

Australia to Spend Nearly \$150 Million on COP31 Negotiation Presidency and Pacific Support

The Australian government will spend nearly 150 million Australian dollars to support Climate Change Minister Chris Bowen in his role as president of negotiations for COP31 and to assist Pacific nations participating in the upcoming United Nations climate summit.

The funding details were revealed during a Senate estimates hearing on Monday, where officials from Australia's Environment Department confirmed that the allocation had been included in the May federal budget ahead of the 31st Conference of the Parties (COP31), scheduled for November.

According to department officials, the package includes support for around 70 full-time equivalent staff. Of those, 30 personnel will work directly in the Office of the Presidency, drawing staff from the Department of Energy, Climate Change, Environment and Water. Additional employees from the climate negotiations division will assist Pacific island nations in preparing for and participating in the summit.

Bowen was appointed president of negotiations for COP31 after the Albanese Government withdrew Australia's bid to host the climate conference, allowing Türkiye to take over hosting responsibilities.

During the hearing, Liberal senator Sarah Henderson questioned officials about whether there was a spending cap associated with the conference preparations. Department secretary Mike Kaiser responded that total expenditure would not exceed 148 million Australian dollars.

Henderson remarked that taxpayers would be relieved to know spending would remain below that amount, prompting a sharp response from Bowen.

“It beggars belief that during an international energy crisis, the opposition doesn’t think it’s important to engage with the rest of the world,” Bowen said, accusing the opposition of being “embarrassingly out of touch.”

Kaiser defended the staffing and expenditure, arguing that many officials assigned to COP31-related work would already be handling similar climate and energy issues regardless of the conference.

As president of negotiations, Bowen is expected to play a significant diplomatic role during COP31, including selecting international political leaders to oversee specific negotiation tracks and helping draft the final summit agreements.

Australia has also secured a commitment for a pre-COP international meeting to be held in the Pacific. The preparatory summit will take place in Fiji and is intended to focus on directing climate finance toward small island developing states vulnerable to rising sea levels and climate impacts.

Pacific nations had strongly supported Australia’s original bid to host COP31 in Adelaide alongside regional co-hosts. Many island countries expressed disappointment after Australia withdrew its candidacy following Türkiye’s refusal to step aside.

The Senate hearing also saw tense exchanges between Kaiser and Senator Henderson over requests for detailed costs associated with departmental travel to Fiji ahead of the pre-COP meeting.

Kaiser defended departmental officials after one senior officer requested additional time to provide exact figures,

telling the senator she was being “unreasonable” in demanding immediate answers.