

Extracting Influence: The Australian Mining Industry and National Climate Policy

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ABSTRACT: The growing urgency of climate action to avert the disastrous consequences of climate change has influenced the Australian Government to announce its commitment to fighting climate change, exemplified by its net-zero emissions by 2050 commitment and the signing of the Paris Agreement. However, despite the environmental impacts of mining, the economic and political influence of the mining industry in Australian politics has created political stagnation and climate inaction, undermining Australia's commitment to climate leadership and accountability. While many previous assumptions about climate inaction have pointed towards the economic cost of a decrease in GDP, the current energy production dependence on fossil fuels, the potential effect on national employment levels, or the defunding of climate science programs by previous governments, many omit the political influence of the mining sector in pressuring mining-friendly legislation or approvals. This paper argues that political spending of the Australian mining industry influences Australian climate policy outcomes. The Australian mining industry, through spending such as political donations and advertising campaigns, has led to the lack of climate legislation and continued mining expansion, which undermines the government's promise of climate action.

KEYWORDS: Political Science, Public Policy, Australia, Environmental Politics, Mining Industry, Climate Change.

■ Introduction

The Australian Government has committed to the legally-binding Paris Agreement, which states that nations commit "to limit global warming to 1.5°C, greenhouse gas emissions must peak before 2025 at the latest and decline 43% by 2030,"¹ and has set out a clear target for net-zero emissions by 2050.² Despite its commitments to climate action, which would require a halt of further new gas, coal or oil projects, it has avoided major legislation that reduces or economically harms the mining industry due to successful political lobbying. The continued support of the mining industry and its expansion is one of the reasons why Australia is currently not on track to meet its climate objectives.³ This contradicts the global consensus that the mining industry is detrimental to the environment and thus active steps should be taken to switch to renewable energy production or at least stop or rescind new approvals for expansion.⁴

Even within Australia, there have been calls for urgent climate action, as many recognize the threat that climate change poses to humanity and the Earth. Many Australian citizens have been affected by climate change, especially through the increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters, such as the 2019 Black Summer Bushfires. Over 70% of Australians said they are concerned about climate change, and a majority of Australians (55%) said that they support Australia's commitment to global objectives of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C, including the requirement to terminate new mining projects to meet those goals. Many have also recognized the adverse effects of mining on the environment, with 56% of Australians being actively aware that opening new gas, coal, or oil projects will make it more difficult for Australia to reduce

greenhouse gas emissions by 43% by 2030. Similarly, many also agree that to better protect the environment and meet its targets, Australia cannot continue with the status quo, and 66% of Australians think that the government should plan to phase out coal mining and transition into other industries.⁵

Recent studies on the causes of climate inaction in Australia include papers discussing the various framings of climate discourse, the role of narratives and conservatives, economic dependence on the industry, ineffective government institutions, and more. However, previous research uses frameworks that are too narrow in scope, such that they do not always reflect the general patterns and causation. Also, some arguments and trends observed no longer reflect reality due to the rapidly changing nature of public opinion and climate discourse. Finally, the existing research discusses non-essential factors, rather than the core reasons. This paper contributes to the existing research by looking at political spending, specifically political donations and media campaign spending by the mining industry on national climate policy outcomes.

This paper aims to explore how political spending by the mining industry has created climate policy inaction based on the theoretical framework that politicians are disproportionately influenced by financiers. It introduces a central causal mechanism and utilizes various historical and modern examples to understand the relationship between political spending and climate policy inaction. Through the analysis of political donations and media spending patterns and their impact on shaping the major parties and political outcomes, I will argue that the political spending of the Australian mining industry is a key factor that has influenced climate policy inaction in Australia.

In the next section, I will discuss existing literature and its limitations. In the third section, I will explain the theoretical framework of the paper, including the causal mechanism and the mining industry in Australia. In the following section, I will investigate the impact of political donations and media spending on climate policy and the subsequent policy inaction. Finally, I will close with a brief conclusion.

■ Literature Review

Framing:

Existing studies point to the political framing of climate discourse as the primary cause for policy inaction. These studies assume that political discourse engaged by politicians within policy-making bodies represents the general view of the constituents. In particular, scholars highlight the relationship between economic framing and the failures of both international organizations and domestic policymaking in passing effective regulations. Christoff argues that Australia's policy inaction has been caused by waning public support and awareness because of failures of joint, international commitments for urgent and domestic policy implementations.⁶ Christoff recognizes a shift in public recognition of climate change, and a subsequent shift in economic discourse from "old" to "new," signifying an explicit recognition of climate change. However, Christoff asserts that failures of international commitments undermined political momentum for decisive climate policy and discourse. The failure of international commitment, specifically through the examination of the 2009 Copenhagen climate negotiations, has spurred political opposition against climate-positive legislation in favor of the economic argument, which was evident in the divisive debates for carbon pricing. The lack of urgency in climate action suggests that the consensus disregarded the exigency and that politicians acted based on the stances of their constituents. Furthermore, media focus on divisive domestic debates, such as Carbon Pricing, further eroded public support for climate action.

However, since then, there has been a significant shift in both public awareness and urgency as well as public support for tougher regulation, particularly among the younger generations. This means that the majority of Australians no longer disregard climate as a problem. The shift is evident in significant civil participation by environmental activists to influence governmental policy, significant youth protest movements such as Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion, as well as other nationwide and grassroots climate justice protest movements that represent a shift in public opinion. This is supported by data that suggests that over 70% of Australians are concerned about climate change.⁵ While applicable at the time of writing (2013), significant shifts in public opinion and intensive civil participation for stricter environmental policies mean that such an argument is no longer as accurate.

Role of Conservatives:

Other studies also point to the power of conservatives within Australia's major parties, specifically within the Liberal-National Party Coalition, which has dominated Australian politics in the 2000s and 2010s. Crowley argues that there is

division within both the Liberal-National Party Coalition and the Labor Party in the stance of the dominant parties on climate action. Conservatives utilize climate policy differences to incite internal political dissent, resulting in conservatives who are staunchly in support of mining being able to exert influence within the party. This has resulted in a pro-mining-driven narrative, with internal party politics and warring internal factions being more instrumental in dictating positive climate policy. Even with public support, it has not swayed the government from adopting climate policies.⁷ While conservatives do exert significant influence, there have been instances where pro-climate policy has been implemented or promised because of public support and opinion. An example is Howard's 2007 electoral commitment to an Emissions Trading Scheme, despite being historically against it and despite incurring significant protest and challenges from the conservatives.⁸ Another example is the federal approval of Snowy Hydro 2.0 under the Turnbull government, providing clean energy, despite facing intense resistance from conservatives due to various reasons, such as opposition to the implementation of clean energy and the high projected cost.⁹ This demonstrates that while conservatives have the power to delay or hinder policies from being introduced, ultimately, public pressure and opinion have the power to force action. Moreover, it does not explore the impact of external sources of influence on the views of the conservatives, which is then reflected in their position against climate action. In this case, mining lobby groups help sway conservatives to continue their anti-environmental policy despite mounting public pressure.

Ineffective Government Institutions:

Others point to the role of ineffective domestic institutions in supporting the introduction and implementation of effective climate policy in Australia. MacNeil defines these institutions as "formal and informal procedures, routines, norms, and conventions embedded in the organizational structure of the polity or economy" under the federal government. MacNeil argues that Australian climate policies have been largely hindered by the political system locked in a highly polarized debate around anthropogenic climate change and climate policy. This creates a limited number of institutions that lack the agencies and resources to create decisive policy to combat climate change. This results in weak national policy, such as the dismantlement of various institutions under the Abbott government. These institutions are thus unable to protect the national climate policy against the toxic national debate on climate change, which results in varying policies dependent on the current party in power. MacNeil further argues that the climate policies that have been introduced by such institutions are unable to take decisive action as they need to appease both individuals and groups that support climate action, but also anti-climate constituents, especially within elements of the conservative Liberal party.¹⁰

However, government institutions have not been as ineffective as they seem. They have been quick to adopt climate-related policy, which is evident in the responses to proposed climate legislation and requests for mining expan-

sion. Government institutions have been favorable to the mining industry, as can be seen by the rejection of drastic new environmental laws and approvals of mining expansion by both major parties. This is largely attributed to the political influence wielded by the industry. Even if these legislations are not pro-climate, they are cases where government institutions have acted efficiently, influenced by the industry. Moreover, these arguments also do not address the core reason why such climate discourses experience such high polarization. The polarization has caused division within both the Labor and Liberal-National Coalition Party, with many party members becoming more conservative. The mining industry, through lobby groups, swiftly passed policies related to the expansion of mining.

■ Methods

Theoretical Framework:

Past studies about campaign contributions argue that people who donate money to political parties view it as an investment for their interests, and once the party that they supported is elected, they will gain something in return.¹¹ These could be more beneficial policies, an amendment of legislation, a repeal of a law, preventing a proposed law debated in Parliament from being passed, tax cuts, and more. Joo-Cheong Tham argues that “when judging what is in the ‘public interest’, the minds of politicians will be skewed towards the interests of their financiers.”¹² These political donations lead to higher engagement between legislators and lobby groups, leading to the interests of certain political groups being heard more than others, skewing political outcomes in favor of donors. These political donations are important resources for political parties to run campaigns and to fund other party ventures, with parties increasingly relying on them. These donations financially pressure legislators to act in favor of donors to secure future funding, informally binding politicians to the interests of donors. Similarly, other types of political spending, such as public relations campaigns and advertising investments, can shift public opinion in favor of the view of lobbyists and directly pressure governments to act in accordance with the interests of the lobbyists.

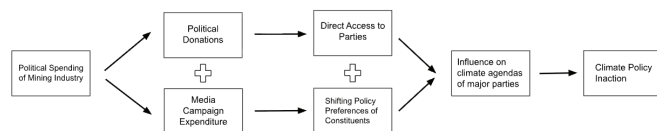


Figure 1: Political Spending of the Mining Industry on National Climate Policy Inaction. It represents the causal mechanism of how political spending by the mining industry has impacted Australian climate policy outcomes.

Figure 1 represents the core argument of my paper, demonstrating the causal mechanism of political spending by the mining industry and its subsequent impact on Australian climate policy. The political spending comprises donations to the major parties and media campaign expenditure. Political donations increase access to the major parties and allow preferential hearing of the interests of the mining industry. This permits them to directly influence the parties' policy stances. At the same time, media campaign expenditure shapes the policy preferences of constituents, which indirectly pressures

the government to introduce favorable policies to the mining industry. The combination of political donations and media campaign expenditure influences the climate agendas of the major parties. This has a direct implication on national policy-making, resulting in climate policy inaction by the Australian Government.

Case Study: Mining Industry in Australian climate politics:

The mining sector in Australia grew considerably into large, industrialized corporations that run massive mines. Growth in the industry was accentuated during the energy and mineral demand boom of the 2000s.¹³ By 2020, Australia was one of the largest producers of coal and had proven reserves of 150.227 billion tons, a staggering 37.6% of global iron ore reserves, around 30% of global uranium reserves, and had large reserves of many other precious metals and minerals such as opal and nickel. Australia also remains one of the largest natural gas and oil producers globally, with 151.7 billion cubic meters and 140.89 million barrels produced in 2023, respectively.¹⁴

The profits of these companies grew considerably with increasing global demand due to mass industrialization, especially among developing industrial economies, notably China. Substantial profits helped investment into the industry and supported the growth of large mining giants such as BHP and Rio Tinto.¹⁵ Through consolidation and involvement as a stock company, these corporations have created a very high market capitalization, highlighting their wealth.¹⁶

Currently, mining makes up around 14% of the National GDP,¹⁷ around 12% of National Output,¹⁸ and is the most exported product. In the 2022-2023 financial year, it reaped a revenue of \$241.9 billion, accounting for two-thirds of the national export revenue.¹⁹ In 2025, the mining industry employs around 324,800 individuals,²⁰ making it an important factor for consideration when approving expansions and has been touted as a key benefit of mining by the industry.

However, mining causes significant environmental degradation both in the immediate vicinity and in its contribution to anthropogenic climate change. It results in considerable mechanical damage to the surrounding landscape and creates acid mine drainage. Mining activities cause substantial soil degradation, leading to acidic soil with lower soil pH,²¹ and contaminating local waterways through the leaching of heavy metals and tailings into waterways, with abandoned mines also contributing to water quality degradation.²² Moreover, considerable amounts of harmful particulates and gases, such as Sulphur dioxide, degrade air quality,²³ and contribute to global emissions through significant amounts of greenhouse gases, such as methane and carbon dioxide, released as a result of mining operations.²⁴ This results in negative environmental outcomes for the local and global environment.

The large profits of the industry and its impact on Australia's economy allow it to exert large amounts of influence in the political landscape of the country, especially among the more conservative parties such as the Liberal-National Coalition. This has resulted in the development of a close relationship between the government and lobbyists, notably between the

Liberal National Party Coalition and the industry, with greater government support of extraction and exploration through subsidies.²⁵ The State and Federal Governments have actively supported the growth and development of this industry by providing substantial financial subsidies and tax breaks. The government has also supported the industry by granting mining tenements that give companies the right to construct and extract from mines.²⁶ In 2015, the Australian Government provided \$4 billion in subsidies, yet that has considerably grown in the following decade to around \$14.5 billion in the year 2023-2024 to coal mines, oil, and gas operations.²⁷

These financial supports divert funding from other aspects of federal spending, including climate research or response, and make fossil fuels a cheaper option than renewable alternatives, disincentivizing a national shift towards renewable and cleaner energy sources and technologies.²⁸ These subsidies are also very unpopular with the Australian people, with only 7% of Australians supporting government subsidies for mines according to a survey conducted by the Australian Institute.⁵

■ Results and Discussion

In Australia's case, political spending by mining corporations aims to exert more influence and pass new legislation that supports the expansion of mining and prevents laws that would economically harm the industry, such as stricter regulations on mining approvals or laws that prevent further expansion. This highlights the relationship between the government and the industry, where industrial lobbyists, who act in the interests of mining companies, shape policy. The vested interests of political spending by mining corporations are economic in nature, striving to increase their profits and benefit investors. Such spending has allowed the industry to exert a significant influence on the government to enact favorable legislation, contributing to climate inaction. This directly contradicts the government's climate promises and the general sentiment within the Australian population that supports stronger governmental regulation and intervention to better protect the environment.

Political Donations:

Mining corporations have regularly used political donations to exercise considerable influence on parties' policy agendas, most notably the conservative parties, such as the pro-mining Liberal-National Coalition. This has been possible because political parties in Australia are primarily run by private funds, especially for federal election campaigns. The impact of financial donations on the parties is that the interests of the mining industry are prioritized. The mining industry uses this money to access business forums and other political events organized by the major parties, influencing the party's policy.²⁹ Political donations by mining corporations such as Rio Tinto, Glencore, and BHP have allowed unparalleled access to the political and economic events of the major parties.³⁰

Financial donations have helped secure meetings between the mining lobby and legislators and bureaucrats, where donors aim to persuade politicians to introduce or block policy in favor of the mining industry. This allows the constant en-

gagement of politicians with issues raised by donors through frequent interactions with politicians and mining lobby groups.³¹ As a consequence, it causes preferential hearing of the interests of political donors over other concerns raised by non-financiers, such as environmental activists, despite public support of environmental action. An official Senate inquiry into the corrupting effects of political donations highlights the issue that Australians have recognized as a threat to proper and fair democracy and its effect on skewed policies that favor the interests of the mining industry.¹²

The most influential lobby group is the Minerals Council of Australia, which pushes for financial subsidies and approvals for the expansion of mining. In an Australian Senate Inquiry into political donations in 2018, the Minerals Council of Australia conceded that it has made political donations to gain access to members of Parliament and directly lobby their interests.¹²

Donations to major parties from the resource sector 2006-2016

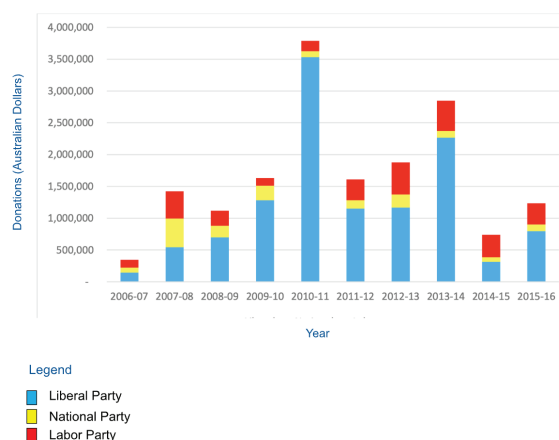


Figure 2: Political donations from the mining industry to major parties (2006–2016). Adapted with permission from reference 32. Copyright 2017 The Australia Institute. Between 2006 and 2016, the majority of political donations from the resource (mining) sector were given to the conservative Liberal-National Coalition, notably during federal election years.

Australia is a multi-party system, but it operates like a system with two major parties, the Australian Labor Party and the Liberal-National Coalition. At each election, one of the two major parties would win a majority of seats in Parliament to form a government. They do not need to compromise with minor parties that are against mining activity, such as the Greens, or with independent candidates. This is why political donations are focused on the Liberal-National Coalition and the Australian Labor Party, because it allows the maximum impact of political donations.

Based on the 2017 discussion paper, *The tip of the iceberg: Political donations from the mining industry* by the Australian Institute (Figure 2), between 2006–2016, the mining industry donated \$16.6 million to the 3 major parties. This included 71% of donations made to the Liberal Party, with the remainder divided between the Labor and the National Party. However, current reporting laws allow the mining industry to conceal political donations below a certain threshold and make multiple donations of small amounts without being disclosed.³² By

making large amounts of donations to the Liberal-National Coalition, the mining industry has influenced the stance of the Coalition. The Liberal Party has constantly supported natural resource exploitation on the grounds of economic growth and energy security. In addition, the mining industry utilizes financial donations as a way to influence the Australian Federal Election outcome. This money is used for campaigning and to sway the climate agenda of the incoming government.

According to Figure 2, there has been a spike in donations in the federal election years: 2007, 2010, and 2013. This observation is consistent with findings of Tello, Hazelton, and Leong, who noted that corporate political donations drop significantly during non-federal election years.³³ The large amount of donations in the 2010 election highlights the motivation of the mining industry to sway political outcomes on legislation that would harm them, especially the mining profit supertax proposed by Labor candidate Kevin Rudd. The exact amount of political donations is likely to be much higher than the declared amount, because donations under \$16900 are not required to be disclosed.³⁴ In 2022–2023 alone, 42% of private income and 22% and 27% of total income of the Liberal and Labor Party, respectively, came from undisclosed sources.³⁵

In Figure 2, the skewed distribution of donations towards the Liberal-National Coalition demonstrates the mining industry's attempt to influence the federal election through greater funding to the conservative party. Conservatives are generally more supportive of the mining industry because of its emphasis on the economic benefits of mining. They are more concerned with maintaining the status quo, rather than environmental sustainability, which does not have an immediate effect on the livelihoods of voters. There are greater concerns over the disruption of the mining industry, which has economic implications. By passing laws favorable to the mining industry, the conservatives can also win the support of constituents who are in line with their party's ideology.³⁶

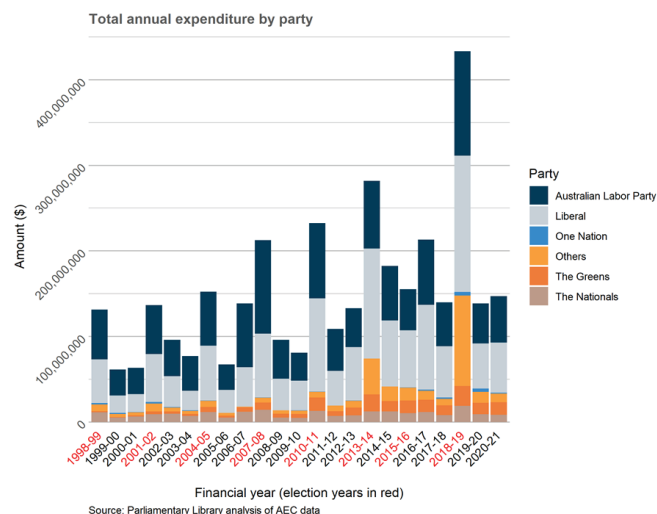


Figure 3: Total annual expenditure by major parties. Reproduced from reference 37 under a CC BY-NC-ND 3.0 AU license. Between 1998 and 2021, the annual political expenditure of major parties increased, particularly in Federal Election years.

The impact of political donations is intensified by the recent phenomenon in which election campaigns are becoming increasingly expensive. Based on the annual expenditure by the major parties between 1998 and 2021 (Figure 3), there is a massive increase in party expenditure during election years. While it is understood that costs increase during election years to fund election campaigns, in recent years, the amount has grown considerably. In addition, the parties need to diversify campaign strategies to attract new types of voters. They now have to launch social media campaigns in addition to using traditional media such as radio and television. Thus, many parties are increasingly reliant on big donations. Those with greater campaign funding can increase their visibility to national audiences, retain supporters, and attract new voters. Budget increases allow active public relations campaigns targeting marginal and swing seats, where competition is very tight and can be more easily won compared to less marginal or safe seats.

Election Year	Total Votes		
	Labor Party	Liberal-National Coalition	Other candidates
1975	36	91	0
1990	78	69	1
2010	72	73	5
2022	77	58	16
2025	94	43	13

Figure 4: Australian federal election results - House of Representatives, 1975–2025. Data adapted from reference 38. Since 1975, seats in the House of Representatives have shifted away from being wholly divided between the Australian Labor Party and the Liberal-National Coalition to a more plural composition, with increased representation of minor parties and independent candidates.

In recent years, the House of Representatives in federal elections has become more plural due to the rise of independents and minor parties. The Greens Party and non-party-aligned Independent candidates are against mining. The Mining Industry has tried to limit its influence and ensure that the Liberal-National Party wins most seats. Figure 4 demonstrates the shifting voting patterns for the House of Representatives from 1975 to 2025, particularly in the years 1975, 2022, and 2025. Figure 4 illustrates the bipartisan voting pattern in 1975 for the House of Representatives, with the vote wholly split between the Australian Labor Party and the Liberal-National Coalition. The bipartisan voter trend allows the parliament to be split between the two parties, making attaining a majority to form a government easier and less complex. However, since the election of the first Independent member to North Sydney, Ted Mack, in 1990, there has been a rise in Independent and Minor party candidates. The major parties declined, and the rise of these other candidates has increased competition. Instead of major parties competing against one another, they now contend against smaller parties and Independents, splitting votes more.

In the 2025 election, based on YouGov, there was a rise in the influence of candidates not representing the Labor Party or Liberal-National Coalition, with an increased projected vote share compared to previous elections.³⁹ This has created tighter races in all electorates for both major parties. In the 2025 election, non-major party candidates won thirteen seats,

creating a large crossbench of non-major party parliamentarians,⁴⁰ with a dramatic shift from zero seats in the 1975 election to thirteen in 2025. The 2022 election results also reflect this trend, where non-major party candidates won sixteen seats. This is likely to continue in future elections, making more seats unavailable to major parties to obtain a majority to form a government.

This pattern has significantly magnified the importance of campaign spending. The rise of the non-major parties and Independents has meant that major parties must compete with more parties for voters. In the 2025 election of the Sydney electorate, Bradfield, the voter margins were one of the lowest recorded in history, with the Independent candidate winning by 26 votes.

In sum, mining companies have used financial means to influence key parties and their stances on climate policies. They have utilized political donations to support the party most aligned with their interests.

Media Framing:

As climate change has become a more pressing issue, public opinion has shifted towards greater support for environmentally beneficial reforms and a transition towards renewable energy. Public support for government action to address climate change has been a threat to mining corporations. In a report by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO),⁴¹ 64% of Australians agreed, or strongly agreed, that collective efforts can reduce the negative effects of climate change. Furthermore, 81% were at least somewhat interested in the energy transition. The mining corporations have tried to sway public opinion through advertisements, public relations campaigns, media partnerships, and social media campaigns. Given that in a democracy, the government acts in the interests of voters, shifting public opinion will directly influence policy outcomes.

The mining industry has conducted advertisements that emphasize its role in economic growth and job creation. Advertisements create a perception of minimal effects on environmental impacts.⁴² For instance, Woodside Energy, one of Australia's largest mining corporations, framed mining as a way to increase jobs and economically benefit communities. Subsequently, by shifting constituent policy stances, the industry has influenced the climate agendas of the major parties. It successfully brands itself as a company that engages in carbon-reducing behavior and emphasizes continued commitment to a sustainable future by setting out clear net-zero emissions by 2050. It has continued campaigning and seeking approval for mining expansions. It gained approval in May 2025 to extend the operation of its North West Shelf Gas Plant in Western Australia to 2070, 20 years after its net-zero claims.⁴³ These advertisements attempt to address constituent concerns by assuring people that mining activities are adapting to net-zero goals and are transitioning towards clean mining practices.

In 2025, the Ad Standards Community Panel, an Australian advertisement regulator, found that Hancock Prospecting, a mining conglomerate, had intentionally misled consumers

with its unsubstantiated claim that its gas was clean, violating environmental codes that advertisers are required to abide by.⁴⁴ The use of media campaigning permits the industry to reframe the environmental consequences of mining and create a perception that mining practices are harmless.

Another instance was the mining industry's threats towards a proposed windfall profit tax, in the context of its increased revenue from higher gas and coal prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Supporters of the windfall tax, such as Richard Denniss argue that "the fact that companies are making these record profits while Australians struggle with the cost of living crisis is likely why almost 9/10 Australians support Government intervention into the energy market, according to...certified research."⁴⁵ As a response, the Mineral Council of Australia pushed back, arguing that "we can't afford to see jobs go in regional Australia...we can't afford to see investment slow down." The spokesperson for the Minerals Council of Australia, Tania Constable, announced the intention of the council to start a substantial advertising campaign focused on the economic implications, similar to the one that ended the Mining Super Profits Tax proposed by the Rudd Government, if such a policy were to pass. After the statement was made, the proposal was not passed by the government after careful consideration and consultation with the lobbyists.⁴⁶

Policy Outcome: Climate Inaction:

The mining industry has continued to employ its financial means to block any legislation that would financially affect it or hinder its ability to obtain policy approvals. This often clashes with public opinion, which wants the Australian government to actively take steps to protect the environment and mitigate any further pollution and degradation caused by the mining industry.

Mining lobbyists have exerted significant influence on climate discourse and national policy to combat climate change since the earliest attempts and pledges for environmental action. The first policy promise was during the Labor government under Bob Hawke, which agreed to international cooperation at the 1988 Toronto Conference on Climate Change, pledging a 20% reduction in greenhouse gases from the 1988 levels by 2005. It was followed by the proposal to the cabinet in 1989 and the subsequent failure to adopt it in 1990. Despite the promise of change, policy inaction continued throughout the remaining term of Hawke, the following government under Paul Keating, and particularly during the term of the Liberal Party under John Howard until 2007. Inaction under Keating was largely attributed to political challenges in the wake of the 1990s recession.⁴⁷ Under the Howard government, climate policy was under significant influence of mining and energy sector lobbyists, despite pressures from scientists, environmental organizations, and business groups such as the Business Roundtable on Climate Change.⁴⁴ Pearce, in his book *High and Dry*, highlights the pervasive nature of representatives of lobby groups of major polluting industries, especially mining, which was referred to as the 'greenhouse mafia', in industry and governmental positions that dictated policy under Howard. The political influence of the mining industry during the Howard

government between 1996 and 2007 prevented climate action that could negatively impact the industry. As a result, there was a decade of significant inaction during a critical period, and the Howard Government attempted to jeopardize international cooperation in climate change. It rejected ratification of international climate agreements such as the 1997 Kyoto Protocols and promised the public that no further goals were being considered.⁴⁸ This was despite extensive advocacy from various environmental groups, members of the public, many government personnel, and politicians.⁴⁹

One of the first instances of direct political intervention by mining companies is their response to the proposed super tax on mining profits by Kevin Rudd. While this was not directly related to the environmental issue, it demonstrated the power of the mining industry. In May 2010, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd introduced a highly debated 40% Resource Super Profits Tax on mining companies. Government ministers supported this proposal as it would bring greater government revenue and distribute the benefits of the recent mining boom to citizens. It was further supported by scholars as the key recommendation of the 2010 *Australia's Future Tax System Review Final Report* commissioned by Treasury Secretary Ken Henry.⁵⁰

The mining industry was alarmed by the prospect of a 40% tax on its revenue. Spearheaded by the Minerals Council of Australia and mega-mining corporations such as Rio Tinto and BHP, the mining industry began a costly media campaign amounting to \$22.2 million, attacking the tax with contested claims. The media campaign pressured the Labor Party to replace Kevin Rudd with Julia Gillard, who negotiated a much weaker tax on mining profits.⁵¹ In their study, Bell and Hindmoor concluded that the super tax ultimately failed because the mining industry was able to persuade a large number of voters that the tax would be economically deleterious.⁵²

The mining supertax would have generated a significant taxation income, amounting to more than \$200 billion in the following decade, for the government to spend on other initiatives. This included potential spending on environmental protection and for climate policy implementation, with projects that would benefit Australians, especially because most of the shares and profits of mining companies are owned by foreign investors. While some argued that the high amount of tax is unsustainable, the mining industry reaped immense profits due to the global boom, amounting to \$51 billion in 2009–2010 alone, and a continued projected growth for the coming decade.⁵³ The high profits of the industry would have allowed the industry to afford the tax while maintaining high profit margins.

Moreover, the political influence of lobby groups has marginalized indigenous groups, who opposed mining activities on sacred lands. Indigenous culture is deeply connected to the land, which makes up a fundamental part of their spirituality. They believe in their responsibility in protecting the land as traditional custodians.⁵⁴ Indigenous groups campaigned against the construction of the Carmichael Mine, which was proposed by Adani Enterprises, an Indian industrial conglomerate, to the Queensland Government in 2010. Adani submitted an application to construct one of the world's large-

est greenfield coal mines, with supporting infrastructure in the Galilee Basin on traditional Wangan and Jagalingou lands. From the start, the local Indigenous community vehemently protested the construction over major environmental concerns to their traditional homelands, affecting local groundwater, ecosystems, and endemic species, especially with Adani's history of development that incurred damages to the environment. Local groups rejected Adani's proposed Indigenous Land Use Agreements that would extinguish native title rights. The Indigenous community launched a well-publicized "Adani, No Means No" campaign and took legal action that attracted significant public support. This created mass controversy during the 2017 Queensland State Election, which resulted in a shift in the government's position by removing \$1 billion in federal funding to reduce electoral backlash. However, the government continued to support the approval.⁵⁵ The mining lobby supported the construction of the mine and sought governmental backing of the project. They secured 191 contacts between them and the government and around 60 meetings with senior ministers in 2018, before the final approval.⁵⁶ The powerful influence of the mining lobby led to governmental support of the project. Furthermore, Adani, mining lobbyists, and many state officials propagated false messages on the benefits of the mine, which claimed it would create 10,000 jobs despite the realistic projection of 1464 jobs according to the testimony of Adani's own economist.⁵⁷ They also disseminated false claims of "sustainable mining," despite expansive research and case studies that contradict this.⁵⁸

In spite of the public support for decarbonization and government promises for action, the continued influence of the industry is shown in the number of mining project approvals by the Labor Government in 2024. The environmental minister approved many proposals, including 7 major mining projects, encompassing the expansion of four coal mines that will release more than 850 million tons of CO₂ over their lifetime, close to double the amount of annual national emissions.^{59–62} These approvals faced public backlash and undermined Australia's goal of becoming a leader in global climate action and its bid to host COP31. Furthermore, later in the year, three more coal mine expansions were approved,⁶³ with the government defending its decision by saying that it is in accordance with "facts and the national environment law". However, the Australian Conservation Foundation estimated that the projects would generate 1.3 billion tons of greenhouse gas.⁶⁴ While the Liberal-National Party coalition, the conservative party, is traditionally more influenced by the mining industry, the mining expansion approvals reflect the influence it has on both sides of the political spectrum. Labor contradicted its 2022 Federal Election promises, which regarded climate change as a central issue. The outcome of the ABC Vote Compass Survey indicated that climate change is the number one priority for voters.⁶⁵ Officially, the party's climate commitments are against new mine expansions, but it is evident that policy is shifting in favor of the mining lobby.

Contrary to the previous argument on the ineffectiveness of government institutions as a factor resulting in climate policy inaction, government institutions have acted efficiently in cli-

mate-related policy, especially in mining expansion approvals. Under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, mining expansions that affect important national environmental outcomes, as stated in Matters of National Environmental Significance, such as water resources that relate to unconventional gas development and major coal mines, or threatened species and ecological communities, require approval from the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW).⁶⁶ In recent years, there have been a large number of approvals by the DCCEEW, through the Minister of Water and Environment. This demonstrates the efficiency of these institutions in passing climate-related policies. However, these approvals undermine Australia's net-zero goals and are anti-climate.

In 2025, the Labor Government abandoned 'nature positive' laws that would create a government agency to enforce decisions made under environmental laws. The agency would be able to stop mining activities and audit businesses to ensure compliance with laws. Due to pressure from the mining industry before the Western Australian State Elections, these laws were not introduced because of objections from the state government. The environmental spokesperson of the Australian Greens Party, Sarah Hanson-Young, highlights that "the prime minister has again caved to the vested interests of the Western Australian mining industry."⁶² These actions directly contradicted Labor election promises, with the proposed agency being a key promise of the 2022 Federal Election.⁶⁷

■ Conclusion

As the world is transitioning to a green future powered by renewable energy and sustainable development, global efforts are slowly phasing out high-emitting sectors, including mining. The mining industry in Australia has employed significant amounts of resources, through financial expenditure, in order to influence major political parties through lobbies and media campaigns. The mining industry has played a big role in preventing meaningful and sustainable national policies and has hindered Australia's transition away from a heavy carbon economy. Australia has continued to be a leader on the global stage in combating anthropogenic climate change, but the influence of the mining industry undermines the government's credibility. If this continues, Australia will be unable to address its climate goals and face global backlash by breaching the legally binding Paris Agreement. Moreover, Australia's extractivist economic model, characterized by the over-reliance on finite resources in an increasingly decarbonizing world, risks its long-term development as many other nations are transitioning their economies to a sustainable model. One limitation of this research is that it does not make use of originally collected data.

In future research, it can be investigated why non-profit organizations and climate activists have been overshadowed by the interests of the mining industry. Another research study could look at the role of supranational organizations in shifting climate discourse and the national climate agenda. Moreover, the mobilization of social media on the campaign against mining expansion can be further examined. Finally, the rise

of the far-right One Nation party threatens to erode the political influence of the current conservative coalition, which could change the current relationship with the mining industry. This can profoundly alter the current political landscape of Australia, leading to potential shifts in the attitudes of the government on climate policy. This might further intensify the influence of the mining industry in the future.

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