

Climate policies 'don't need Greens'

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EXCLUSIVE

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New Energy Minister Chris Bowen insists voters gave Labor a mandate to deliver its “ambitious” climate plan, warning independents and the Greens he has designed a crossbench-proof climate policy that means he won’t need to negotiate over their calls to end the use of coal and gas.

Greens leader Adam Bandt is demanding that Labor step up its climate targets, including a ban on new coal and gas projects, but Bowen said he deliberately designed the party’s Powering Australia climate policies so they could be implemented without the support of the Senate, where the Greens hold the balance of power.

“In relation to the Senate, a lot of the stuff in Powering Australia doesn’t need legislation, there’s a lot of stuff we’ll just be getting on with,” he said.

Labor has committed to

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Labor's climate plans 'crossbench proof'

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legislating its target of hitting net zero emissions by 2050 – a goal with bipartisan support.

However, it has not promised to do the same for its 2030 target, which is to cut greenhouse emissions by 43 per cent from 2005 levels, even though that is the party's preference.

No new laws are required to implement the key elements of Labor's Powering Australia climate policy over the next three years.

"We designed that very deliberately so that we would have scope to just get on with the policy and not get bogged down in the climate wars," Bowen said.

He has designated two areas that will do the heavy lifting in Labor's first term in government under the Powering Australia plan.

One involves tightening the Safeguard Mechanism, which lay dormant under the Coalition government, to impose caps on Australia's 215 biggest polluters.

The other is a \$20 billion Rewiring the Nation fund that will pour money into the electricity grid and expand its capacity so it can handle a near tripling of renewables, which are expected to

comprise 82 per cent of the grid by 2030.

Bowen said Labor's win, which delivered the party a majority in the lower house, represented a mandate for the climate policy it took to the election and bending to the Greens' demands to veto coal and gas projects would be a betrayal of the electorate.

"The [Greens'] argument goes something like this – to oversimplify it: 'Congratulations on winning the election. The first thing we'd like you to do is trash the policies you took to the election.'"

The Coalition went to the election pledging net zero emissions by 2050 and to cut emissions by 26 per cent by 2030. The Greens want to hit net zero by 2035.

Bowen dismissed claims, made by the Greens and independent "teal" candidates, that Labor went to the election with weak climate goals and a small-target strategy.

He released an energy policy with more detail than his opponents five months ahead of the election and the Coalition ran scare campaigns claiming Labor's climate policy would cost tens of thousands of coal mining jobs and add \$560 to yearly energy bills.

"You don't take a policy with a target and its levers and the safe-

guard mechanism, which can be weaponised in a narrowcasting way, which the [Coalition] tried to do. That's not a small target. It is not. So I do reject that."

Bowen said he wanted to work with the private sector and avoid what Labor has argued were damaging market interventions by the Coalition that discouraged private investment.

These included former energy minister Angus Taylor's \$600 million promise for a publicly owned gas plant at Kurri Kurri in the Hunter region of NSW.

"Reactive interventions are counterproductive," Bowen said. "They were into what I call 'the perp walk', calling energy chief executives in to justify price rises."

Power prices are rising steeply as a global energy crunch drives up the cost of coal and gas, prompting the Australian Industry Group, representing some of the nation's biggest energy users, to warn that Labor faces "an unenviable but urgent task in responding to this crisis".

However, it said the energy reform agenda "is not one they can or should take on alone" and called for industry to help support the transition to renewables and away from fossil fuels.



Chris Bowen at Parliament House yesterday. Photo: James Brickwood