

Equitywatch country profile: Australia

1. Australia's CO₂ emissions grew by 42% from 1990 to 2007

- Australia's CO₂ emissions increased by 42 per cent from 1990 to 2007. This is the fastest rise among major industrialised countries, largely due to new coal-fired electricity generation.
- Total greenhouse gas emissions grew almost as fast: 30 per cent from 1990 to 2007.¹
- NB: Australia committed to a Kyoto Protocol target of 8 per cent above its 1990 emissions.

2. Australia is calling for an “ambitious global deal”; closer scrutiny reveals that developing countries would have to carry most of the burden in Australia's definition of an ambitious deal.

- Australia says it plans to reduce emissions by 5 to 15 per cent below 2000 levels by 2020.
- However, “if the world agrees to an ambitious global deal” to stabilise atmospheric GHG concentrations at 450 parts per million (ppm) or less, Australia will reduce emissions by 25 per cent below 2000 levels by 2020.
- The table shows what both these targets mean in terms of a 1990 base year, the UN standard.

Australia's emissions pledges

Conditions	Stated target	Target in terms of a 1990 base year
“If the world agrees to an ambitious global deal to stabilise GHGs at 450 ppm or lower”	25 % below 2020	11 % below 1990
In the absence of a global deal	5 to 15 % below 2020	13 to 1 % above 1990

- According to the IPCC, in order to stabilise emissions at 450 ppm: (a) industrialised countries have to reduce emissions by 25 to 40 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020; **and** (b) developed countries have to substantially reduce emissions growth.

*If industrialised countries only reduce emissions by 11 per cent below 1990—like Australia—developing countries may have to start **reducing emissions before 2020.***

- Thus, Australia's version of an “ambitious global deal” would place an extremely unfair burden on developing countries, which still need room to expand their economies and combat poverty.

¹ These figures exclude land use change (LULUCF/LUCF); if land use is included, emissions fluctuate widely from year to year, due to droughts, forest fires and other weather-related events.

3. Like many other industrialised countries, Australia’s targets are further undermined by offset provisions.

— Because Australia’s current emissions reduction legislation proposals allow for unlimited use of “Kyoto compliance units”, including international offsets, there is no guarantee that any emissions cuts will be made in Australia.

Offset provisions in industrialised country targets

Country	Unilateral target (against 1990 base year)	Target given an “ambitious global deal”	International offset provisions	Guaranteed domestic cuts, given offset provisions
Australia	+ 1-3 %	- 11 %	Unlimited ²	None
EU	- 20 %	- 30 %	Up to the first 10% of reductions below 1990	10% or 20% below 1990
US (Kerry-Boxer)	- 7 %	- 7 %	Up to 1.25 Gt / year	None for many years

4. Australia is championing a pledge-and-review deal at Copenhagen based on “national schedules”.

— Australia has been promoting a replacement for the Kyoto Protocol in which the distinction between industrialised and developing countries is eliminated. Instead, every country would make commitments based on its own national circumstances.

— This approach has two major problems. First, it does away with the principle of historical responsibility—the idea that rich countries must immediately make deep emissions cuts, in order to leave atmospheric space for poor countries to develop. Under Australia’s proposal, every country has an equal duty to combat climate change.

— Second, it eliminates the possibility of negotiating targets based on science. The proposal allows every country to set its own targets; if the sum of these targets is less than what’s needed to effectively combat climate change, there is nothing to be done.

— The Danish Prime Minister, chair of the Copenhagen CoP, has expressed his strong interest in a “binding, political deal”—such as Australia’s pledge-and-review proposal—at Copenhagen, and has invited Prime Minister Rudd to be a “friend of the chair”. This essentially makes Mr Rudd one of the three most influential leaders at the Copenhagen negotiations (the others being the Danish PM, and the Prime Minister of Mexico, host of CoP-16.)

— Thus, there is little doubt that the Australian Proposal will figure significantly in CoP negotiations, despite its fundamental flaws.

² Australia’s proposed Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme allow “an unlimited number of eligible Kyoto units” to be used.