

Albanese Net Zero Policy Threatens Australian Manufacturing Jobs

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Australia's opposition Shadow Assistant Manufacturing Minister, Andrew Willcox, has voiced strong concerns over the Albanese government's approach to achieving net zero emissions, warning it could lead to significant job losses in the country's manufacturing sector.

Speaking on Sky News with host Rowan Dean, Mr. Willcox criticised the government's reliance on renewable energy, arguing that the intermittent nature of sources like solar and wind cannot support a full-time economy. "You can't run a full-time economy on part-time power," he said, suggesting that the government's renewables-only strategy risks sending Australian manufacturers "to the wall."

The warning comes amid growing concerns about the viability of energy-intensive industries under Australia's current climate policies. One recent example is international metals producer Nyrstar, which was granted a \$135 million bailout package by the federal and state governments. The funding aims to preserve operations at two smelters in Port Pirie, South Australia, and Hobart, Tasmania, sites that collectively support around 8,000 jobs.

Nyrstar itself noted the crucial importance of a consistent, high-energy supply to maintain its smelting operations. The bailout underscores the challenges faced by manufacturers reliant on substantial power input amid energy transition policies.

Mr. Willcox highlighted further risks in Queensland, where he warned that up to 17,000 jobs could be lost if copper refining facilities shut down. He cited concerns about the Mount Isa copper smelter, which he suggested might close under current conditions, potentially triggering the shutdown of the nearby Townsville copper refinery located within his electorate.

Beyond employment, the Shadow Assistant Minister pointed out broader implications for Australia's agricultural sector, noting that by-products of copper smelting are used in fertilizer production. "We just don't have enough fertilizer for our farmers in this country," he said, emphasizing the wider economic consequences.

The opposition's concerns reflect ongoing debates over how best to balance environmental commitments with economic and industrial sustainability. Mr. Willcox and fellow Coalition members are reportedly developing alternative policies aimed at offering a more pragmatic path toward emissions reduction without jeopardizing manufacturing jobs.

He revealed plans to collaborate with Nationals Senator Matt Canavan and Shadow Energy Minister Dan Tehan on a joint committee tasked with formulating the Coalition's official stance on net zero. "We will be bringing a policy forward that will actually work," Mr Willcox

said. “We’ve got three years before the next election, but we will have this developed within the next 12 months.”

The debate over Australia’s energy future and manufacturing sector remains highly contentious. While the Albanese government continues to pursue ambitious net zero targets, critics argue that the transition must consider the practical realities of energy supply and the economic fallout for industries dependent on reliable power.

Host Rowan Dean’s comments during the interview captured the sharp divisions, suggesting the straightforward solution was to “ban net zero,” highlighting the polarised discourse around climate policy in Australia.

As the country prepares for its next federal election, the Coalition’s emerging policy proposals and the government’s ongoing renewables push will likely dominate discussions on how to secure Australia’s economic and environmental future.