

COP31 – Policy Ideas and the Role of the Alliance



5 June 2025

Introduction

Australia is planning to host the COP31 climate summit with Pacific Island countries in 2026. As host and president of the UN climate talks, Australia will be expected to accelerate action across all three pillars of the Paris Agreement – *mitigation, adaptation, and finance* – and develop initiatives for the *implementation* of shared climate goals.

This discussion brief has been prepared by the COP Universities Alliance as a ‘thought starter’ in exploring policy ideas and opportunities for constructive engagement with Alliance members for the delivery of a successful and ambitious climate summit. With just over a year until COP31, and recognising the narrowing window for shaping key priorities, the Alliance aims to offer timely insights to inform the agenda and broader framing of COP31.

Policy ideas and development

As president of COP31, Australia’s first responsibility will be to work with Pacific Island nations to reinforce global cooperation to implement the Paris Agreement. While the official COP agenda is decided by all UNFCCC parties, each Presidency can promote an ambitious Action Agenda for the summit and shape a policy legacy for international climate action.

Now is the time to ask: What would a *successful COP31* look like in terms of potential policy ideas or ‘marquee’ initiatives pursued by the Presidency? (see Fig. 1).

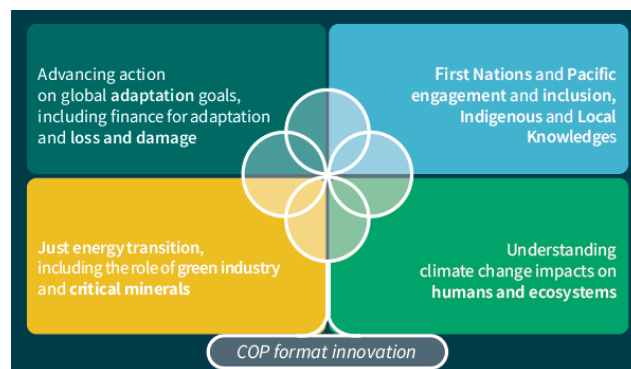


Figure 1: Thematic areas of focus for COP Universities Alliance

Key themes and initiatives emerging from those consultations relevant to the pillars of mitigation, adaptation, finance and implementation, include:

Mitigation: Countries have agreed to transition away from fossil fuels in their energy systems, while tripling renewables capacity and doubling energy efficiency this decade. Cooperation is needed to *implement* this consensus. Australia has an excellent story to share, with ambitious plans to replace coal-fired power with wind, solar and storage. COP31 is a key moment to attract investment for Australia’s clean energy transition. Australia can make an even bigger difference by building clean energy supply chains in the Asia-Pacific, helping to decarbonise heavy industry and planning to phase out fossil fuel production.

Potential Initiatives: Global Green Iron Pledge; Partnership for 100% Renewable Pacific; bilateral decarbonisation agreements with key trading partners (e.g. China, Japan, Republic of Korea); ‘NDC+’ target that includes impacts in the Asia-Pacific.

Adaptation: Countries are working to implement the Global Goal on Adaptation and have agreed to develop National Adaptation Plans by 2030. Australia is currently undertaking a National Climate Risk Assessment and completing a National Adaptation Plan. Several Pacific nations are also implementing National Adaptation Plans. First Nations engagement and inclusion, and incorporating Indigenous and local knowledges, is a distinctive part of efforts across both adaptation and mitigation in our region.

Potential initiatives: Showcasing lessons from adaptation planning in Australia and the Pacific; mobilise international finance for the Pacific Resilience Facility.

Finance: Climate finance is critical for the implementation of shared commitments on mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage. For a balanced outcome at COP31, Australia will

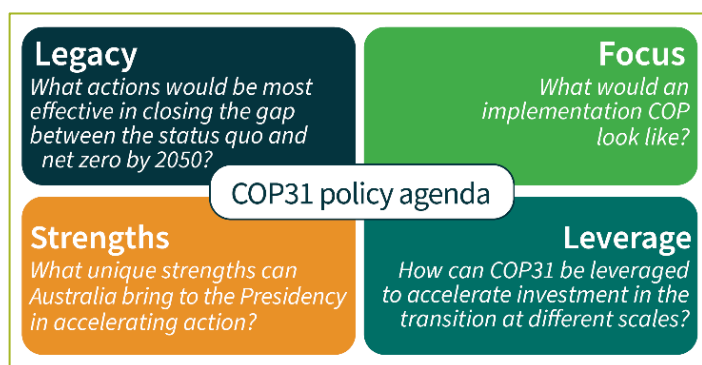


Figure 2: Key questions in framing the policy agenda for COP31

Initial consultations have been undertaken with COP Universities Alliance members regarding the COP31 policy agenda (see Fig. 2 for summary).

need to support finance initiatives that mobilise investment in clean energy and build resilience in our region.

Potential initiatives: A regional 'green bank' similar to the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC); mobilising global finance for a new Pacific Renewables Partnership; new contributions to the UN Loss and Damage Fund.

Ensuring an inclusive 'Pacific COP': Pacific Island countries have been global leaders on climate action for decades. COP31 is a chance to celebrate this leadership and present a shared regional vision for a 'Pacific COP'. Australia must ensure Pacific leaders, and First Nations voices, have a central role to play in the summit. A focus on climate and oceans will also be essential.

Potential initiatives: Appoint a Pacific 'co-President' for the COP; host a Pacific leaders' event (a 'survival dialogue'); appoint Pacific and First Nations climate champions; organise an Oceans Day – focused on the Blue Pacific.

In this way, COP31 presents an opportunity to build on existing initiatives and contribute to a lasting legacy from the previous sequence of COPs (see Fig. 3 below).

How might the Alliance contribute?

Universities can play an important role in supporting the COP31 presidency by providing research briefs, policy guidance and supporting public engagement. The COP Universities Alliance was established in May 2024 as a collaborative partnership between Australian and Pacific universities. The Alliance aims to support a successful and ambitious COP31 summit and may contribute in different ways during each stage of the COP process (e.g. in the lead-up to COP, during the conference itself, and for immediate post-COP activities).

Through its activities the Alliance also aims to help build a legacy for future COPs, including through catalysing thought leadership on innovative COP formats and providing a focal point for connection of the research and science community during the COP itself.

Potential roles for the COP Universities Alliance in COP31 include:

1. **Knowledge partner:** Providing policy support and advice; undertaking research, evidence gathering or evaluation to underpin policy proposals; publishing key policy briefs.
2. **Stakeholder convening:** Providing a forum for dialogues on complex issues, including new COP formats; and enabling First Nations, Pacific and youth participation through capacity-building and networks/partnerships.
3. **Engagement and socialisation:** Hosting events to build public climate/COP literacy; convening the international research/science community as part of COP (e.g. with a dedicated Science & Research Day in the Action Agenda).



Next steps

The COP Universities Alliance is well placed to facilitate community engagement with COP31 and help share the social and economic story of the summit.

In the months leading up to COP31, the Alliance is ideally positioned to convene public forums in Australia and the Pacific, both to debate key policy initiatives and also to help build public literacy about the summit. Alliance members are also preparing to draft a series of 'policy briefs' on key aspects for the negotiations and the COP31 Action Agenda.

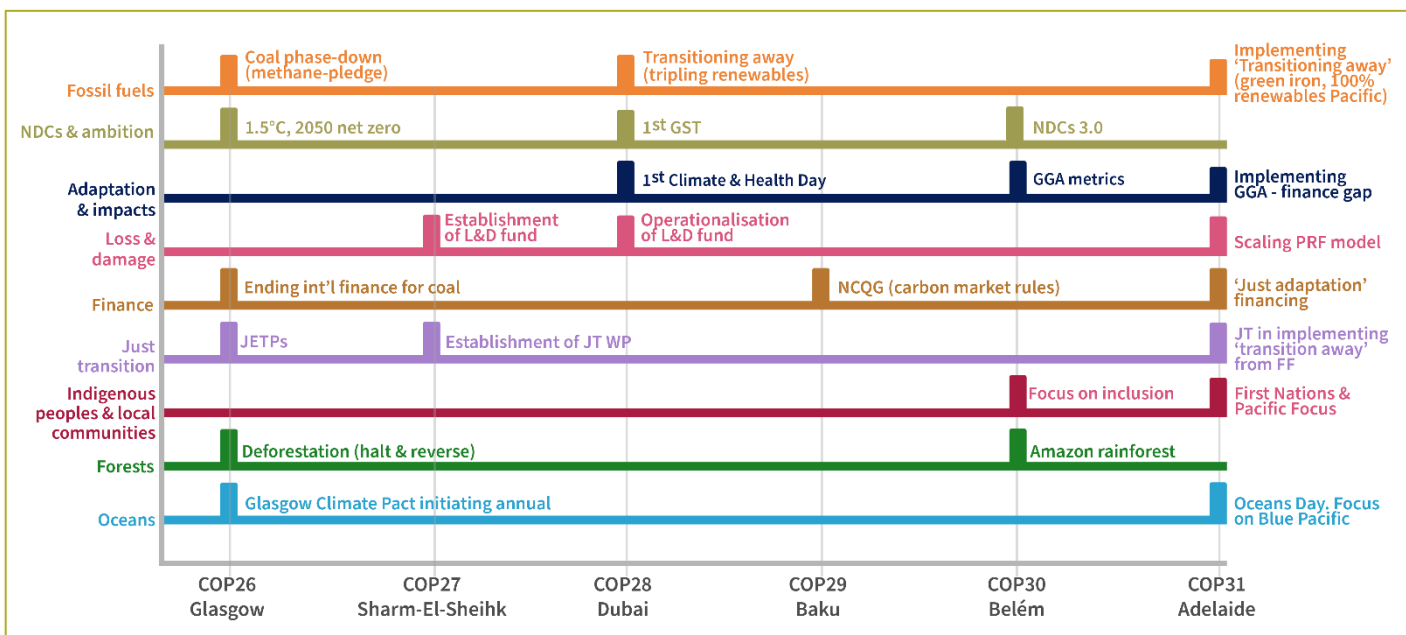


Figure 3: Towards an ambitious COP31 building on existing initiatives