiterating comments earlier in the month made on the ABC's 7.30 program.

"What we're seeing though is a business-as-usual approach, a technology-driven approach, which will see us, I think, more than meet our targets out to 2030," Mr Morrison said.

### New coal power is not the answer

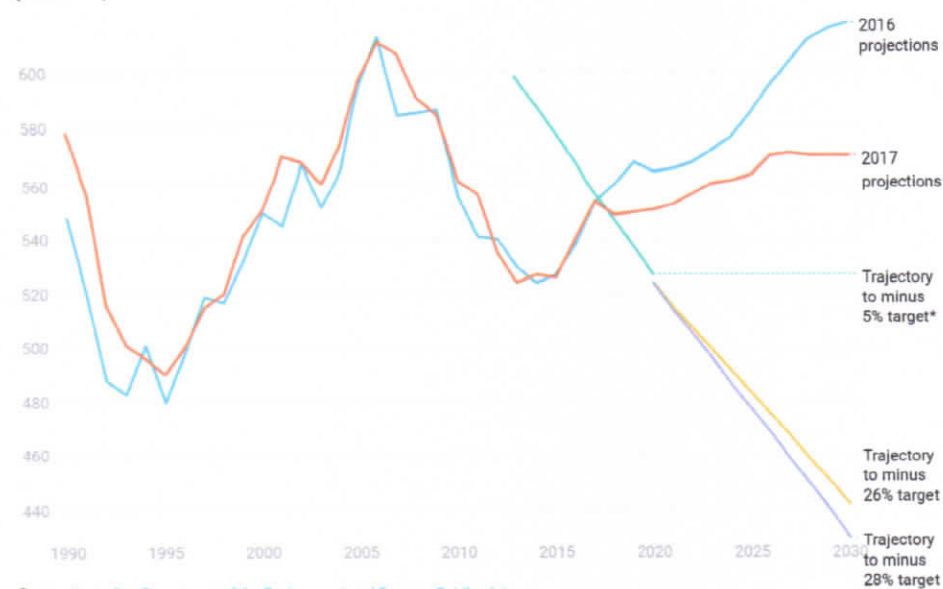


The tipping point's been reached: the cold, hard numbers show that new renewable energy is supplying cheaper electricity than new coal-fired power plants could and will continue do so, writes Stephen Long.

That view is at odds with the Government's official projections, last updated in December 2017, which show under business as usual, emissions will increase steadily all the way to 2030.

## Australia's emissions trends, 1990 to 2030

(Mt CO<sub>2</sub>-e)



Source: [Australian Department of the Environment and Energy](#) • [Get the data](#)

**EMBED:** Australia's emissions trends, 1990 to 2030

"Emissions are rising and there's no national plan to turn it around," Ms O'Shanassy said.

"It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that if we don't have a plan, we're not going to meet our emission target.

"They're kicking the can down the road for the next government but in doing so they're putting lives at risk because climate change is dangerous."

Ms Price's spokesman said: "The 2017 review of climate change policy said Australia has the right mix of policies and improvements in technology.

"The Government's policies are scalable and will enable Australia to meet the 2030 target."

**Topics:** environment, environmental-policy, environmental-management, government-and-politics, federal-government, climate-change, australia

First posted Thu 4 Oct 2018, 3:10am