

Coalition commitments to 5 - 25 per cent emissions reduction targets

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Despite speculation to the contrary, both major parties maintain their bipartisan support for 2020 emissions reduction targets of 5 to 25 per cent below 2000 levels. These commitments have been made in Australia but also to international audiences with final determination in international UN negotiations by end of 2015. They have been repeated since the election. This is why the relevant test of the credibility of policies is the ability to achieve 25 per cent reductions.

This credibility test is even more important when considered as a credible contribution towards a global effort to avoid an increase in average global temperatures of 2°C. Australia, China, the US are amongst 190 other nations who have agreed that avoiding 2°C global warming is in their national and collective interests.

The Climate Institute recently released a [brief](#) on Australia's climate risks with warming above of 2°C. CSIRO, the Bureau of Meteorology and others have listed potential impacts including: very extreme bushfire days occurring four to five times more in south-eastern Australia; irrigated agricultural value in the Murray Darling falling up to 50 per cent, and; increasing demand for aid, disaster and security support as low lying regional populations are displaced.

Speculation has focused on the Coalition's commitment particularly when Tony Abbott said that the Coalition would not spend more than already allocated on its Emission Reduction Fund (ERF). He and Opposition spokesperson, however, have continued to state their belief that the ERF will achieve the 5 per cent target. The Coalition's 2010 "Direct Action Plan" stated that ERF:

"arrangements can be changed to meet the obligations of any global agreements to which Australia may become a signatory, or amended to reflect the approaches taken by our major trading partners and big global emitters. The Coalition remains committed to its previously announced target range." (p15)

This "target range" is the same as the Government's, a position that dates back to 2009 and continues to this day.

This was reaffirmed in the last days of the election campaign by the Coalition giving support to the caretaker ALP government signing on to the [Majuro declaration](#) at the Pacific Island Forumⁱ. This explicitly included the addition to its schedule Australian commitments to action which included both this target range and the 20 per cent Renewable Energy Target.

The Coalition Government, to its credit, has reaffirmed its support for the 5 per cent reductions and conditions for change.

Below is a catalogue of some statements from the Prime Minister and Environment Minister Greg Hunt on their support for emission targets of between 5-25 per cent reductions on 2000 levels by 2020. The Minister, also to his credit, talks about targets in the plural even in the last few days of the election campaignⁱⁱ, or about the 5 per cent target and conditions for change.

These targets of up to 25 per cent reductions are promises made not only to Australians but also, with Coalition support, to other countries by inclusion in international agreements. In addition to the Majuro Declaration, the agreements include:

- **The Kyoto Protocol:** In December 2012, Australia signed amendments to the Kyoto Protocol to take on a new binding emission reduction commitment from 2013-2020.ⁱⁱⁱ This includes reference to the full target range and an undertaking to review the current minimum commitment to increase ambition in 2014. Taking on a second Kyoto commitment had in principle support from the Coalition.^{iv}

- **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change:** In 2011, Australia submitted its full target range in line with all other major economies under the UNFCCC’s Cancun Agreements.^v
- **Copenhagen Accord:** In 2010, Australia submitted its full target range in line with all other major economies under the Copenhagen Accord agreed outside the formal UNFCCC.^{vi}

Table 1. Coalition promises on 5-25 per cent reduction targets.

Date	Who	Quote (Emphasis added)	Source
30 September 2013	Hunt	“The Coalition is committed to the target of a 5 per cent reduction in emissions by 2020 and the conditions for extending that target further, based on international action”	“Acid Oceans are the biggest worry”, AFR Opinion piece
4 September 2013	Hunt	“We agree with the Government on the science and we agree with the Government on the targets. ”	Direct Action will do the right thing, SBS News
27 August 2013	Hunt	“ And our commitment on our targets is clear and categorical. ”	Hunt pledges less regulation, more effective action, CE Daily
11 August 2013	Abbott	HARTCHER: “Your commitment rather than Mr Rudd’s. If there is international progress, would you keep your commitment to consider cuts above and beyond the 5 per cent?” ABBOTT: “ We’ve always said that if circumstances change we will adjust appropriately but there is no way that other countries are embracing the kind of carbon tax and the kind of Emissions Trading Scheme that Australia has if anything the trend is all the other way and if you look at what has happened in this country of ours, our emissions ...”	Rudd v Abbott 1st Debate: the debate in full – transcript, The Guardian
16 July 2013	Hunt	“So the second principle here is we also accept, and we gave support to the government for the targets, not just the 5% but also the conditions for change. Now many will say that they should go further and I understand and respect that view deeply, but this is about how do we make a key start and how do we play a role in having the world take steps forward? So we accept the science, clearly, categorically, absolutely. Secondly, we accept the targets, clearly, categorically, absolutely. ”	The Coalition’s Climate Change Strategy, Melbourne 16 July 2013 – Edited transcript, Grattan Institute
17 June 2012	Hunt	PAUL KELLY: “If we look at the question of targets, Minister Combet has held out the possibility that the government may have an enhanced target over the next few years beyond the five per cent emissions reductions by 2020. What’s your response to that and might the Opposition be prepared to revise that 5 per cent commitment as well?” GREG HUNT: “Well we have actually given bi-partisan support to the targets ...” PAUL KELLY: That’s right. GREG HUNT: ... “ and to the conditions for any change in the targets. So	Sky News, Australian Agenda

		that is not a point of dispute between the two sides in Australia. But where we do disagree radically is on the two methods, on the electricity and gas tax versus the incentives based approach.”	
1 December 2011	Hunt	“Nor is there disagreement over the targets. Our commitment to the 5 per cent reduction on Australia’s emissions is the same as the Government’s, as are the conditions for any extension of that target.”	Greg Hunt speech
2010	Official policy	“The Coalition remains committed to its previously announced target range”	Durban and Beyond: Reducing Emissions While Protecting Prosperity
22 December 2009	Abbott	“The Coalition’s position of bi-partisan support for emission reduction targets – subject to the conditions which were earlier outlined – remains unchanged.”	Letter to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd obtained by The Climate Institute under FOI. Available on request.
22 December 2009	Abbott	“I think we should go for the five per cent and we should only go higher than that if there are clear, binding, enforceable, transparent commitments from other countries in the wake of Copenhagen, we certainly can't be confident that we've got that.”	Carbon emissions cut of 5 percent adequate: Abbott, ABC News
21 December 2009	Hunt	“The Government currently has an emissions reduction target range of 5 to 25 per cent of 2000 levels. Mr Rudd will announce a final figure by February 1 next year, once other nations reveal what their targets are. Mr Hunt says Mr Rudd will get bipartisan support on that. ‘That's not an issue of fighting between the two sides,’ he said.”	Copenhagen failure 'vindicates Opposition stance', ABC News
2 December 2009	Abbott	"The Coalition is committed to the bi-partisan targets as they currently stand."	Tony Abbott stumbles, forced to restate support for emissions targets, The Australian
26 May 2009	Turnbull	“However, Mr Turnbull says the Coalition does support the Government's emissions reduction targets of between 5 to 25 per cent of 2000 levels by 2020. ‘This enables Mr Rudd to go to Copenhagen in the knowledge that the entire Parliament, at least the Government and the Opposition, support the targets he is taking there,’ he said. ‘It's a rare degree of bipartisan support.’”	Opposition delivers carbon trade ultimatum, ABC News

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ⁱ <http://www.majurodeclaration.org/>

ⁱⁱ See for example Direct Action will do the right thing, <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2013/09/04/comment-direct-action-will-do-right-thing>

ⁱⁱⁱ Doha amendment to the Kyoto Protocol, https://unfccc.int/files/kyoto_protocol/application/pdf/kp_doha_amendment_english.pdf

^{iv} Coalition supports sequel to Kyoto protocol, <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/coalition-supports-sequel-to-kyoto-protocol-20120815-2495l.html>

^v Compilation of economy-wide emission reduction targets to be implemented by Parties included in Annex I to the Convention, <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2011/sb/eng/inf01r01.pdf>

^{vi} Letter to the UNFCCC, http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/cop_15/copenhagen_accord/application/pdf/australiacphaccord_app1.pdf