



## The Consequences of Poor Climate Change Policy: Warnings from Indonesia's Neighbours

By

**Luke Gallen**

Intern at The Habibie Center  
thc@habibiecenter.or.id

### Introduction

The climate is changing, the science is settled<sup>1</sup>, the policies are not. The effects of climate change in Indonesia are widespread and more evident year on year. In response to this, Indonesia has been called upon by international stakeholders to engage in more concrete climate policies.<sup>2</sup> In the first part, this piece aims to highlight the shortcomings of governments with poor climate policy despite positive rhetoric and ambition. Following this, there is further discussion that the future of global trade will bring about economic pressure to economies that fail to incorporate proactive climate change policy.

### So, What's the Problem?

Jakarta is witnessing the effects of climate change. Indonesia's capital city provides a prime example of such effects, leading to worsening air pollution and intensifying floods. Air pollution is an overt problem faced by Jakarta, one city that is accustomed to topping the infamous list of 'world's most polluted city'.<sup>3</sup> This view was upheld by data from air monitoring stations located at the US Embassy in 2017 which showed the air quality of Jakarta was found to only be considered as 'good' for 26 days that year.<sup>4</sup> The ramifications of this poor air pollution for several years has resulted in reduced life expectancy of Jakartan citizens by 2.3 years.

Another disaster faced by Jakarta, also exacerbated by climate change, is flooding. Like clockwork, the capital encounters increased water levels annually. New Year's Eve of 2019 brought with it the highest rate of rainfall since 2007 as reported by the Indonesian the Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics



Agency (BMKG).<sup>5</sup> A spokesperson for the agency declared that it is clear that the flooding was linked to global warming when speaking to VICE Indonesia. Whilst floods are nothing new to Jakarta, climate change has been found to amplify extreme precipitation and led to more intensified flooding.<sup>6</sup> Yet these are only two of the various threats of climate change towards Indonesia nation-wide.<sup>7</sup>

These problems are compounded by the lack of education and awareness of its serious nature by Indonesian citizens. The YouGov-Cambridge Globalism Project found that 18% of Indonesian people surveyed do not believe climate change is the result of human interference.<sup>8</sup> The cause of this might stem from the Indonesian media focussing on religious and political issues rather than supplying in-depth exposes on climate issues. It may also be the result of an educational system that places less importance on such issues. Nevertheless, the recent intensifying of natural disasters and worsening of air pollution ought to have chins wagging on the importance of better climate policies.

## Jakarta's Current Policies

Early into his first term, the Joko "Jokowi" Widodo administration spouted rhetoric that was optimistic about limiting the effects of climate change.<sup>9</sup> This particular dialogue was in reaction to air quality reduction due to the peat-driven fires of 2015. Since then the environmental policies put forward by the current government have failed to capitalise on the climate crisis. Both of the aforementioned natural disasters facing Jakarta have been met with criticism that the government is not doing enough to mitigate the dangerous effects of a warming climate.

The Lowy Institute reported one such example of criticism, where a coalition of citizens submitted a lawsuit following their concern with the government's handling of Jakartan air quality.<sup>10</sup> The coalition demands for laws that effectively regulate air pollution in light of the climate crisis and provide more transparent data on the levels of air pollution. Similar citizen lawsuits have been successful in other cases, most recently in Paris where the French state was found to be culpable for not taking sufficient action to reduce air pollution.<sup>11</sup>

Broadly speaking, Indonesia has not taken the necessary steps to create sound climate policy. The independent data collector Climate Action Tracker (CAT) rates Indonesia's current policy projections as 'insufficient', whilst their Paris Agreement 2030 targets are still labelled as 'highly insufficient'.<sup>12</sup> One such area that ought to be invested in to promote better climate policy is renewable sources of fuel. CAT described one such pathway, where Indonesia could meet its Paris Agreements and achieve sustainable





development if the country, “[shifts] the investments in coal planned for the next five years towards renewable, zero-carbon solutions.” There is pressure on the Jokowi administration to move investment into renewable industries that limit greenhouse gas pollution. This would limit the effect on climate change and minimise further intensifying of natural disasters linked to a warmer climate.

## **Consequences of Poor Climate Policy: A Sunburnt Country**

If one looks across the pond to Australia, you will find a country experiencing the results of poor climate policy. The images of the current bushfires have been plastered across the global media for the entirety of the summer.<sup>13</sup> As it stands, the bushfires that are burning land comparative to the land mass of South Korea have caused the destruction of thousands of homes, a billion animals to perish and a rising human death toll that includes both residents and firefighters.<sup>14</sup> It may be argued that these bushfires are one example resulting from Australia’s overall environmental policies having plateaued under the prevailing leadership. The incumbent Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, leads a conservative-minded Liberal party that, practically speaking, does not focus on proactive environmental policy.<sup>15</sup> Whilst Morrison himself is not a denier of climate change per se, he is a strong advocate against enforcing stronger climate policies. The Prime Minister believes that Australia is already “carrying its load” and believes that the warming climate is essentially the new norm that we must adapt to.<sup>16</sup> He is also a strong advocate for coal, infamously known by many environmentally conscious Australians as the man who brought a physical lump of coal into parliament in a bizarre marketing-like stunt.<sup>17</sup>

The recent Australian administration has made little effort towards creating proactive measures to counter the effects of climate change. Consequentially, the 2020 Climate Change Performance Index gave Australia’s climate policy the lowest rating (0.0) stating that the current national government continues to, “worsen performance at a national and international level.”<sup>18</sup> Australian representatives have further been banned from speaking at the UN Climate Change Summit due to the country’s continued unwavering support of ‘environmentally damaging industries’.<sup>19</sup>

Australia has a unique economy as it is one of the few developed countries that is heavily dependent on minerals and natural resources to sustain its GDP. This amongst others, is one of the most pertinent reasons Australia fails to invest and rely on more environmentally sustainable sources of fuel or industry. This reliance in coal is strongly felt despite evidence indicating that a failure to have sound climate policy will lead to economic downfall.<sup>20</sup> The current Australian government has been further insistent to not implement transformative or proactive policies to tackle climate change.<sup>21</sup> This was indicated more





overtly when Australia was the only country by late 2019 that was openly planning to utilise its Kyoto credits from the 1997 negotiations in order to meet its Paris agreement targets.<sup>22</sup>

This case study ought to be of particular importance to Indonesia as, much like Australia, the Indonesian economy also heavily relies on mining products, with the Jokowi administration opening 10 coal plants last year to meet Indonesia's energy needs.<sup>23</sup> Questions should be raised as to whether it is within Indonesia's best interests to continue investing so highly into minerals. Some antagonists of global warming argue that such concessions on climate policy are necessary to ensure positive growth across other sectors of the economy. However, this case study of Australia suggests that the figures of the past year have been bleak, particularly: unemployment rates, the balance of trade, household debts and the value of the Australian dollar.<sup>24</sup> Whilst there is many factors in place to be considered aside from the culpability of abject climate policy, it is still interesting to identify the numerous economic indicators that have performed poorly in Australia despite the growth of the global economy.

## Analysis/The Verdict

There are a few takeaways for Indonesia. First that numerous stakeholders ought to ensure Indonesians better understand the 'climate crisis' at hand. This includes support from governmental agencies, educational providers and the mainstream media as they have the resources to advocate and more accurately discuss the reality of climate change. Second, that the current Indonesian environmental policies need to improve and align with the positive rhetoric shared by leaders in climate change prevention. Third, Australia is a developed, neighbouring country that should act as an example of the potential negative ramifications of poor climate change policy. Further it suggests that concessions on sound climate policy does not result in economic growth. The future of the global economy is moving away from investing in non-renewable fuel. Therefore, it is in the interests of Indonesia to look at diversifying its exports to satisfy the growing future demands of renewable biofuels. To continue to invest highly in non-renewable palm oil is to put 'too many eggs in ones' basket'.





## Endnotes

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**Contact:**

The Habibie Center  
Jl. Kemang Selatan No. 98, Jakarta 12560  
Tel: +62 21 781 7211 | Fax: +62 21 781 7212  
Email: [thc@habibiecenter.or.id](mailto:thc@habibiecenter.or.id)  
Website: [www.habibiecenter.or.id](http://www.habibiecenter.or.id)