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Is Australia's 'clean' coal a misnomer?

<https://www.nzz.ch/international/schwere-vorwuerfe-an-australiens-kohleindustrie-ld.1714019?reduced=true>

Documents are said to show that raw materials companies have falsified laboratory results

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On the Minerals Council of Australia's website are the unctuous words: "Reduce emissions with Australian coal." Former Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison once brought a lump of coal into Parliament to proudly advertise Australia's "black gold". And the incumbent head of government, Anthony Albanese, who has committed the country to significantly more ambitious emission targets, likes to praise Australia's "quality coal". The latter fits the narrative of the domestic coal industry, which argues that global greenhouse gas emissions would increase if foreign customers had to source coal from another country. Finally, Australia's coal exports are of higher quality and produce fewer emissions.

According to independent MP Andrew Wilkie, this is all a blatant lie. Wilkie made serious allegations against Australia's coal exporters before Parliament this week. He was referring to "thousands of documents" he claims to have received from a whistleblower - apparently an executive at a coal company. He accused the industry of beautifying the quality of Australian coal with false laboratory results. As an example, he cited a report that contained a higher water content in an earlier version than in the final version. More moisture causes the coal to burn less efficiently. According to Wilkie, bribes were paid to ensure that those responsible ignored such discrepancies and did not refuse exports.

Net zero target is "fiction"

"The fraud is environmental vandalism," Wilkie said before Parliament. It makes "all the talk of net-zero emissions by 2050 a fiction". Wilkie also noted that the authorities had been informed a long time ago. But so far no one has done anything. Even when one of the test laboratories reported itself in 2020 and admitted to having falsified coal certificates, this had no consequences.

According to Wilkie, the allegations of fraud are aimed at numerous large corporations. The MP named Australia's Macquarie Bank and the mining companies Terracom, Anglo American, Peabody and Glencore. The Swiss raw materials group was the only one to respond to a request: Glencore had taken note of Wilkie's statements, it said in a statement. The group is "not involved in any investigations or proceedings related to this matter". Both Peabody and Anglo American denied the allegations to the Australian media.

Tim Buckley, director of the think tank Climate Energy Finance, who has seen the documents submitted to the court, is convinced that the allegations are valid. Buckley believes, however, that the offenses are not so easy to prove. The coal industry had acted extremely skilfully. The data was only slightly changed. Also, bribes were not paid directly, but through many detours.

Government is following leads

In response to Wilkie's Parliament speech, Resources Minister Madeline King confirmed that the reports were being investigated and that more information had been requested. They want to "maintain Australia's reputation as a reliable and competitive supplier of high-quality metallurgical and thermal coal," said the minister. Should the government not launch an official investigation, MP Wilkie wants to make the whistleblower's documents public.