



# The electric car is the future: Finkel

**Nicole Hasham**

Affordable electric vehicles that can drive up to 600 kilometres on a single charge will help bring a motoring revolution to Australia, predicts Chief Scientist Alan Finkel, in an intervention that defies naysayers of the technology.

In an interview with Fairfax Media, Dr Finkel said the onus was on the federal government to cut greenhouse gas emissions from the transport sector, but predicted electric cars “will be a significant element” of policies considered.

Dr Finkel – who owns two electric cars – would not comment on government policy. But he pointed to his review of the national electricity market that called for development of a whole-of-economy emissions reduction strategy by 2020.

Environment and Energy Minister Josh Frydenberg last month declared electric vehicles would revolutionise Australia, saying the scale of disruption would rival the introduction of the iPhone.

The comments prompted fierce debate about the extent to which the government should encourage the electric vehicle industry. A handful of Coalition backbenchers led by climate sceptic Craig Kelly stridently oppose financial incentives, such as subsidies, to lower the purchase cost of the technology.

The transport sector is a major contributor to Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions. However, electric vehicle uptake is minute compared with other nations such as those in Europe, where governments have played a greater role in encouraging the technology.

Dr Finkel said Australia’s vast

distances, and concern about electric vehicle driving range, may have held back sales.

However, the next generation of cars, soon to reach Australia, were at entry-level prices and could drive up to 600 kilometres on a single charge, he said. “That will make quite a difference to Australians’ interest in electric cars. It will get better and better in time because the improvements in batteries keep on coming.”

France and Britain are encouraging electric car adoption by vowing to end the sale of new diesel and petrol cars by 2040. Norway and the Netherlands aim to do so by 2025, and China has indicated it will also adopt a ban.

Transport Minister Barnaby Joyce has ruled out similar moves in Australia.

Despite this, benefits flowing from the overseas bans would trickle down to Australia, Dr Finkel said. “There will be an extraordinarily deep shift away from petrol and diesel cars towards pure elec-

tric [vehicles],” he said of countries with a ban on conventional cars.

“Volume will go up, prices will go down, electric cars will therefore inevitably be better vehicles with longer range, lower prices and more accessible to Australians.”

Aside from the clear environmental benefits, electric cars were a “more enjoyable driving experience”.

“You just touch the accelerator and the car responds . . . There is something magical about the responsiveness of it,” he said.

Australia had the potential to develop next-generation lithium-ion batteries used in electric cars, but there was “no actual large-scale activity” to date.

“We’ve got a workforce, we’ve got access to raw materials such as lithium . . . we’ve got experience in designing, building and exporting products, but we haven’t made that kind of commitment.”

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Plugged in: Chief Scientist Alan Finkel charges up. Photo: Rebecca Hallas