

guardian.co.uk

Australia passes 20% renewables bill

- Legislation matches European targets for clean energy
- Some officials warn greater emission cuts still necessary

Associated Press

guardian.co.uk, Thursday 20 August 2009 10.25 BST

A [larger](#) | [smaller](#)

Australia's parliament today passed a law demanding that 20% of the country's electricity come from renewable sources by 2020, matching European targets.

The law would quadruple the renewable energy target set by the previous government in 2001 and provide enough clean electricity to power the households of all 21 million Australians.

The target matches one set by the European Union, which leads the world in green power technology.

But some officials warned that more aggressive cuts in greenhouse gas emissions are needed as well.

The bill was passed by the Senate and House of Representatives on Thursday after the government reached a deal with the main opposition party to increase government assistance to industries that are heavy users of electricity and create safeguards for existing investment in the coal mining industry.

Senator Bob Brown, leader of the Australian Greens minor opposition party, said the target should be 30% and that big polluters were offered too much government assistance.

Senator Bob Fielding, an independent, said the bill will make power too expensive.

"It's mums and dads that will be subsidising wind-powered electricity, solar – these are very expensive," he said.

Currently, 8% of Australia's electricity comes from renewable sources, including hydroelectric generators built late last century, according to the private Clean Energy Council.

Critics argue the target will make electricity more expensive in coal-rich Australia without curbing the amount of climate-warming greenhouse gases that the nation emits, as overall electricity consumption rises.

Climate change minister, Penny Wong, told the Senate on Wednesday that even with one-fifth of Australia's electricity coming from renewable sources by 2020, the nation's carbon gas emissions are projected to be 20% higher than 2000 levels.

"The only way we're going to be able to turn around the growth in our carbon pollution ... is to put a firm legislated limit on the amount of carbon that we produce and make those who create the pollution pay for it," Wong said.

Last week the Senate rejected a government-proposed bill that would have taxed industries' carbon emissions starting in 2011 and slashed the country's emissions by up to 25% below 2000 levels by 2020.

