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OPINION

Once again the Coalition is trying to wreck the joint rather than save it

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The Coalition's Luddites are at it again, doing what they do best – wrecking the joint as they try to blow up the renewables transition. This week's [Rally Against Reckless Renewables](#) in Canberra is a case in point.

Timed to coincide with the first sitting day of federal parliament, it featured a stellar line-up of Liberal and National party climate antagonists, many of whom have been busy spreading inflammatory disinformation to foment community dissent.



Opposition spokesman for veterans' affairs Barnaby Joyce at the rally against renewable energy.

Community consultation and effective engagement, including with landholders, communities near developments and First Nations peoples must be central to planning and approvals for the rollout of clean, cheap renewable energy. No one is denying this, least of all the government.

Federal Energy Minister Chris Bowen has accepted in principle the recommendations of the Energy Infrastructure Commissioner's [review into community engagement on renewable energy projects](#), including improved consultation processes, a developer rating system to underpin community confidence, and better handling of complaints. Equally, the renewables transition must not come at unnecessary expense of natural places, biodiversity and native species, and environmental protection must be top of mind.

But so should pivoting policy momentum and public capital to our massive, once-in-a-century opportunity to establish Australia as a renewable energy and zero-emissions trade and investment superpower, building new models of community benefit-sharing and unlocking huge new investments to revitalise our regions in the process.

The world is rapidly decarbonising. China put on nearly [300 gigawatts of renewables last year](#), *five* times the total capacity of the east Australian national energy market, including renewable and nonrenewable sources. The [\\$US1 trillion](#)

[Inflation Reduction Act](#) – dubbed the “green new deal” – is turbocharging the energy transition and industrialisation in the US, as are comparable policy and public investment programs the world over.

The world’s progress spells inevitable terminal long-term decline for coal and gas – and trouble for a global, top-three coal, gas and oil export petro-state such as Australia, which shares that dubious honour with Russia and Saudi Arabia.

Yet all we are getting from the fossils in the Coalition and its political allies is Climate Wars 2.0, a concerted campaign opposing the clean energy transition we need to tackle the climate crisis and bring low- or no-cost, zero-emissions power to all Australians.

Notably, the Liberal and National Party shills express zero concern that rampant coal and gas extraction and burning destroys environments as it drives increasingly frequent and intense climate catastrophes – such as the floods and fires that are tearing communities apart – and inflicts rising economic costs on our country. They have nothing to say about the massive hyperinflation of fossil fuel energy prices that has smashed consumers and driven the cost-of-living crisis.

What’s reckless is the Coalition’s call for a suspension of the renewables rollout and a pivot to [nuclear](#). This is another deeply cynical and inane demonstration of how utterly out of touch this ship of fools is. There would be a multidecade wait

before we could stand up nuclear generation in this country and, even if we did, it would be prohibitively expensive when renewables costs are falling massively year-on-year. We can't afford this charade after the devastating lost decade of climate and energy policy failure under the previous federal Coalition government.

Meanwhile, our incumbent federal and state governments and private capital base are now collaborating to accelerate our transition to a sustainable future. For example, the federal government's [Capacity Investment Scheme](#), announced at the end of last year, quadrupled strategic public capital investment in firmed renewables to "crowd-in" private investment.

Our research shows NSW has a substantial [pipeline of renewables](#) in train – more than enough, by the Australian Energy Market Operator's own admission – to replace the ageing, unreliable and expensive Eraring power station on the Central Coast, Australia's biggest coal clunker, when it closes in 2025.

Australia's new government leaders clearly envision a country in which our prosperity is built on our abundance of clean power from sun and wind, as we switch from coal and gas mining, export and generation, and value-add the critical minerals that will drive the new global economy, delivering an economic and jobs bonanza, mostly in regional industrial and mining hubs.

The global race is on, and what we now need to see is a significant [escalation in the federal government's clean tech investment ambition](#) in the May budget and beyond to match the scale and urgency of our opportunity.

Alongside the build-out of utility-scale solar, wind, batteries and transmission, we need more support for clean energy resources at household and commercial level – such as solar PV systems, batteries, heat pumps and EVs – and we need to get polluting, expensive gas out of homes and industry and “electrify everything”, as Dr Saul Griffith, renewable energy leader and founder of [Rewiring Australia](#), has argued.

Just as importantly, we need federal and state governments to get real about our commitment to the Paris Agreement goal to keep warming below the critical 1.5-degree threshold and end their dangerous addiction to new coal and gas. This requires investing at speed in zero-emissions technologies and industries of the future, not digging our massive coal and gas hole deeper. Then we can truly move forward with clarity and conviction.

<https://www.smh.com.au/environment/climate-change/once-again-the-coalition-is-trying-to-wreck-the-joint-rather-than-save-it-20240207-p5f30p.html>

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