



Dispatches From The Wild, Weird World Of Humanity And Its Biosphere

May 25 2022

## Australia



Australia held an election on May 21st, and the incumbent Prime Minister Scott Morrison of the Liberal Party (which, confusingly for Americans, is the name of the Australian conservative party) lost his majority. The new Prime Minister of Australia, sworn in on May 23rd, is [Anthony Albanese](#) of the Australian Labor Party. ([Pictured](#), above: Albanese with his partner Jodie Haydon on the right and his incoming Minister for Foreign Affairs [Penny Wong](#) on the left). This is excellent news for climate action and renewables progress in Australia, for a number of reasons.

Since 2013, Australia has been governed by conservatives. Their prime

ministers have pursued actively anti-climate-action policies, with Scott Morrison in particular promoting coal mining, [claiming](#) that vehicle emissions standards were a "war on the weekend," and saying that coal plants should "[run as long as they possibly can](#)." Over \$1 billion in "climate funding" his party promised was [set to go to fossil fuel projects](#), though that will almost certainly be avoided by their election loss.

By contrast, incoming Prime Minister Albanese [said](#) he wanted to make Australia a "renewable energy superpower," and has pledged to set a Paris Agreement greenhouse gas emissions reduction target of 43% below 2005 levels by 2030, [up considerably](#) from the Morrison government's target of 26-28% below 2005 levels by 2030, [one of the lowest among developed countries](#). Just after his victory, Albanese [said to the BBC](#) "We have an opportunity now to end the climate wars in Australia. Australian businesses know that good action on climate change is good for jobs and good for our economy, and I want to join the global effort."

This election also held more good news for climate action beyond the simple swing from Morrison to Albanese in charge. The strongly pro-climate action Australian Green Party had [the best result in their history](#), and could potentially hold the balance of power [in the unlikely event](#) that Albanese doesn't have a majority with the Labor Party MPs alone. (Not all results are in as of this writing, so it's clear that Labor won, but not clear how big their majority is). Furthermore, six new "[Teal Independent](#)" MPs were elected, an interesting group (all women) who belong to no specific political party, but have several policies in common including support for faster [emissions reductions](#). (The newly elected 47th Parliament of Australia will [likely have the most women and most nonwhite members in history](#)). After brutal wildfires, droughts, and Great Barrier Reef bleaching events in recent years, Australian voters are [clearly](#) looking for more climate action from their leaders.

The future for Australian climate progress looks bright. Even under the actively anti-renewables Morrison premiership, Australia has been deploying renewable energy in leaps and bounds, thanks to climate-smart state governments in [New South Wales](#) and [South Australia](#) and a [booming](#) world-leading grassroots rooftop solar movement. As previously reported in this newsletter, Australia is [one of the three countries moving fastest towards renewables](#) (alongside the Netherlands and Vietnam), with the share of Australia's electricity from wind and solar rising from 13% in 2019 to 22% in 2021. With a climate-smart PM in charge, those numbers will likely only get better. [Advance, Australia fair!](#)



## Netherlands & Europe

The Netherlands has announced that they will ban the installation of new fossil fuel-centric heating systems starting in 2026, mandating that all new installations and replacements use electric or [electric/gas hybrid](#) heat pumps from that year onward. This will be a big shift: in 2018, gas-only heating [covered](#)

[71% of residential heating demand](#). However, the government is [committed to making it happen](#): a fund of 130 million euros per year has been reserved through 2030 to help support homeowners purchasing heat pumps, new heat pump-focused training courses are being developed with the installers' union, and manufacturers are investing in at least three new heat pump production locations. This is just one example of Europe doubling down on the green industrial revolution as a response to Putin's fossil-fueled aggression: on a broader scale, the European Commission submitted on May 18th a [300 billion euro "REPowerEU" plan](#) to eliminate all fossil fuel imports from Russia by 2027. If fully adopted, this plan would up the EU renewable energy target to 45% by 2030 ([and that's all energy, including cars, furnaces etc., not just electricity](#)) and make solar panels mandatory for new residential buildings by 2029, among many other policies. Great news!



## Lord Howe Island

Lord Howe Island ([pictured](#)), a tiny, isolated Australian possession in the middle of the Tasman Sea, was a jewel of unique wildlife, once home to over a dozen endemic bird species and subspecies, five endemic genera of plants, and one or more endemic species of skink, gecko, snail, beetle, and stick insect. ("Endemic" means "native to and found only that in that location."). Like many such "island paradises," it had a very rough Anthropocene, with early settlers in the 1800s driving the [Lord](#)



[Howe swamphen](#) and [Lord Howe parakeet](#) to extinction. When rats were introduced to the island by [the shipwreck of the SS Makambo](#) in 1918, the situation got even worse. The classic rats/isolated island ecological tragedy played out; the rat population skyrocketed and they ate the local fauna and flora to death. More endemic birds were driven to extinction by the rat onslaught, including the [Lord Howe white-eye](#), [Lord Howe gerygone flyeater](#), [Lord Howe fantail](#), and [Lord Howe thrush](#). By the mid-20th century, the island was beleaguered by feral livestock, native species were either extinct or barely seen, and there were an estimated 210,000 hungry rats present.

But in the 21st century, the Australian government got serious about a rat eradication program on the island, and it looks like it [finally succeeded](#) when the last rat was spotted in August 2021. (They still bring in rat-detecting dogs every few months just to make sure). The results have been dramatic. “What is unfolding is an ecological renaissance, since the rodents have gone, the catchphrase is: ‘I’ve never seen that before’,” [said longtime Lord Howe Island resident Hank Bower to the Sydney Morning Herald](#). “There’s a vine which we didn’t know what the fruit looked like, people are taking photos of insects and sending them to the Australian Museum who are saying we’ve only got three of those on record ever but we are seeing hundreds of them. Everything is blooming, all the plants are flowering and we are seeing a carpet of seedlings.” Endemic land snails have reappeared, including some from species that hadn't been seen in decades and had been feared extinct. The flightless [Lord Howe woodhen](#), one of the last surviving endemic birds, saw its population dip to just 22 individuals in the 1970s, but now has risen to 565 birds; close to the healthy carrying capacity of the tiny island.



There are even [plans underway](#) to reintroduce the [Lord Howe Island phasmid](#), aka "tree lobster," ([pictured](#)) a magnificent giant stick insect that was extirpated from Lord Howe Island by the rats but clung to life with a tiny population on the nearby [Ball's Pyramid](#) rock, and is now successfully breeding in captivity. ([The finding of that population is a fascinating conservation odyssey in its own right:](#)

[check it out here.](#)).

The Lord Howe Island story is a particularly dramatic example of a planet-wide phenomenon: there have been so many stories of invasive species, especially rats, devastating island wildlife and conservationists trying to clean up afterwards that there exists a [Database of Island Invasive Species Eradications](#) with over 1,000 entries. Lord Howe Island is now seeing the payoff of such work: a rich, restored ecosystem with a second chance at life for unique natural wonders. Great news!

**The Weekly Anthropocene**

Email Address:  
samuelmatey@g.ucla.edu

Contact Us Today

