

Australian prime minister announces greener policies

March 23 2016, by Rod Mcguirk



Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, left, listens to Minister for the Environment Greg Hunt, as they attend a press conference in Sydney, Wednesday, March 23, 2016. Prime Minister Turnbull assured Australians that they were in a stronger security position than Europeans because of Australia's greater border control. (AP Photo/Rick Rycroft)

Australia's prime minister on Wednesday distanced himself from the man he replaced by announcing a new fund to promote clean energy

innovation as the country heads toward a likely early election in July.

The announcement by Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull of the 1 billion Australian dollar (\$760 million) Clean Energy Innovation Fund comes after his predecessor Tony Abbott accused him this week of seeking re-election on the Abbott government's record.

Among Abbott's biggest achievements of his two years in power was repealing a carbon tax that had been paid by the worst industrial polluters in a bid to reduce the nation's greenhouse gas emissions.

Turnbull, who has long advocated that polluters should pay for their carbon emissions, also announced the center-right government's support for two agencies that finance and promote [clean energy](#) in Australia.

Abbott had gone in an election in 2013 promising to abolish both government agencies—the Clean Energy Finance Corp. and the Australian Renewable Energy Agency—which had been established by the former Labor Party government.

"This is a very good day for innovation, it is a very good day for technology and for taking on the big challenge of global warming," Turnbull told reporters.



Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull attends a press conference in Sydney, Wednesday, March 23, 2016. Prime Minister Turnbull assured Australians that they were in a stronger security position than Europeans because of Australia's greater border control. (AP Photo/Rick Rycroft)

"This reflects a very big change in the way the government ... is now approaching this type of investment," he said.

The green policy shift makes it more difficult for Labor to campaign against the government's climate change record. Abbott had been

accused of taking a minimalist approach to reducing Australia's [greenhouse gas emissions](#), which are among the world's highest on a per capita basis because of the country's heavy reliance on abundant reserves of cheap coal.

Turnbull announced Monday that he will call an early election on July 2 unless the Senate agrees to pass contentious legislation next month, effectively kicking off a 15-week de facto election campaign.

The government trailed the opposition in opinion polls until Turnbull replaced Abbott as [prime minister](#) in September, although Turnbull's popularity has waned as observers have criticized his slow pace of reform.

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