

# A Review of Australia's Subsidies for Mining & Exploration vs Those Available for Renewable Energy Industries

Australia's subsidies landscape shows a stark contrast between the mining sector, particularly fossil fuels, and the renewable energy industries.

## Mining & Fossil Fuel Subsidies

- In the 2022–23 financial year, Australian federal and state governments provided about **\$11.1 billion** in subsidies and tax breaks to fossil fuel industries, including coal, oil, and gas mining.
- This figure rose sharply by 31% to **\$14.5 billion in 2023–24**, highlighting increasing government support despite global climate commitments.
- A significant portion of these subsidies includes fuel tax credits, which amounted to billions annually, effectively supporting mining operations and fossil fuel consumption.
- Over the last two decades, mining companies have also benefited from substantial diesel tax subsidies, amounting to nearly \$60 billion, with projections of continued taxpayer losses if these supports persist.

## Renewable Energy Subsidies

- Renewable energy subsidies in Australia are growing but remain significantly smaller in scale compared to fossil fuel subsidies.
- The International Energy Agency (IEA) forecasts an 85% expansion in renewable energy capacity by 2027, reaching 40 gigawatts, driven by ambitious government targets and supportive policies.
- However, specific dollar amounts for renewable energy subsidies are less prominently reported, and the overall financial support is dwarfed by fossil fuel subsidies.
- The Australian government has introduced incentives and grants for renewable projects, but these are often fragmented across federal and state levels and do not yet match the scale of fossil fuel industry support.

## Summary

- Australia's mining and fossil fuel sectors continue to receive **billions in subsidies annually**, with fossil fuels alone receiving upwards of \$14 billion in 2023–24.
  - In contrast, renewable energy subsidies, while growing, are not yet at a comparable scale, reflecting a significant imbalance in government financial support.
  - This disparity presents challenges for Australia's energy transition goals and climate commitments, as fossil fuel subsidies can undermine investment and growth in renewable energy.
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## State by State

Australia's subsidies landscape for mining & exploration versus renewable energy industries varies significantly across states, reflecting differing economic priorities, resource endowments, and policy frameworks. Below is a detailed state-by-state breakdown comparing these subsidy supports, highlighting key programs, estimated subsidy amounts, and policy focus.

### 1. New South Wales (NSW)

#### Mining & Exploration Subsidies

- NSW provides substantial subsidies and tax concessions to coal, gas, and mining sectors, including royalty holidays and fuel tax credits.
- Estimated mining subsidies in NSW exceed **\$2 billion annually**, supporting large coal mines and gas fields.
- Infrastructure grants and exploration incentives target resource development, particularly in the Hunter Valley and Western NSW.

#### Renewable Energy Subsidies

- NSW leads with the **Renewable Energy Zones (REZ)** initiative, backed by \$32 billion infrastructure investment over 10 years to support wind, solar, and battery projects.
- Grants and rebates for rooftop solar and energy storage, including programs for low-income households.
- Federal programs like ARENA and CEFC also channel funds into NSW projects.

### 2. Victoria

#### Mining & Exploration Subsidies

- Victoria offers subsidies mainly to brown coal mining and exploration, including royalty concessions and energy subsidies for coal-fired power plants.
- Estimated fossil fuel subsidies total around **\$500 million annually**, less than NSW but significant given the state's energy mix.

#### Renewable Energy Subsidies

- The **Victorian Renewable Energy Target (VRET)** auctions have contracted over 2 GW of renewable projects, supported by state funding and federal grants.
- The **Solar Homes Program** has invested over \$1 billion in rooftop solar and batteries.
- Clean Energy Jobs Fund supports industry growth and innovation.

### 3. Queensland

#### Mining & Exploration Subsidies

- Queensland is a major coal and gas producer, with mining subsidies estimated at **\$3 billion+ annually**, including fuel tax credits and royalty exemptions.
- Exploration incentives target coal seam gas and minerals.

#### Renewable Energy Subsidies

- Programs include grants for schools, rental properties, and community renewables.
- The Queensland Renewable Energy Fund supports large-scale and community projects.
- Federal subsidies also support Queensland's growing solar and wind capacity.

## 4. South Australia (SA)

### Mining & Exploration Subsidies

- Mining subsidies are smaller, estimated under **\$300 million annually**, focused on mineral exploration rather than fossil fuels.
- Limited coal mining means fewer fossil fuel subsidies compared to other states.

### Renewable Energy Subsidies

- SA's **Home Battery Scheme** offers rebates up to \$6,000 for battery installations.
- The **Virtual Power Plant Program** subsidizes battery storage to improve grid stability.
- Renewables Investment Fund supports utility-scale wind and solar projects.

## 5. Western Australia (WA)

### Mining & Exploration Subsidies

- WA is Australia's largest mining state, with subsidies estimated at **\$4 billion+ annually**, including fuel tax credits, exploration grants, and royalty concessions.
- Strong support for iron ore, gold, and gas sectors.

### Renewable Energy Subsidies

- Solar battery rebates and the Renewable Hydrogen Fund support emerging clean technologies.
- WA Renewable Energy Target includes financial incentives and streamlined approvals.
- Federal programs complement state subsidies for solar and wind projects.

## 6. Tasmania

### Mining & Exploration Subsidies

- Tasmania's mining subsidies are modest, under **\$100 million annually**, focused on mineral exploration.
- No significant fossil fuel mining subsidies due to limited coal or gas extraction.

### Renewable Energy Subsidies

- Focus on hydroelectricity modernization and community renewable projects.
- The Renewable Energy Action Plan provides grants and support for innovation.
- Tasmania benefits from federal funding for renewable integration.

## 7. Australian Capital Territory (ACT)

### Mining & Exploration Subsidies

- Minimal mining subsidies due to lack of significant resource extraction.

### Renewable Energy Subsidies

- Generous feed-in tariffs and solar rebates drive high rooftop solar uptake.
- Subsidies support electric vehicle adoption as part of broader emissions strategy.
- Federal renewable programs also support ACT initiatives.

## 8. Northern Territory (NT)

### Mining & Exploration Subsidies

- Mining subsidies estimated at **\$200 million+ annually**, supporting mineral and some gas exploration.
- Fuel tax credits and exploration grants are key supports.

### Renewable Energy Subsidies

- Solar rebate schemes and renewable energy grants support early-stage adoption.
- Federal programs assist with remote and community renewables.

### Summary Table (Estimated Annual Subsidy Values)

State	Mining & Exploration Subsidies (AUD)	Renewable Energy Subsidies (AUD)	Notes
NSW	\$2+ billion	Hundreds of millions	Largest fossil fuel subsidies; strong REZ support
Victoria	~\$500 million	\$1+ billion	Brown coal subsidies; strong solar programs
Queensland	\$3+ billion	Hundreds of millions	Major coal/gas subsidies; growing renewables
South Australia	<\$300 million	\$100+ million	Limited fossil fuel subsidies; battery focus
Western Australia	\$4+ billion	\$100+ million	Largest mining subsidies; emerging hydrogen
Tasmania	<\$100 million	Tens of millions	Minimal fossil fuel subsidies; hydro focus
ACT	Negligible	Tens of millions	No mining subsidies; strong solar incentives
Northern Territory	\$200+ million	Tens of millions	Mineral subsidies; early renewable adoption

## Summary

Australia's mining and fossil fuel subsidies remain substantially higher than renewable energy subsidies across all states, reflecting the country's economic reliance on resource extraction. However, state-level renewable energy subsidies are growing rapidly, especially in NSW, Victoria, and South Australia, signalling a shift toward supporting clean energy transition.

### Economic and Environmental Impacts

Australia's significant disparity between fossil fuel (mining & exploration) subsidies and renewable energy subsidies has profound economic and environmental consequences. This analysis outlines key impacts of this imbalance, supported by current research and data.

## Economic Impacts

### 1. Distorted Market Signals and Investment

- **Fossil fuel subsidies lower costs artificially**, encouraging continued investment in carbon-intensive industries rather than cleaner alternatives.
- This distorts energy markets, making renewables less competitive despite falling technology costs.
- As a result, private capital flows are diverted away from renewable energy innovation and deployment, slowing economic diversification.

### 2. Fiscal Burden and Opportunity Costs

- Australia spends **billions annually on fossil fuel subsidies** (estimated \$14.5 billion in 2023–24), representing a substantial fiscal burden.
- These funds could be redirected to accelerate renewable energy projects, infrastructure upgrades, and social programs, generating higher economic multipliers and job creation.
- Maintaining subsidies for mining exposes governments to financial risks as global markets shift away from fossil fuels, potentially stranding assets.

### 3. Regional Economic Dependence and Transition Challenges

- States heavily reliant on mining subsidies (e.g., WA, Queensland, NSW) face economic risks if subsidies are removed abruptly, including job losses and social disruption.
- Without balanced support for renewable industries, these regions may struggle to diversify their economies and create new employment opportunities.
- Uneven subsidy distribution exacerbates regional inequalities, with some states advancing clean energy faster than others.

## Environmental Impacts

### 1. Increased Greenhouse Gas Emissions

- Fossil fuel subsidies encourage higher production and consumption of coal, oil, and gas, directly increasing Australia's carbon emissions.
- This undermines national and international climate commitments, such as the Paris Agreement goal to reduce emissions by 43% below 2005 levels by 2030.
- Subsidies also delay the retirement of carbon-intensive infrastructure, locking in emissions for decades.

### 2. Slowed Renewable Energy Uptake

- Lower renewable subsidies relative to fossil fuels slow the deployment of clean energy technologies.
- This prolongs reliance on fossil fuels, increasing air pollution and associated health risks.
- The environmental benefits of renewables—such as reduced water use and biodiversity protection—are delayed or diminished.

### 3. Global Reputation and Climate Leadership

- Subsidy disparities weaken Australia's international standing on climate action, impacting trade relations and foreign investment.
- They reduce the country's ability to influence global climate finance and policy discussions effectively.

## Summary Table of Impacts

### Impact Category    Consequences of Subsidy Disparity

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Economic	Market distortions, fiscal burden, regional inequality
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Environmental	Increased emissions, delayed renewables, pollution
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Social & Political	Job losses risk, transition challenges, global reputation
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The current subsidy disparity in Australia favours fossil fuels, creating economic inefficiencies, fiscal risks, and environmental harm. Redirecting subsidies toward renewable energy could unlock stronger economic growth, accelerate emissions reductions, and support a just transition for communities dependent on mining. Balancing subsidies is essential to aligning Australia's energy system with its climate goals and sustainable development priorities.

### Compare Australia's subsidy policies with those of other countries

Australia's fossil fuel and renewable energy subsidy policies reflect a complex balance between supporting traditional mining industries and fostering clean energy growth. When compared internationally, Australia's approach shows both similarities and distinct challenges.

#### 1. Fossil Fuel Subsidies

##### Australia:

Australia provides substantial subsidies to fossil fuels—estimated at \$14.5 billion in 2023–24—including fuel tax credits, royalty exemptions, and direct grants. Despite international pressure, subsidy removal has been slow, partly due to the economic importance of mining and political factors.

##### Indonesia:

Indonesia historically had very large fossil fuel subsidies (over 20% of government spending) but has aggressively reformed since 2014, phasing out subsidies with social protections.

##### Mexico:

Mexico deregulated fuel prices and eliminated subsidies in 2017, improving fiscal health and reducing market distortions, though facing challenges with price volatility.

##### European Union (EU):

The EU has committed to phasing out fossil fuel subsidies and redirected support toward renewables, with many member states implementing carbon pricing and subsidy reforms aligned with the Green Deal.

##### United States:

The US provides fossil fuel subsidies largely through tax breaks and incentives but has increased support for renewables under recent climate legislation.

#### 2. Renewable Energy Subsidies

##### Australia:

Renewable subsidies are growing but remain smaller than fossil fuel supports. Federal programs like ARENA and CEFC, combined with state initiatives (e.g., NSW REZs, Victoria's Solar Homes), promote renewables but face challenges scaling rapidly.

##### Germany:

Germany's Energiewende policy features strong feed-in tariffs, auctions, and subsidies, driving rapid renewable deployment and grid modernization.

##### China:

China leads global renewable subsidies with massive investments in solar, wind, and battery storage, supported by aggressive industrial policies.

### **United Kingdom:**

The UK uses Contracts for Difference (CfD) auctions and grants to support renewables, with clear targets and phased subsidy reductions as technologies mature.

## **3. Policy Design and Transparency**

### **Australia:**

Subsidy reporting lacks full transparency and consistent accounting of indirect supports, complicating reform efforts.

### **OECD Countries:**

Many OECD members have improved subsidy transparency and adopted clear phase-out plans, often linked to carbon pricing and climate commitments.

## **4. Key Comparative Insights**

### **Scale and Direction:**

Australia's fossil fuel subsidies remain relatively high compared to its renewable energy support, contrasting with countries like Germany and the EU, where renewables receive prioritized funding.

### **Transition Strategies:**

Countries with successful subsidy reforms (e.g., Indonesia, Mexico) combine phased removal with social protections and reinvestment in clean energy, a model Australia is increasingly urged to follow.

### **Political and Economic Context:**

Australia's heavy reliance on mining exports influences subsidy persistence, whereas countries with diversified economies often move faster on reform.

In summary, Australia's subsidy policies are characterized by significant fossil fuel support alongside growing but comparatively smaller renewable subsidies. Internationally, countries that have successfully reduced fossil fuel subsidies combine transparency, phased reform, social protections, and strong renewable investments—offering actionable models for Australia's energy transition.

## **International Examples of Successful Fossil Fuel Subsidy Removal**

Several countries have successfully phased out fossil fuel subsidies, offering valuable lessons for Australia's transition. These international examples highlight diverse approaches, economic contexts, and policy tools that can guide effective subsidy reform.

### **1. Indonesia**

- **Context:**  
Indonesia historically provided large fuel subsidies, costing over 20% of its government budget at times, straining public finances.
- **Reform Approach:**  
Starting in 2014, Indonesia implemented phased subsidy cuts for gasoline and diesel, replacing them with targeted social assistance programs to protect vulnerable households.
- **Outcomes:**
  - Significant fiscal savings redirected toward infrastructure and social programs.
  - Reduced fuel consumption and emissions growth.
  - Public acceptance improved through strong communication and compensation measures.
- **Challenges:**
  - Initial public protests required careful political management.
  - Ongoing need to strengthen social safety nets.

### **2. Mexico**

- **Context:**  
Mexico subsidized gasoline and diesel heavily, leading to market distortions and smuggling issues.

- **Reform Approach:**  
In 2017, Mexico deregulated fuel prices and eliminated subsidies, allowing prices to reflect global market rates.
- **Outcomes:**
  - Improved fiscal balance and reduced government expenditure.
  - Increased investment in renewable energy due to clearer price signals.
  - Short-term inflationary pressures managed with compensatory social programs.
- **Challenges:**
  - Price volatility affected low-income consumers, necessitating targeted support.

### 3. South Africa

- **Context:**  
South Africa subsidized coal and electricity, contributing to high emissions and fiscal pressure.
- **Reform Approach:**  
The government gradually reduced coal subsidies and increased electricity tariffs, while expanding renewable energy procurement through the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP).
- **Outcomes:**
  - Enhanced renewable energy capacity and investment.
  - Improved fiscal sustainability.
  - Social programs helped mitigate impacts on vulnerable groups.
- **Challenges:**
  - Balancing affordability with cost-reflective pricing remains ongoing.

### 4. India

- **Context:**  
India had extensive subsidies on kerosene, LPG, and diesel, impacting government budgets and energy efficiency.
- **Reform Approach:**  
India implemented direct benefit transfers (DBT) to replace subsidies with cash transfers, reducing leakages and targeting support better.
- **Outcomes:**
  - Fiscal savings and improved subsidy targeting.
  - Encouraged energy efficiency and cleaner fuel use.
  - Supported vulnerable populations without distorting prices.
- **Challenges:**
  - Ensuring all vulnerable populations have access to DBT remains a work in progress.

### Key Lessons for Australia

- **Phased and Transparent Implementation:** Gradual subsidy removal with clear timelines helps manage economic and social impacts.
- **Targeted Social Support:** Direct assistance to vulnerable households cushions the effects of higher energy prices.

- **Strong Communication:** Public engagement and transparency build trust and acceptance.
- **Complementary Policies:** Subsidy removal paired with renewable energy investments and carbon pricing accelerates decarbonization.
- **Political Will:** Successful reforms require leadership and willingness to face short-term challenges for long-term gains.

These examples demonstrate that fossil fuel subsidy removal is feasible with carefully designed policies that balance economic, social, and environmental objectives. Australia can adapt these lessons to its unique context to accelerate its clean energy transition.

## Policy Options for Phasing Out Fossil Fuel Subsidies in Australia

Phasing out fossil fuel subsidies in Australia is a critical step toward aligning the country's energy system with climate goals and fostering a sustainable economy. Here's an overview of key policy options, their mechanisms, and considerations:

### 1. Gradual Subsidy Removal with Clear Timelines

- **Phased Approach:** Gradually reduce subsidies over a defined timeline to allow industries and communities to adjust. This avoids economic shocks and provides certainty for investors in clean energy.
- **Sunset Clauses:** Introduce sunset clauses in subsidy legislation to ensure automatic expiry unless explicitly renewed, encouraging regular review and accountability.

### 2. Redirecting Subsidies to Renewable Energy and Transition Support

- **Reallocate Funds:** Shift financial support from fossil fuels to renewable energy projects, energy efficiency programs, and grid modernization.
- **Just Transition Programs:** Use savings from subsidy removal to fund retraining, social support, and economic diversification in fossil fuel-dependent regions, minimizing social hardship.

### 3. Improving Transparency and Reporting

- **Mandatory Disclosure:** Require governments to publish detailed reports on fossil fuel subsidies annually, including direct and indirect supports, to increase public scrutiny and policy coherence.
- **Independent Review Bodies:** Establish independent agencies to assess subsidy impacts and recommend reforms based on environmental and economic criteria.

### 4. Implementing Carbon Pricing or Emission Trading Schemes

- **Carbon Pricing:** Introduce or strengthen carbon taxes or cap-and-trade systems to internalize the environmental costs of fossil fuels, reducing the need for subsidies.
- **Subsidy Phase-out Linked to Carbon Prices:** Align subsidy removal with carbon pricing milestones to ensure a smooth transition and maintain competitiveness.

### 5. Regulatory and Legislative Reforms

- **Eliminate Tax Breaks and Royalties Exemptions:** Remove specific tax concessions and royalty holidays that disproportionately benefit fossil fuel producers.

- **Ban New Subsidies:**  
Legislate bans on new fossil fuel subsidies and restrict public financing for fossil fuel infrastructure.

## 6. Engaging Stakeholders and Building Political Will

- **Consultation and Collaboration:**  
Engage industry, workers, communities, and environmental groups early to build consensus and design equitable policies.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:**  
Increase public understanding of subsidy impacts and benefits of reform to generate support.

In essence, a successful phase-out of fossil fuel subsidies in Australia involves a combination of gradual removal, strategic reallocation to renewables and communities, enhanced transparency, regulatory reforms, and active stakeholder engagement. This multifaceted approach can help Australia meet its climate commitments while supporting economic resilience.

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