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Western Australia's Paris Agreement 1.5°C carbon budget is just 12 years of present emissions - report

Without acting to reduce emissions, Western Australia is likely to use up its Paris-Agreement 1.5°C compatible carbon budget within 12 years, but rapidly reducing carbon pollution will significant economic opportunities for the state according to a new report released today.

"WA has a vital interest in the world taking action to limit warming to 1.5°C – it is on the front line of climate impacts, so getting on a pathway consistent with limiting warming to 1.5°C is crucial to the economic and environmental survival of the state," said CEO of Climate Analytics Bill Hare.

Climate Analytics has calculated a 2018-2050 Paris Agreement 1.5°C compatible carbon budget for all sectors of the Western Australian economy, from 2018 to 2050.

WA accounted for 17% of Australia's national emissions in 2017 – emissions have increased 24% since 2005. The report shows that a Paris Agreement-compatible 2030 target would entail peaking emissions as soon as possible, followed by a steep dive towards a 49% reduction below 2005 levels by that date, and then reaching zero emissions by 2050.

"If WA takes no action now, and emissions continue, the state could burn up its 950 million tonne carbon budget within 12 years," said the report's lead author and Climate Analytics senior analyst Dr Ursula Fuentes Hutfilter.

"We show that with the right policies and technologies Western Australia can spread this carbon budget over the next 30 years, achieving zero CO₂ emissions by 2050. Not only is it feasible, it will help the state capture the benefits of the global transition to towards zero carbon, renewable fuels, for which there is vast potential, especially in green hydrogen, wind and solar power," she said.

WA will need a whole of economy approach to climate strategy that puts the role of the power sector at the centre of decarbonising the economy – this means the state needs to consider overarching climate legislation such as "Zero-carbon" Act to integrate all the relevant policy areas.

Key to decarbonising the power sector is a fast transition to renewable energy, taking advantage of the vast potentials, low and falling costs of renewable energy and storage technologies and the opportunities for a range of sectors. The report shows that WA could achieve close to 90% renewables in the power sector by 2030, with 95% emission reductions, with the sector being carbon in the early 2030s.

"At present WA is the only state without a renewable target - an important step would be to adopt one close to that of South Australia's 100% by 2030 target", said Dr Hutfilter.

At the heart of a WA 1.5°C Paris compatible strategy is the need to bring emissions from the Liquefied Natural Gas industry under control - LNG emissions have increased threefold (318%) since 2005, and if current LNG sector plans go head, are set to increase by 630% by 2030.

“Unless WA addresses its natural gas climate issue, this sector’s emissions in WA to 2050 are likely to be in the range of 1 billion tonnes of CO₂ - more than the state’s entire carbon budget - or about 14 times WA’s entire emissions in 2005,” said CEO of Climate Analytics Bill Hare.

“Around 70-75% of the LNG industries emissions in WA can be avoided over the next 30 years but WA will need to regulate to ensure that at least 80% of CO₂ released from gas wells across the entire industry are captured and stored, and that the industry replaces natural gas used in manufacturing LNG with renewable energy, phased in over the next ten years” said Hare.

These things are possible now, but will not be implemented by the LNG industry without a carbon price or direct regulation by the State Government.

As the Paris Agreement is implemented globally a decline in the LNG market will likely occur as demand for natural gas in the power sector in Asia, a major source of WA LNG demand, peaks by around 2030 and then declines to close to zero between 2050 and 2060. There is an opportunity to transition the LNG industry to a major global producer of green hydrogen, however this will require the State Government to develop a proactive transition strategy for the LNG export industry towards green hydrogen exports over the next 10-15 years

“It would be very unwise and risky for the State Government to rely on scenarios promoted by industry which show ongoing increases in LNG demand through to 2040 and beyond which are clearly not consistent with meeting the Paris Agreement goals and limiting warming to 1.5°C” said Hare.

A 37% reduction in energy and industry emissions by 2030, decarbonising electricity generation, and shifting from gas to renewable energy exports such as green hydrogen would put Western Australia in line with the Paris Agreement while delivering significant economic advantages into the future, says the report.

“Western Australia is uniquely placed, both economically and geographically with its proximity to Asian markets, to reap the benefits of a low-carbon economy including through green hydrogen exports.”

“With 1°C global warming the state is already experiencing rapidly declining rainfall in the south-west putting increasing strain on farmers and water supplies, accelerating sea level rise is already damaging beaches and coastal infrastructure, damage marine heatwaves already damaging Ningaloo, Shark Bay and fisheries and heatwaves on land already causing health problems.”

“The pathway to zero is critical and it is dangerous to focus only on an endpoint of net zero emissions by 2050 and not deal with the needs for emissions to be nearly halved by 2030”, said Hare.

Download report
Link Coming

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