

[The Green Recovery](#)

Australia could create hundreds of thousands of jobs by accelerating shift to zero emissions

The Guardian

June 29,2020

Adam Morton

Environment editor

Hundreds of thousands of jobs could be created in Australia by hurrying the shift to zero greenhouse gas emissions, a study backed by business and investment leaders has found.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates [835,000 jobs have been lost](#) since the coronavirus pandemic shutdown began in March. [A report by Beyond Zero Emissions](#), an energy and climate change thinktank, says practical projects to decarbonise the economy could create 1.78m “job years” over the next five years – on average, 355,000 people in work each year – while modernising Australian industry.

Called the “million jobs plan”, it says further stimulus measures needed to fight the Covid-19 recession are “a unique opportunity to lay the foundations for a globally competitive [Australian economy](#) fit for 21st century challenges”.

The report focuses on proposals it says are already being planned and could create jobs by accelerating private and public investment in [renewable energy](#), [clean buildings](#), clean transport, manufacturing and land use that will happen in the years ahead anyway. Benefits would include improved air quality and new employment in regional areas.

Eytan Lenko, Beyond Zero Emissions’ interim chief executive, said the group had brought together investment, business and industry leaders to scope the best clean solutions that would drive productivity and growth.

“No one thought 2020 would turn out the way it has. We now have a unique opportunity to seize this moment, to retool, reskill, and rebuild our battered economy to set us up for future generations,” he said.

The plan would require hundreds of billions of dollars in investment. It says clean energy investors have indicated their willingness to spend on this scale, pointing to the more than \$100bn of existing renewable energy projects proposed but yet to be built.

The report says Australia risks missing out on some of these opportunities, and others in electric transport, zero-carbon manufacturing and [green steel](#), unless governments deliver policy certainty and help create an environment that encourages large clean investment deals. Reserve Bank research found the number of large-scale renewable energy projects reaching commencement [fell about 50% last year](#) after a record-setting 2018.

Beyond Zero Emissions says governments also have a role to play in direct investment in, for example, urgent transmission line projects to new renewable energy zones, the [construction of energy-efficient social housing](#), and the introduction and expansion of electric buses and trains.

“Such projects represent excellent value for taxpayers,” the report says. “New transmission infrastructure will unlock billions of private investment in renewable energy. More social housing means less homelessness and fewer resources expended on dealing with the problems of homelessness. Electric public transport leads to better air quality, and fewer health problems linked to pollution.”

It also calls for governments to stimulate private spending by underwriting renewable energy industrial zones, guaranteeing developers a minimum price for their clean energy and using record low interest rates to help kickstart new business models. They could include allowing homeowners to pay for home energy retrofits over time, without a large upfront cost, using a similar model employed in mobile phone contracts.

Significant figures [from across the community](#), including [business leaders](#), [unions](#) and [the welfare sector](#), are pushing for a green recovery from the Covid-19 crisis. Project advisers on the Beyond Zero Emissions plan [included former prime minister Malcolm Turnbull](#) and [economist Ross Garnaut](#). Speakers at the Monday launch event include software billionaire and philanthropist Mike Cannon-Brookes, the former UN climate chief Christiana Figueres and Deanne Stewart, chief executive of First State Super.

In a statement, Cannon-Brookes said the plan showed the way to an economic recovery that would set up for the country for decades to come. “There is no doubt that the million jobs plan is bold, but importantly it’s also doable,” he said.

The Morrison government has not yet made low-emissions investments a priority in its recession response. The energy and emissions reduction minister, [Angus Taylor, called for a gas-fired recovery](#), and the [National Covid-19 Coordinating Commission has strongly backed expanding the gas industry](#) while giving little consideration to renewable energy.

The Beyond Zero Emissions report estimates there would be nearly 200,000 jobs in renewable energy, building and transport construction and more than 200,000 ongoing positions across all sectors measured. It does not estimate the number of indirect jobs that be created to support the direct jobs.

Steps in the plan include:

- [Supporting the rapid deployment of 90 gigawatts of renewable energy](#) over five years, creating 124,000 construction jobs and 22,000 ongoing jobs, and backing the local manufacture of components including wind turbines and batteries.
- Creating a “net zero energy home” standard that would require covered buildings to generate as much energy as they consume, and setting a national target to eliminate emissions from the buildings sector.
- Governments to expand social housing programs to [build 150,000 publicly owned, zero-emissions homes](#).
- Creating renewable energy industrial zones in which energy-intensive manufacturers can access renewable energy at a low fixed cost.
- Using government procurement policy to prioritise locally manufactured products built using low-emissions technology, and introducing a zero carbon industry strategy that could help establish renewables-powered industry such as hydrogen and green steel.
- Rolling out 13,000 electric buses, replacing 30% of the existing bus fleet, and electrify 3,000km of rail track over five years.
- Building or improving 5,000km of cycling lanes.
- Setting a national target of 90% resource recovery, and set minimum requirements for recycled content to drive the supply of new products.
- Creating 40,000 land care jobs by revegetating 27m hectares – 3.5% of Australia’s land mass – in five years and 55m hectares over a decade.
- Creating a national careers institute to work out what training would be needed.