

Speech for the Hon. Anthony Albanese MP
Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local
Government

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Thank you to our host – Minister Kazuyoshi Kaneko.

I also acknowledge my ministerial colleagues from far and wide.

It is good to see you all here today.

It is fitting we are meeting in Japan this week to discuss how we can improve the way we work together to combat climate change.

It was here in Japan, a little over a decade ago, where countries came together to sign the Kyoto Protocol.

The challenge of climate change has also brought opportunities, as the world moves towards carbon constrained economies.

Right across the globe, people are changing their lifestyles to reduce their carbon footprints.

In turn, businesses are working hard to become more 'green' because they recognise this is fundamental to their success into the future.

Economic frameworks have been established to drive reductions in countries' greenhouse gas emissions.

As we speak, emissions trading is underway in 27 countries across Europe.

In the United States, President-elect Obama has also pledged to introduce an emissions trading scheme.

I am pleased to say, we can now add Australia to this growing list.

The Rudd Labor Government came to power a little over a year ago, and a key priority since then has been action on climate change.

On day one of the new Australian Government being formed, our first decision was to ratify the Kyoto Protocol.

Ratifying Kyoto was a landmark moment for our country.

It signalled to the Australian people, and indeed to the rest of the world, that Australia is serious about playing a part in a global solution on climate change.

We've built on the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol with a number of domestic initiatives I will briefly outline to you today.

Before I do, a quick snapshot of Australia.

Australia is currently in the grip of one of the most severe droughts in its history.

In fact, during the past 12 years, we have experienced 11 of the hottest years since records began.

For our farmers, this has resulted in crop and stock losses.

For people living in the cities, water restrictions are a way of life.

While this has been occurring, we have also experienced a number of serious bushfires, floods and cyclones.

Moreover, if no action is taken, we may face an increase in temperature in our country of up to five degrees by the end of the century.

In the last decade, two things have become abundantly clear.

Our climate is changing and becoming more unpredictable.

And if we don't take responsible action now, the costs – both economic and environmental – will continue to rise.

Expert analysis tells us that the longer we wait to take action on climate change, the more it will cost.

These costs will take many forms in my home country...

...rising sea levels that will threaten coastal properties...

...a fall in demand for Australian exports which will impact on our terms of trade...

...more frequent droughts that will affect our farmers' ability to produce food...

...and irreversible damage to our natural environment, and the industries it supports.

It's clear the current generation needs to take responsibility for the climate challenges confronting us.

That is why the Australian Government is taking responsible action now, so the generation after us is not burdened with the full impacts of climate change.

Since coming to office, the Rudd Government has taken decisive action to combat the climate change challenges facing our nation.

The first step, as I just mentioned, was to ratify the Kyoto Protocol.

The next step in Australia's plan to contribute to avoiding dangerous climate change is our proposed Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme.

This is an economy-wide emissions trading scheme.

The Scheme, which we will introduce in 2010, will make industries pay for the carbon pollution they generate.

Introducing a cost for carbon will act as a powerful incentive for business to reduce their emissions and to encourage them to invest in new clean and renewable technology.

Transitioning to a low pollution economy will also create the jobs of the future.

For example, we expect Australia's renewable energy industry to grow to around 30 times its current size by 2050.

The Government will provide some compensation to businesses and households affected by the introduction of the scheme.

We will use every cent raised by the sale of pollution permits to transition to a low carbon economy and help households and business adjust to the Scheme.

The Australian Government is committed to reducing our carbon pollution by 60 percent of 2000 levels by the year 2050.

By the end of 2020, we will reduce Australia's carbon pollution by between 5 per cent and 15 percent below 2000 levels.

A reduction of 5 per cent below 2000 levels is our minimum, unconditional commitment to reduce emissions by 2020, irrespective of the actions of other nations.

This represents a significant cut of around 27 percent on a per capita basis.

It is particularly significant given Australia was one of only two Annex One countries, along with Iceland, whose 2012 Kyoto protocol target was for an increased level of emissions based on 1990 levels.

In our case, 108 per cent.

A reduction of 15 per cent below 2000 levels is the Australian Government's commitment to reduce emissions further, if there is a global agreement where all major economies agree to substantially restrain emissions and advanced economies take on significant reductions.

In Australia, the transport sector contributes around 14 percent of our total emissions, making it the second fastest growing source of emissions.

That is why transport has been included in the scheme – minus international aviation and maritime – which are being dealt with at the multilateral level through the International Civil Aviation Organization and the International Maritime Organization.

Our inclusion of domestic aviation in the scheme represents the latest in a series of initiatives we're progressing to reduce emissions from Australia's aviation sector.

The Australian Government is also using the APEC forum to work with our Asia Pacific neighbours to find ways to minimise aviation's carbon footprint.

I'm pleased to say this has led to a new APEC Aviation Emissions Taskforce.

We are also pushing ahead with a number of practical measures to reduce emissions from aircraft.

For example, we are working with air traffic service providers in New Zealand and the United States to put in place more efficient flight paths across the Pacific, with the aim of cutting emissions from aircraft that fly between the three countries.

Complementary to these initiatives is our Aviation Green Paper which I released last month.

The Green Paper is the precursor to Australia's first ever comprehensive aviation policy – the Aviation White Paper which I will release later this year.

The Green Paper proposes a number of practical steps the industry can take to reduce emissions from the sector.

It also outlines the Government's commitment to work with industry to identify areas where we can complement the carbon pollution improvements the industry itself is making.

For example, how can we improve air traffic management systems to make the most of the next generation of fuel efficient aircrafts?

It is important as we discuss approaches that can help us better manage the impacts of transport on the environment, that we keep in the front of our minds the bigger picture.

The planet is warming because of us, and those who have gone before us.

Some may argue that we should not act on climate change until we ride out the global financial storm that currently engulfs our nations.

I disagree.

Australia disagrees.

The current economic crisis makes it more important that we secure the long term prosperity that comes from building the carbon constrained economies of the future.

Ignoring the problem of climate change will only make it worse, and more difficult to deal with for future generations.

We need to be responsible, and as leaders in our fields, help shape a global solution to this major environmental and economic problem.

That is why events like this carry such importance.

It's an opportunity we should all embrace to work together to share possible solutions to our common challenges.

I look forward to working with you on these issues.