

Majority of renewables projects stuck in limbo

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NEWS

Developers of dozens of wind and solar farms say their projects are stuck in limbo, as new figures show four out of every five applications lodged since 2018 have yet to pass the federal government's environmental laws.

The delays have become a major hurdle to Australia's energy transition, investors say, making it more difficult to add enough renewables to the grid to keep electricity prices stable as coal-fired power station closures draw closer.

It also puts at risk the Albanese government's ambitious goal to more than double the share of clean energy in the power grid from 40 per cent to 82 per cent by 2030.

Of the 124 projects that have applied for approval under national environmental laws, just 28 have reached a final decision – either approved or rejected – according to the Clean Energy Investor Group, which represents major en-

ergy investors such as Macquarie, Neoen and BlackRock.

Meanwhile, the time required to gain federal approval for a wind or solar farm blew out from an average of 505 days in 2018 to 831 days in 2021. There are no figures on projects from 2023 or 2024 as no assessments for projects lodged in those years have been finalised.

"The government's 82 per cent renewable electricity target is at significant risk unless these issues are resolved," said Clean Energy Investor Group chief executive Richie Merzian.

Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek said the findings of the report were "wrong and misleading" because it excluded the government's record of greenlighting 66 renewable projects, most of which did not trigger an assessment under the Environmental Protection Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act.

The EPBC Act dictates that the federal government assesses projects set to have a major impact on a matter of national environmental significance, such as

threatened plants or animals.

The 96 renewable projects yet to receive a final decision have all triggered an EPBC assessment.

"This report is wrong and misleading and the organisation should correct the facts immediately," Plibersek said. "Under the Liberals and Nationals, on average, less than half of decisions made under national environment law have been on time. With Labor, that's almost doubled with 86 per cent."

The government has committed more than \$200 million to beef up departmental resources to speed up project assessments.

While Australia's clean energy shift ranks among the fastest in the world, the transition is falling short of the pace required for Australia to hit the government's 82 per cent target.

However, the speed of the roll-out has been increasing, and the government insists its target remains within striking distance after a record year of clean energy investment.

Data from the Clean Energy Regulator shows up to 7.5 gigawatts of renewable capacity will have been connected to the grid this year, eclipsing the 6 gigawatts of additional capacity per year experts say is needed to replace fossil fuel energy production.

Merzian said a chief gripe of energy developers was that state governments impose environmental assessments alongside the federal government, causing unnecessary duplication.

"Inconsistent and inefficient regulatory processes are hindering the billions of dollars of investment needed for Australia's clean energy transition," Merzian said.