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Australia has a rare chance to lead the world's next energy revolution

By Tim Buckley | July 3 2026 - 7:30pm

Last week, China unveiled a [new five-year plan to reshape its energy system](#): focusing heavily on electrification and clean energy.

It anticipates the world's most populous nation reaching 35 per cent electrification by 2030, and includes a major new electricity grid upgrade to transport more renewable energy, as wind and solar push past 50 per cent of their energy mix.

A few weeks ago, Australia and Turkiye, co-hosts of this November's global climate conference, COP31, announced they would elevate electrification as a centrepiece of the talks.

Australia, China and much of the world are all in on renewables and electrification. And the recent fossil fuel energy price crises caused by the war in Iran and closure of the Strait of Hormuz, and previously the Russian invasion of Ukraine, have prompted many nations in Asia double down on electrification to build energy independence.

But no one wants to talk about Australia's continued reliance on fossil fuel exports.

What will happen to our economy as our key Asian coal and gas customers rapidly shift their energy mix and their economic growth strategy to electrification and renewable energy?

For years, Australia has talked about becoming a renewable energy superpower. Now, the race is well and truly on.

And perhaps for the first time, we have an opportunity to help shape not just our own energy future, but the world's, with our Climate Change and Energy Minister, Chris Bowen, serving as COP31 President of Negotiations.

It is an influential and important role and "[middle-power diplomacy at its absolute best](#)", as Mr Bowen said during the week.

Electrification has emerged as one of the defining global priorities and refers to powering our transport, buildings and industries with clean electricity in place of fossil fuels. Examples include electric vehicles, heat pumps, split system air conditioners, rooftop solar and home batteries, and electric machinery.

And, the momentum in this sector is unmistakable.

In early June Australia and the Turkish COP31 Presidency announced a [global goal of accelerating electrification to 35 per cent](#) of final energy consumption by 2035; from around 20 per cent globally, or 23-24 per cent in Australia now.

Last week at London Climate Action Week, [governments across five continents](#), businesses and more than 40 civil society organisations [launched the Electrify Now campaign](#) to build international support for that ambition.

The message was simple: electrifying transport, buildings and industry using renewable energy is becoming one of the fastest ways to improve both climate outcomes and national energy security.

For Australia, this should sound remarkably familiar.

UK think tank EMBER has detailed the [remarkable shift under way across Asia](#). And it [demonstrates what future energy consumption could look like](#) beyond fossil fuels.

China has [spent years showing how electrification, renewable energy and clean manufacturing can strengthen energy independence](#) while lowering exposure to volatile global fossil fuel markets.

Now, many of China's neighbours are following suit, often leveraging ever lower-cost, higher-quality Chinese cleantech exports.

[Pakistan's extraordinary rooftop solar boom](#) - triggered by the previous fossil fuel crisis when Russia invaded Ukraine - transformed their electricity market in just two years and helped to protect them from the latest surge in energy prices.

Vietnam's rapid solar expansion laid important foundations earlier this decade.

Across Asia, countries are accelerating investment in solar, batteries, electric vehicles and heat pumps as they seek greater energy security and lower electricity costs.

The lesson is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore.

These electric technologies are now cheaper, more efficient and less vulnerable to swings in international oil and gas prices.

Governments, businesses and households are pivoting because electrification increasingly makes economic sense.

For Australia, this presents both an opportunity and a warning.

We remain the world's third-largest exporter of fossil fuels, yet many of our biggest export markets are simultaneously accelerating their transition towards renewable electricity and electrified industries.

As these economies in Asia continue reducing their dependence on imported coal and gas, Australia's long-term export profile must change.

Rather than resisting that shift in a way that leaves workers exposed to sudden shocks, we should prepare for it.

Australia has abundant renewable energy resources, globally significant reserves of critical minerals and strategic metals, and a world-leading expertise in deploying rooftop solar and household batteries.

We should be investing aggressively in value-added exports such as green aluminium and green iron, while expanding our domestic capacities around batteries and clean manufacturing.

We also have practical and technical expertise that many countries need. Australia's world-leading uptake of rooftop solar and home batteries, driven by supportive policies from our federal and state governments, offers valuable lessons for rapidly electrifying nations throughout our region. ARENA's domestic mandate should be expanded to cover the Asia-Pacific.

This is where Australia's COP31 leadership could become genuinely significant.

Australia has an opportunity to champion practical solutions that improve energy affordability, strengthen national security and reduce emissions simultaneously.

Electrification does exactly that.

The world appears increasingly ready to embrace this agenda. The question now is whether Australia will seize the opportunity not only to participate in the global energy transition, but to help lead it.

If we do, COP31 could be remembered not simply as another climate summit, but as the moment Australia helped accelerate one of the most important economic transformations of the century.

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<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/9303419/tim-buckley-cop31-co-host-faces-fossil-fuel-export-challenge/>