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UN Climate Chief's 'Mega-Drought' Claims Slammed by Experts

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On July 28, 2025, United Nations climate chief Simon Stiell delivered a speech in Sydney, urging Australia to adopt a more ambitious 2035 emissions reduction target. Speaking at a Smart Energy Council event, Stiell warned that failure to curb emissions could result in “mega-droughts” and severe impacts on food security. He claimed climate inaction could cost the country up to \$6.8 trillion in lost economic output by 2050. He described the forthcoming target, due in September, as a defining moment for Australia’s regional and economic future.

The remarks drew strong criticism from Australian energy analysts and commentators. John Storey, Director of Energy Policy at the Institute of Public Affairs, rejected Stiell’s warnings as exaggerated. He argued that Australia’s contribution to global carbon

emissions is approximately 1.3 percent, citing 2023 International Energy Agency data. According to Storey, much larger emitters like China and India account for over 30 percent and 7 percent of emissions respectively, making Australia's impact negligible by comparison.

Additional criticism focused on what some described as alarmist rhetoric. Commentators noted that Australia has made considerable progress in renewable energy, with solar and wind contributing 32 percent of electricity generation in 2024, according to the Clean Energy Council. They argued that focusing on Australia distracts from more significant global emitters and distorts the proportional economic risks.

The debate comes as the Albanese government prepares its 2035 climate target under the Paris Agreement. At the same time, Opposition MP Barnaby Joyce has introduced a bill to repeal Australia's net-zero commitment, arguing that it imposes costs without delivering a measurable global benefit. While the bill is unlikely to pass, it highlights the growing political divide over Australia's climate strategy.

Australia currently accounts for a relatively small share of total global emissions but has one of the highest per-capita emissions rates among developed nations. The political response to Stiell's speech reflects the broader tension between international climate expectations and domestic policy priorities.