

Architect of Paris climate accord says Morrison government's emissions stance is 'anti-science'



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A key architect of the landmark Paris climate deal has lambasted the Coalition government's inaction on greenhouse gas emissions, saying it "goes against the science", squanders economic opportunity and risks Australia's international standing.

Laurence Tubiana, a respected French diplomat and economist, also says Prime Minister Scott Morrison's claim that Australia will meet its Paris targets "at a canter" is contradicted by international scientific opinion.

Her comments follow an official report on Friday showing Australia's climate pollution rose by 1.3 per cent in the year to March – the highest quarterly rise in eight years. The troubling findings were released on the eve of the long weekend in some states and on the same day as the banking royal commission interim report - timing critics say was designed to bury the report.

Since assuming the prime ministership last month Mr Morrison has dumped the National Energy Guarantee, which would have curbed emissions from the electricity sector, and declared Australia would not join other signatories to the Paris deal in ratcheting up emissions reduction targets by 2020 in line with climate science.

Ms Tubiana is a former French ambassador for international climate negotiations who played a major role in brokering the 2015 Paris treaty. She is now chief executive of the European Climate Foundation. She described as "concerning" Mr Morrison's refusal in the next parliamentary term to revise the Paris targets beyond Australia's current commitment – a 26 per cent cut by 2030, based on 2005 levels. She said most emission reduction commitments made at the Paris talks, including Australia's, were "insufficient" to achieve the goals of the treaty - which aims to keep global warming to well below 2°C - and the international community expected Australia to go further.

"[Mr Morrison's stance] goes against the science, spirit and letter of the Paris agreement. As we see other countries preparing to increase their levels of

ambition, I strongly urge Australia not to fall behind," Ms Tubiana told Fairfax Media. "The Australian government, along with all others, needs to listen to the science and the economics, and lead the country towards decarbonisation. "Failure to do so will have profound consequences on the country's standing in the international community and its future prospects in terms of innovation and economic opportunity."

Mr Morrison has repeatedly insisted Australia will meet the 2030 Paris commitment, despite projections from organisations including the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations, as well as the government's own forecasts, showing emissions are set to badly overrun the target.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison believes his Government will meet emissions targets despite a report finding Australia's climate pollution rose by 1.3 per cent in the year to March. "We're going to meet those in a canter, our 26 per cent target ... we have the policies in place and importantly, the technology, the demand management. All of these issues are pointing to that outcome," he told ABC's Insiders program on Sunday. However Ms Tubiana rejected this assertion, saying "the consensus in the scientific community is that Australia is not currently on track to reduce emissions and meet its Paris Agreement commitments".

This is despite Australia's "bountiful" renewable energy potential and major economic gains to be won by those at the forefront of the technology, she said.

Leaked drafts of a major new report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a summary of which is due for release on Monday, suggest global warming will exceed the critical 1.5°C threshold by 2040 unless rapid and drastic action is taken.

Environment Minister Melissa Price said Australia was responsible for just 1.3 per cent of global emissions. "We will do our part, but climate change is a global problem that requires a global solution," she said. However Ms Tubiana said Australia was a G20 country in the top 20 emitters and was "not a small player" in global climate action efforts. "Given Australia's extreme vulnerability to climate change, as we have seen with the massive damage to the Great Barrier Reef, and the harrowing images of the epic drought across eastern Australia, Australia has a vital national interest in the entire world implementing the Paris agreement in full," she said.

The Federal Government delayed an emissions report due to the country's failure to lower its greenhouse gas pollution. Ms Price said Australia "has a proud history of meeting our international commitments" and current policies could be scaled up. "We have comfortably beaten our first Kyoto target, we will beat our 2020 Kyoto target, and we will meet the responsible 2030 Paris target. Australia's emissions are currently at their lowest level on a per capita and GDP basis in 28 years," she said.

Critics dismiss the per capita and GDP reduction as irrelevant because overall national emissions continue to rise. They also say claims that Australia will meet its Kyoto targets are misleading because Australia claims emissions reductions based on reduced land clearing after 1990 - a year when clearing rates were unusually high.