

AUSTRALIA PASSES KEY BILL ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Conservation, Sustainable Development, and EIA

Welcome move: Students demanding action on climate change ahead of the national election, in Sydney. File photo

Australia on Thursday passed its first major climate change Bill in over a decade, codifying emissions targets and enshrining into its law for the first time a goal to reach net zero by 2050.

The legislation, a key election promise of Australia's new centre-left Labour government, aims to slash emissions in the carbon-intensive economy by 43% from 2005 levels.

Its passage was heralded by the government as the end of a decade of Australian inaction on climate, and it garnered broad support from unions and business groups.

One of the world's leading coal and natural gas exporters, Australia has been slow to adopt climate targets, even as it is hit by increasingly ferocious bush fires and floods.

While the new targets are more ambitious than the previous government's planned 26-28% cut by 2030, the legislation has been criticised by some for not doing enough and for failing to ban new coal and gas projects.

"43% is not enough," rugby star turned Senator David Pocock said. "But it's a start... I think it's important that we do legislate a target," said Mr. Pocock, one of the green-minded independents who helped push the Bill through.

Mr. Pocock was among a number of climate-aware candidates swept into office in the last election on promises of swifter action to curb global warming.

The issue was key to the ousting of the previous conservative coalition government after wildfires in the late 2019 and early 2020 tore through 5.8 million hectares of Australia's east and released so much smoke that researchers said it significantly affected the ozone hole above Antarctica.

However, fossil fuels, coal and gas in particular, remain central to the Australian economy, rendering climate action a politically fraught subject.

"Clearly the impediment in Australia hasn't been people (or) communities (not) wanting more action, it's been lack of political will," Mr. Pocock said.

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