Necropolicy in the Capitalocene: Australia's political ecology of death

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Abstract

This is the Capitalocene, an age characterised by death derived from capitalism's endless accumulation, growth, and resource exploitation. In the Capitalocene, policies dedicated to climate change mitigation are intertwined with a capitalist logic, perpetuating a self-reinforcing cycle of validation and harm. Based on a political ecology approach analysing the Australian government's climate change mitigation policies, I suggest, these policies promote the deferral of climate change action and the slippage into death-boundedness—subtly and over time. By casting climate issues as matters of economic growth and energy transition, policies create the appearance of robust action while neglecting the fundamental drivers of environmental harm such as the conflict between ongoing capital accumulation and ecological well-being. Additionally, legal systems reinforce these harmful cycles and hinder meaningful climate change mitigation. As such, climate change mitigation policy in the Capitalocene represents 'necropolicy', death-bound policy.

Key words: Australian climate policy, capitalism, Capitalocene, climate change mitigation, necropower, policy analysis, political ecology

Résumé

Nous vivons actuellement dans le Capitalocène, une ère caractérisée par la mort résultant de l'accumulation, de la croissance et de l'exploitation sans fin des ressources par le capitalisme. Dans le Capitalocène, les politiques consacrées à l'atténuation du changement climatique sont étroitement liées à la logique capitaliste, perpétuant ainsi un cycle auto-renforçant de validation et de dommages. Sur la base d'une approche d'écologie politique analysant les politiques d'atténuation du réchauffement climatique du gouvernement australien, je suggère que ces politiques favorisent le report des mesures de lutte contre le réchauffement climatique et le glissement vers la mort, de manière subtile et progressive. En présentant les questions climatiques comme des questions de croissance économique et de transition énergétique, les politiques donnent l'impression d'une action vigoureuse tout en négligeant les facteurs fondamentaux de la dégradation de l'environnement, tels que le conflit entre l'accumulation continue de capital et le bien-être écologique. De plus, les systèmes juridiques renforcent ces cycles néfastes et entravent toute atténuation significative du changement

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climatique. La politique d'atténuation du changement climatique dans le Capitalocène représente une « nécropolitique », une politique vouée à la mort.
Mots clés: politique climatique australienne, capitalisme, Capitalocène, atténuation du changement climatique, nécropouvoir, analyse politique, écologie politique

Resumen

Estamos en el Capitaloceno, una era caracterizada por la muerte derivada de la acumulación, el crecimiento y la explotación de recursos sin fin del capitalismo. En el Capitaloceno, las políticas dedicadas a la mitigación del cambio climático se entrelazan con una lógica capitalista, perpetuando un ciclo autorreforzado de validación y daño. Sugiero que estas políticas promueven el aplazamiento de las medidas contra el cambio climático y el deslizamiento hacia la muerte, de forma sutil y a lo largo del tiempo. Utilizo un enfoque de ecología política para analizar las políticas de mitigación del cambio climático del Gobierno australiano. Las políticas crean la apariencia de una acción sólida, mientras que descuidan los factores fundamentales que impulsan el daño medioambiental, como el conflicto entre la acumulación continua de capital y el bienestar ecológico. Las cuestiones climáticas se presentan como asuntos de crecimiento económico y transición energética. Los sistemas jurídicos también refuerzan estos ciclos perjudiciales y obstaculizan una mitigación significativa del cambio climático. La política de mitigación del cambio climático en el Capitaloceno es una «necropolítica», una política abocada a la muerte.
Palabras clave: política climática australiana, capitalismo, Capitaloceno, mitigación del cambio climático, necropoder, análisis de políticas, ecología política

1. Introduction

Seated in the rocking chair in my bedroom, I turn the page in a picture book and show my daughter the hen, and together, we learn that they lay eggs. Another picture is of a mule: they are good workers. Sheep make wool; we ride horses; we can drink milk from cows and goats. The goose, I teach my young daughter, make down feathers. The book intends to introduce very young children to farm animals. The book, which I picked up second-hand a few weeks prior, has an underlying assumption: these animals represent commodities in our consumption. While questioning *my* consumer choice in purchasing this book, it also provides a stark reminder of the world in which I am raising my daughter.

Many different terms have been used to describe the present era; the Anthropocene, Plantationocene, and, more recently, the Chthulucene and the Capitalocene (Haraway, 2015). Although these terms trace the source of harm to different social events and actors, they all emphasise the destruction of the planet, its ecosystems, natural habitats, and species extinction (Haraway, 2015). These terms also communicate distinct but overlapping relationships between human society and "more-than-human" worlds. The more-than-human, drawing from Whatmore (2004: 1361), emphasises this interdependencies and connections between human- and beyond-human species. Addressing climate change through a political ecology lens requires interrogating these relationships. My daughter's book is just another reminder of this.

The country known as Australia,[2] with its sizeable contribution of domestic greenhouse gas emissions, has an urgent part to play in preventing the continued accumulation of greenhouse gases and decelerating climate change. Moreover, as one of the largest fossil fuel producers in the world, exporting coal, uranium, and natural gas, Australia is also responsible for much of the world's emissions (Geoscience Australia, 2023). A recent report established that Australian coal and gas

[2] Australia is a settler colony, and sovereignty was never ceded. This was and always will be Aboriginal lands.

exports cause greenhouse gas emissions at a scale only superseded by Russia. Further troubling is that the Australian government is showing no signs of reducing these exports, failing international commitments to transition away from fossil fuels. Instead, the report states, Australian fossil fuel exports are forecasted to substantially increase until 2035 (Grant & Hare 2024). Like many other regions, Australia is already experiencing severe climate change impacts, including more extreme weather events, such as droughts, floods, and fires (Climate Council 2023). From an Australian perspective, climate change mitigation is central on both domestic and global levels.

Australian climate change mitigation policies are grounded in capitalist state structures that prioritise economic growth over ecological well-being. Drawing on a four-year research project exploring urban, state, and international policy responses to climate change, in this article, I consider the Australian federal government's climate change mitigation policies in the Capitalocene. In particular, this article uses discourse/policy analysis to show how these policies reinforce capitalist imperatives, limiting genuine climate action and dismissing alternative solutions. By framing the climate challenge primarily as a question of energy production and transition, the government presents an image of decisive action while failing to address the root causes of climate harm, overlooking the inherent contradictions between capital accumulation and ecological well-being. This also dismisses alternative representations of climate problems and solutions. The continued reliance on national policy to battle climate change requires ongoing scrutiny of how capitalist ideologies and legal structures perpetuate harmful cycles and obstruct meaningful climate mitigation.

In drawing attention to the interactions between capitalist policies and more-than-human worlds, I argue that such policies are not just inadequate but directly harmful, causing death, destruction, and extinction through both commission and omission. As such, I will argue, drawing from Mbembe's (2003) necropolitics, these policies represent *necropolicy*; these are death-bound policies, triggering, supporting, and legitimising death and destruction of more-than-human worlds.

The next section situates this research within political ecology scholarship and introduces the concept of the Capitalocene. I then outline the policy analysis framework and research methods. Following a brief review of recent Australian climate change policies, I present a detailed analysis of Australia's key mitigation policies, focusing on problem representation, underlying assumptions, and proposed solutions. The discussion then shifts to the legal system, examining recent legal challenges and their implications for the capacity of political institutions to either uphold or contest prevailing climate policies. Building on these insights, I develop the concept of necropolicy, drawing on Mbembe's (2003) framework of necropolitics to examine how policies perpetuate harm. Finally, the conclusion considers possibilities for life beyond the Capitalocene, including pathways towards a degrowth society.

2. Politics, the economy, and 'nature'

Climate mitigation policies are a central element of modern political agendas, revealing attitudes, priorities, and considerations associated with broader political aspirations for human societies and the more-than-human world. Power plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes and relationships within the more-than-human context, determining how concerns for the more-than-human are prioritized alongside economic growth and productivity (Greenberg & Park, 1994). Drawing from political ecology scholarship, I highlight the correlation between political power, competition for resources, and more-than-human wellbeing (Vaccaro, Beltran, & Paquet, 2013). As such, this article seeks to uncover dominant discourses and priorities within modern climate mitigation policies and their interaction with deadly environmental outcomes.

This involves examining state-corporate relations that benefit from the political, economic, and environmental status quo. The structures of these relations and their shared profiteering from planetary devastation are central to understanding systematic and recurring instances of climate-related harm. As Whyte (2014: 239) points out, "neo-liberal capitalism conceptualizes the main role of government as facilitating the profitability of business." The state has a hand to play in all forms of corporate harm in the "*a priori* conditions of the regulatory relationship", such as through regulatory failure, enabling, or providing silent approval for harmful acts (Whyte, 2014: 239, emphasis in original). Government regulation and lack thereof, form what Whyte (2014: 244) calls "regimes of permission" that allow corporations, such as the fossil fuel industry, to perpetrate harm continuously.

Environmental problems are often transformed, both discursively and practically, into economic opportunities. This is evident in carbon markets, circular economies, and other green investment mechanisms (Kaika, Calvario, & Velegrakis, 2024). These 'fixes' tend to support capitalist accumulation by addressing perceived environmental problems through economic mechanisms and programs aligned with the capitalist agenda. While these fixes can yield some positive outcomes, research in political ecology has found that most tend to exacerbate social and environmental inequalities and harm (Kaika *et al*. 2024: 71). Capitalism, as Shokrgozar and Girard (2024: 50) argue, is adaptive and thrives by "feeding on the climate crisis." Climate mitigation has thus become a lucrative area of economic development and profitability, often in ways that perpetuate existing socioeconomic dynamics.

Political ecology has been criticised for remaining largely mono-directional in its analysis of 'culture' and 'nature', placing agency predominantly within human societies (Braun, 2004). Although it fundamentally understands humans as part of nature, political ecology sometimes falls short in recognising nonhuman agency and the complexity of causality that follows. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this article, I employ political ecology to uncover the relationships between discursive practices, political and economic forces, institutional practices, and climate change mitigation. Importantly, this approach is not meant to position nonhuman actors as victims lacking agency but to highlight the chains of responsibility and the capitalist cycle of harm. The following section explores the dynamics of power, capital accumulation, and ecological devastation through the concept of the Capitalocene.

3. From the Anthropocene to the Capitalocene

The Anthropocene, the most commonly used term for the present era, refers to human-induced climate change and the end of the Holocene geological period. The Anthropocene, or "the era of humans" emphasises human interference on Earth's geology and climate (Davis, Moulton, Van Sant, & Williams, 2019: 2). Nonetheless, Haraway (2016) is affronted by the over-emphasis of humanity (and all humans) in these discourses. Similarly, Moore (2017: 595) stresses the consequences of the Anthropocene's reaffirming of the separation between humanity and nature: "It shapes our thinking of planetary crisis and its origins, preconceptualizing humanity and nature as separate first, connected second." Following Moore's line of reasoning, if humanity is to blame for the climate crisis, what is to say that humanity will find a way out of this predicament? If capitalism were to blame, on the other hand, there might be hope for a human future beyond the death of capitalism.

Anthropocene narratives often trace their beginnings to the Industrial Revolution and humanity's employment of fossil fuels at a broader scale. From the outset, fossil fuel transactions in Britain during the 19th century, Malm and Hornborg (2014: 64) argue, reveal "the extent to which the

historical origins of anthropogenic climate change were predicated on highly inequitable global processes from the start", including colonialism, slavery, and other forms of exploitation. Hence our reliance on fossil fuels represents only a portion of the tale. Western capitalist exploitation laid the foundation for what became known as the Industrial Revolution and the establishment of the fossil fuel economy. Rather than anthropogenic, then, implicating the nature of humanity, Malm and Hornborg (2014: 66) characterise climate change as "sociogenic", as arising from social relations. Following Malm and Hornborg (2014), therefore, we need to investigate the social elements, power relations and cultures that shape harmful processes, including but not limited to our fossil fuel reliance. Importantly, this involves the ways that modern capitalist practices are intertwined with the current crisis.

This has led scholars, including Malm (2016), Moore (2017), and Haraway (2015, 2016), to theorise the Capitalocene, a concept that underscores the widespread resource extraction, inequalities, and petrochemical dependency inherent in global capitalist domination. As Moore (2016: 5-6) argues, the "Capitalocene signifies capitalism as a way of organizing nature—as a multispecies, situated, capitalist world-ecology." It is therefore capitalism, not humanity, that is the source of violence towards more-than-human lives:

> Global warming is not the accomplishment of an abstract humanity, the Anthropos. Global warming is capital's crowning achievement. Global warming is capitalogenic. (Moore 2018: 237)

Following Moore, analyses of the Capitalocene should attend to the transformation of capitalism and the associated relations between society, ecology, and history. Moreover, it must pay attention to "capital's circuit of expanded reproduction" and "how capitalism values – and de-values – life and land" (Moore, 2018: 240-241). Significantly, capitalism relies on a separation between humans and nature. According to the capitalist logic, nature is externalised from society in much the same way that some humans (typically women and minority groups) are externalised from humanity (Moore, 2017: 600). The accumulation central to capitalism is built on this human/nature binary, clearly distinguishing between those who own and profit and that which can be owned, traded, and exploited (Moore, 2017: 600). Not dissimilar from the animals introduced in my daughter's picture book.

Capitalism's inherent distinction between the consumer and the consumed is the foundation of its destructive forces. As McBrien (2016: 117) has put it, "Capitalism is the reciprocal transmutation of life into death and death into capital." I employ the Capitalocene in this article to consider Australian climate change mitigation policy, its limitations, and harm. Next, after briefly introducing the methods of analysis, I explore the tensions, devaluations, separations, priorities, and death-boundedness that characterise Australian climate change mitigation.

4. Reading between the policy lines

Policy typically refers to official documents outlining and guiding the practices of a particular organisation, institution, or government body (Ball, 1993). In contrast to positivist public policy studies such as cost-benefit analyses or attitudinal surveys, interpretive approaches centre meaning and meaning-making. Such approaches pay attention to the context of policy and its production, the researcher's positionality in extracting understanding and knowledge from policy, and how policy fits into the social production of truths and knowledge more broadly (Yanow, 2007).

Ball (1993) reminds us that all policies sit within existing social structures, inequalities, and logics. They are both products of and contribute to societies' ongoing restructuring and adaptation. Based on a Foucauldian discourse perspective, policies are central components in the production of 'truth' and 'knowledge' (Ball, 1993). This also involves attention to what voices are heard, what assumptions and truths are represented by policies, what solutions are put forward and, importantly, "what's the problem represented to be?" (Bacchi, 2012: 22). Despite claims of truthfulness, policies may also reflect misinformation, vested interests, or incompetence. The unheard and unspoken are also central to Foucault's work. The 'never-said' and 'not-said' is, in his later works, included in his discourse definition to account for the potential but never uttered (1972, quoted in Sam, 2019). The problem representation, Bacchi (2012) reminds us, is central in constructing problems, as well as constraining actions and the objects/subjects of policy interventions.

Forming part of a larger case study research project on climate mitigation, I present an analysis of the discourses, meanings, assumptions, and representations of the climate 'problem' and its solutions in key Australian climate mitigation policies. In particular, the documents I analysed encompass the central climate mitigation plans of the current Albanese government. These includes their *Net Zero Plan*, the *Annual Climate Change Statement 2024*, the *Future Made in Australia Bill*, *the Safeguard Mechanisms*, and various strategies such as *Powering Australia, The National Electric Vehicle Strategy, Rewiring the Nation, the National Reconstruction Fund*, and *New Energy Apprenticeships*. Additionally, the documents cover the government's *Future Gas Strategy* and the Albanese government's *2024-2025 Budget* priorities. In reviewing these documents, I examine how capitalist logic permeates these policies and the implications of their proposed problem representations and solutions. As a climate change researcher and a recent settler on these lands, I am also entangled with climate change, capitalist discourses, and policies. My commitment to the future of the planet informs a deep emotional engagement with the research topics explored in this article. I contend that such engagement constitutes a methodological advantage rather than a limitation (see Anderson, Lundberg, & O'Donnell, 2024).

I examine these materials using Bacchi's (2012) "What's the problem represented to be?" method in order to guide my thinking on the narratives, tropes, assumptions, representations and themes within the documents. These techniques also highlight the meanings and expressions of power embedded within these documents and discourses. Analysing these policies, then, exposes significant hierarchies of knowledge, truths, and practices. Consistent with interpretive policy analysis, the following section outlines the context in which contemporary climate change mitigation solutions have been introduced.

5. Policy in the Capitalocene

The political climate

There is widespread agreement among climate scientists about the urgency of climate change, and most governments now recognise the need to act. Only recently have global agencies and governments begun to acknowledge the exigent need for climate change mitigation, which requires a swift reduction and eventual elimination of fossil fuels (Somerville, 2020). However, coordinated action across all levels of government is stalling. The 2015 Paris Agreement, adopted at the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21), mandates that global greenhouse emissions are reduced to maintain global heating below 2°C and as close to 1.5°C as possible (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC], n.d.).

Nonetheless, according to the United Nations Environment Program (2023), based on 2030 emissions predictions, greenhouse gas emissions must fall by an additional 28 per cent to limit warming to 2°C. This is complicated by the polarising and political nature of climate change (White & Kramer, 2015: 389), given that states and corporations continue to profit from fossil fuel extraction and use. Furthermore, as Walters (2018: 166) points out, climate change is "culturally imbued within contemporary notions of truth and knowledge", allowing people in power to pursue capital accumulation predicated on the destruction of the planet whilst appearing to act in the best interest of more-than-human worlds.

Globally, Australia stands out for its poor climate change mitigation policies and bipartisan inaction during the past three decades. This failure stems from pervasive political denial of climate change and insufficient electoral backing for climate mitigation efforts. After being granted an exemption that permitted Australia to increase its emissions under the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, the Australian government refused to sign the agreement (Da Rimini, Goodman, Swarnakar, & Ylä-Anttila, 2021). Australia finally joined on the condition of allowing it to first increase their emissions by 8 per cent in the first two decades (from 1990), to then cut emissions by 5 per cent by 2020 (compared to 2000 levels) (Crowley, 2021: 1). As Crowley explains:

> Australia has a history then of 'reducing' emissions by negotiating to increase emissions, of offsetting these with decreases from reduced land clearing, and of carrying over 'credits' from this equation to help meet future targets. (2021: 2)

In 2016, Australia became a signatory of the Paris Agreement, as it pledged to reduce emissions by 26-28 per cent by 2030 compared to 2005 emission levels. Despite the modest commitment, their policies were criticised for being inadequate in reaching this target. For example, emissions from transport, stationary energy, and industrial processes saw a sharp increase from 1990 to 2019, demonstrating the inadequacy of Australian climate mitigation policies to date (Crowley, 2021: 2). A significant source of Australia's climate change mitigation failure is the contradiction between the government's climate mitigation ambitions and their energy policies expanding coal and gas production (Da Rimini *et al*., 2021: 296). Significantly, as one of the largest exporters of coal in the world, the fossil fuel lobby has a strong influence and tends to constrain the implementation of effective climate policies (Crowley, 2013: 603). Not until 2021 did the former centre-right conservative Morrison Government formally adopt a net zero by 2050 target (Australian government, 2021).

More recently, coupled with an increasing recognition of climate change as a pressing issue among the Australian electorate—spurred on by bushfires, droughts, and floods across the country—the call for political action has grown. As such, it was a significant policy issue ahead of the 2022 Australian Federal Election (Christoff, 2022: 4). This followed widespread discontent with the former administration for failing to act on climate change, including Australia's refusal to join various significant pledges at COP26 in Glasgow (Steffen *et al*., 2021: 2). The Australian Labor Party (ALP), led by the current Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, emerged victorious from the election, albeit with a narrow minority. Compared to the former government, the ALP appeared more inclined to act on climate change, which is thought to be a critical reason behind their success (Christoff, 2022). In May 2025, Albanese was elected for a second term, and this time it was a landslide victory. Pressures are mounting both domestically and internationally for decisive action on climate change, as polling indicates that a majority of Australians are deeply concerned about the issue (Eckersley, 2025).

Arguably, the Albanese government's most significant achievement in climate policy is legislation establishing a commitment to 43 per cent emissions reduction below 2005 levels by 2030 and net zero by 2050 (Prime Minister & Minister for Climate Change and Energy, 2022). Nonetheless, to achieve net zero by 2050, Australia must achieve closer to 70 per cent net emissions reductions by 2030 (Hare, 2024). This would require that the legislation be accompanied by prompt and effective emissions reduction policies. Nonetheless, the Albanese government's climate mitigation policies remain within the confines of the Capitalocene, severely hindering effective action on climate.

Climate change as an economic and industry problem

In a capitalist state, policies, including those aimed at climate change mitigation are embedded within the capitalist logic outlined above. This section will interrogate the discursive techniques embedded in policy that reinforce this logic and prevent real and impactful climate intervention. Climate change (and its mitigation) is fundamentally represented in two ways: as an economic challenge, and as an industrial issue focused on maintaining energy availability and affordability for the future. These are central to justifying the government's policy direction.

In highlighting climate change as an economic problem, the policy documents frame climate change mitigation as an economic opportunity through renewable energy. The government's net zero plan is structured around five priorities: (i) "Clean electricity across the economy", (ii) "Lowering emissions by electrification and efficiency", (iii) "Expanding clean fuel use", (iv) "Accelerating new technologies", and (v) "Net carbon removals scaled up" (Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water [DCCEEW], 2025a: 5). These priorities are seeking to ensure that the net zero transition happens in parallel to "growing the economy; delivering benefits for households and businesses; creating new jobs" (DCCEEW], 2025b: n.p.n.). Their net zero plan endeavours to make "Australia a renewable energy superpower" via "innovation and investment across all sectors" (Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water [DCCEEW], 2025c: para. 2.). Within a capitalist ideology—characterised by the separation of humans (and their profit) from nature (Moore, 2017)—any interventions to address climate change tends to be justified in terms of economic growth. As per the Annual Climate Statement 2024 and the Future Made in Australia Bill:

> The global economy is changing and it is vital that Australia is not left behind… Australia has world-class renewable energy and mineral resources, a highly skilled population and a track record as a reliable investment destination and trading partner. This positions us to be a major beneficiary of these global shifts, and to become a renewable energy superpower. (DCCEEW, 2024a: 11)

> The plan aims to ensure that Australia can take advantage of the economic and industrial benefits of the global move to net zero and to secure Australia's place in the new geopolitical landscape where global competition is being reorganised around preferential trading blocks. (Bathgate & Zhou, 2024: 1)

The Albanese government's Future Made in Australia Bill aims to ensure domestic revenue as part of this transition by employing public investments to attract private funding for renewable energy projects. This also contributes to positioning industry at the centre of the government's mitigation efforts (Bathgate & Zhou, 2024). Moreover, the government's ambition to capitalise on

the demand for renewable energy and critical mineral exports (DCCEEW, 2025c) makes it heavily reliant on industry and private sector investment to support this transition. The Annual Climate Change Statement 2024 also highlighted that, "taking advantage of Australia's abundant renewable energy resources – is fundamental to maintaining Australia's comparative advantage in a net zero global economy" (DCCEEW, 2024a: 10):

> The Future Made in Australia plan will encourage the significant private sector investment needed to harness global net zero transformation opportunities and ensure Australia's future prosperity. (DCCEEW, 2024a: 11)

Various other Labor government policies similarly seek to boost renewable energy production and uptake. This includes *Powering Australia* (boost renewable energy) (Australian Labor Party n.d.), *The National Electric Vehicle Strategy* (increase the supply and demand of renewable energy) (DCCEEW, 2023), *Rewiring the Nation*, (developing offshore wind power) (Prime Minister of Australia, 2022), and the *National Reconstruction Fund* (finance projects that drive "sustainable economic growth", primarily through renewable and low emissions technologies) (Department of Industry, Science and Resources [DISR], 2022). The *New Energy Apprenticeships* support renewable energy companies by funding thousands of apprenticeships in eligible employment areas, emphasising climate change as "Australia's job opportunity" (Albanese, Marles, & Bowen, 2021: para. 1).

The Albanese government's 2024-2025 Budget similarly prioritised investment in critical mineral projects necessary for renewable energy technologies and storage. Moreover, it promoted the ambition of "attracting and enabling investment" (Albanese & Chalmers, 2024: para. 7), making "Australia a renewable energy superpower", and "investing in the foundations for future economic growth…" (King, 2024: para. 4). The emphasis on economic growth and prosperity is front and centre in all their policies, whether targeting corporate emissions or investing in alternative energy technologies.

The problem representation that underpins these policies, hence, centres around maintaining status quo hierarchies, relationships, living standards, and energy dependencies. State-corporate profit conditions remain intact by rolling out policies in collaboration with, and dependent on, industry buy-in and market-based mechanisms. A recurring assumption of the government's Net Zero plan is that the resulting economic transformation will create new job opportunities for Australians: "Together, we are cutting emissions, creating new jobs and securing Australia's place in a changing global economy" (DCCEEW, 2025a: 2).

Such problem framings and the assumptions built into these will inevitably overshadow alternative approaches to emissions reduction, such as those less favourable to industry. Through these problem framings, the government presents renewable energy and economic growth—rather than degrowth or reduced energy demand—as the preferred pathway for climate change mitigation. These policies focus on developing cleaner energy sources by investing in new technologies and rely on the free market to incentivise renewable energy innovations. Aligning with market-based approaches and a capitalist logic, these policies remain deeply committed to continued production and growth. Ultimately, turning the climate crisis into an opportunity for the Australian economy and job market contributes to reinforcing the legitimacy of the capitalist system and market-based approaches as the means to an end. Furthermore, these alternative energy and electric vehicle ambitions assume that climate change can be addressed through capitalist mechanisms and tools. As

such, these policies continue to overlook the inherent contradictions between capital accumulation and more-than-human well-being (Moore, 2017) and dismiss all alternative problem representations and solutions.

Technological and market solutionism

The Albanese government's climate policies are consistently underpinned by the significant assumption that renewable energy offers unlimited potential. This frames the climate change challenge primarily as an issue of energy production, positioning its solution as a transition in how energy is produced, rather than in how it is used. The dominance of technological and market-based solutions to climate change is evident in the ALP's policy approaches and investment priorities. Climate change mitigation models and scenarios often assume ongoing economic growth which relies heavily on technological change. However, continued growth in production and consumption is expected to increase overall energy demand in coming decades (Li et al., 2024: 547). This reliance on new technologies to solve the climate crisis is not an unknown phenomenon. Technological solutions are framed as the ultimate solutions to a wide range of problems, even those caused by technological developments in the first place, of which climate change is the perfect example. Morozov (2013) calls this "technological solutionism."

Importantly, the technological solutionism that dominates climate change mitigation approaches detailed here tends to ignore the shortcomings and harms of 'renewable' energy technologies, including solar cells and wind turbines. Indeed, so-called renewable energy sources are not as renewable as we might like to think, as many of them rely on a whole range of rare minerals and metals that are extracted from vulnerable environments, and may in future come from seabeds with already vulnerable marine systems (Bedford, Mann, Foth, & Walters, 2022: 170). This is also true for the batteries needed to store the more irregular energy from wind and solar (Kallis *et al.,* 2018: 296). Moreover, the energy returns on energy investment (EROIs) for solar and wind power vary between one-fifth and two-thirds of those derived from oil and coal, significantly reducing their ability to replace fossil fuels (Kallis *et al*., 2018: 296). Most detrimental perhaps, current renewable energy solutions can *add* to energy supplies rather than replace fossil fuels. Zehner (2012: 59) writes, "producing more energy simply increases supply, lowers cost, and stimulates additional energy consumption."

Malm and Hornborg (2014: 65) argue that "perceptions of 'technology', no less than perceptions of 'Nature', are cultural constructions conditioned by global power structures." That is, these policy solutions are the result of existing power dynamics rather than necessarily based on their effectiveness and abilities. When the limitations of these alternative energy technologies are recognised, it is generally assumed that increased investment and further technological advancements will resolve these, despite lacking evidence thus far. If anything, the history of modern energy technologies tells us that new challenges accompany new technologies. For example, in early 20th-century Europe, large amounts of dung from horses on the roads in urban areas was a prevalent issue. This problem was seemingly solved by the more widespread use of automobiles (Azar & Dowlatabadi, 1999). Today, we know that cars have created as many problems as they have solved. Entire cities, such as those sprawling across the United States and Australia, have been built around the car, making a shift away from motor vehicles a complex planning, social, cultural, and economic challenge. The Australian government's mitigation policies, however, overlook the fact that unforeseen problems inevitably accompany new technologies.

Also, following Foster (2013: 41), Australian climate policies represent "a form of market fetishism", emphasising market solutions to climate change while distracting from the socioeconomic

conditions that continue to harm. These market-based solutions often centre on technological solutions to climate change that, it is assumed, will allow our carbon-intensive lifestyles to remain intact. Technological developments, such as renewable energy, tend to mirror dominant and unjust infrastructure developments and land appropriation practices (Shokrgozar & Girard, 2024). Climate change and its mitigation are enveloped in colonialism and colonial practices such as the occupation of land and water in the name of carbon offsets, renewable energy investments, mineral mining, that generally dispossess and disadvantaging the most marginalised and vulnerable communities around the world. Sultana (2022: 3) terms this "climate coloniality."

Through technological developments under capitalism, Moore (2017: 620) argues, we learned how to more competitively employ labour to exploit and appropriate nature. The policies considered here are concerned with such continued value extraction. Rather than moving away from the processes that cause climate change and harm, these policies are employed to portray an image of decisive climate action, all while reinforcing capitalist logic. These policies might appear to act on climate change while failing to implement the changes needed to mitigate climate change and achieve net zero by 2050 (in any meaningful way). As Bedford and colleagues (2022: 176) have put it, "The claim that continued economic growth under the current capitalist order can be 'green' needs to be squarely called into dispute…" These policies fail to mitigate harm to the more-than-human world and contribute to death, destruction, and extinction through commission and omission.

Resisting fossil fuel disinvestments

Another significant component of the ALP's mitigation strategy includes the overhaul of the Safeguard Mechanism. This policy was carried over from the former government to regulate the Emissions Reduction Fund (ERF). The ERF is a carbon credit market-based mechanism seeking to limit emissions through economic incentives. The ERF allows participants to earn Australian Carbon Credit Units for each tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent avoided through eligible projects (Department of Agriculture, Fishery and Forestry, 2023). Meanwhile, the Safeguard Mechanism aims to ensure emissions reduction from the most prominent domestic polluters, including coal mines, the gas industry, manufacturing, waste, and transport. This is to ensure that the ERF does not contribute to significant increases in emissions elsewhere in the economy (DCCEEW, 2024b).

However, much critique has been directed at both the ERF and the Safeguard Mechanism for allowing business as usual and failing to limit emissions. Serious flaws have also been revealed in ERF-approved carbon offset projects, bringing into question the legitimacy of the scheme. For example, carbon credits have been issued for avoiding land clearance that was never planned and for growing trees that would have grown anyway (Armistead & Hemming, 2023). In response to such criticism, in their revamp of the Safeguard Mechanism, the ALP plans to implement more stringent pollution limits, seeking a yearly emissions reduction of 5.9 per cent by 2030. Even though this intervention appears promising in concept, these policies remain deeply entwined with the promotion of profit for the fossil fuel industry and the continued exploitation of land and resources at the cost of harm to more-than-human species. Moreover, by "allowing almost unlimited offsets", the Safeguard Mechanism has a restricted impact on Australia's fossil fuel production and export (Hare, 2024: n.p.n). It even allows an expansion in fossil fuels in some cases. The 25 per cent emissions reduction below 2005 levels recorded in 2023 resulted from innovative calculations of the value of carbon offsets in the land use sector (Hare, 2024).

Significantly, the ALP has chosen not to divest from fossil fuels, instead opting to provide funding for new ventures. The Federal government's yearly Resource & Energy Major Project list for 2023 encompassed 116 new fossil fuel projects, marginally more than those two years prior

(Campbell, Ogge, & Vertegen, 2023). Between 2023 and 2024, the government's fossil fuel subsidies totalled AU$14.5 billion (US$10.27 billion), a 31 per cent increase compared to the year before (Campbell, Morison *et al*., 2024). Moreover, in 2024, the Albanese government released its long-awaited *Future Gas Strategy* set to guide its approach to gas, including its use and production in the long- and medium-term future (DISR, 2024). The strategy speaks of optimising and offsetting continued gas use, ensuring the continued affordability of gas in the transition to net zero. Speaking to the export powers of Australian natural gas, it states (DISR, 2024: 6):

> A future made in Australia, our competitive advantage in abundant resources, and our standard of living requires reliable, affordable and clean energy. Continued gas development and more flexible gas infrastructure is needed to increase the resilience of Australia's energy system and keep costs down as we transition.

Natural gas production, the strategy makes clear, will remain central in supporting Australian energy needs and competitive advantage. Natural gas is framed as a "temporary support" for the government to transition the energy sector without sacrificing the economy's strength or energy affordability. After its release, experts and commentators heavily condemned the strategy, pointing out that natural gas expansion undermines net zero pathways (Remeikis, 2024). Most damning is the continued export of liquefied natural gas (LNG), which constitutes 84 per cent of all Australian gas production. Australian natural gas emissions continue to grow, essentially negatively 'offsetting' any headways made in reducing emissions from oil and coal (Hare, 2024). These policy approaches align well with a Capitalocene emphasis on continued petrochemical dependency and resource extraction (Haraway, 2015, 2016; Malm, 2016; Moore, 2017).

Importantly, the emissions reduction targets adopted by the Australian government exclude fossil fuel exports, even though 91 per cent of Australian coal is exported (Grant & Hare, 2024). This casts the government's commitment to net zero in a new light: What does achieving net zero domestic emissions mean when Australia's most severe impacts are associated with its exports? It has been estimated that 80 per cent of Australia's carbon dioxide emissions (constituting as much as 4.5 per cent of worldwide emissions) are associated with their fossil fuel exports. Furthermore, those fossil fuel exports are expected to increase substantially under current government policies (Grant & Hare, 2024). Domestic net zero commitments, then, are little more than political posturing and a diversion from the government's continued profiteering from the exploitation of more-than-human words. It is also worth noting that the concept of net zero rests on the assumption that emissions can be offset elsewhere through carbon credits.

This trend of failing to disinvest from fossil fuels is echoed internationally. In 2022 at COP27, various countries resisted the pledge to eliminate fossil fuels (Lewis, Mcfarlane, & Volcovici, 2022). Similarly, COP28 in Dubai concluded with weak wordings such as "the beginning of the end" for fossil fuels rather than a definite commitment to fossil fuel elimination (UNFCCC, 2023). As Somerville (2020: 360) writes, governmental approaches to addressing climate change at the federal level often align with capitalist interests, resulting in "little effect on global carbon emissions." Significant lobbying continues to resist the abandonment of fossil fuels, despite clear evidence of the urgent need to do so (Malm, 2016). In other words, the fossil fuel economy remains inseparable from dominant climate policy approaches. These business-as-usual attitudes avoid challenging capitalism's obsessions with economic growth, fossil fuel dependency, and consumerism, which act as a preventative of climate change mitigation.

These harmful policies are upheld by the political system and legal processes. The modern state, which dominates contemporary politics, can be understood as "organs and limbs of a single political body that combines a people, territory, and government into a state person of domestic and international law" (Burke & Fishel, 2025: 22). Within this framework, Burke and Fishel (2025: 2) argue, states possess the inalienable right to "dominate, allocate, trade, and destroy nature." The Australian government's climate policies continue to promote and legitimise state-corporate exploitation of Earth's resources. Furthermore, these actions are consistently reinforced by national laws and a "circle of inaction," as evidenced by recent unsuccessful legal challenges.

Legal challenges and the circle of inaction

Some are turning to the courts to challenge government policies that support fossil fuel expansion and harm vulnerable communities and the climate. Recent high-profile climate litigation, such as the *Sharma* decision and the *Living Wonders* case, relied on the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 to object to newly approved fossil fuel projects. In *Sharma*, a group of children argued that the Minister for the Environment owed a duty of care to Australia's children; however, in 2022, the Federal Court ruled that no such duty existed (Worthy & Gardner, 2022). In the 2023 *Living Wonders* case, the Federal Court upheld the Environment Minister's approval of new coal mines, accepting that the projects would not increase global emissions or that their emissions were too minor to require further investigation. The Court further noted that determining the scope of the Minister's powers was a matter for Parliament, not the judiciary (Peel, 2024: 126). These cases highlight the inability of Australia's principal federal environmental law to challenge prevailing pro-fossil fuel politics (Peel, 2024). Furthermore, the limitations of these legal approaches demonstrate that the legal system and the rule of law are designed to protect and legitimise the capitalist exploitation of nature by both corporations and the state.

In 2025, two additional cases highlighted the limitations of Australian law in compelling the government to take stronger action on climate change. In August 2025, the court dismissed a case challenging the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority's (NOPSEMA's) approval of the Scarborough offshore gas facility's environmental plan, allowing Woodside to proceed with producing an estimated eight million tonnes of LNG annually off the coast of Western Australia. The court reasoned that it is beyond their mandate to review the quality of NOPSEMA's determination. Similarly, in another 2025 case, Torres Strait Islander community leaders argued that the Commonwealth owes a duty of care (established via colonialism) to protect the Torres Strait Islanders from adverse effects from climate change. The applicants argued that the government was negligent in setting inadequate emissions reduction targets and failing to support necessary adaptation measures which led to significant loss and damage from climate change in their communities. Similarly in this case, the court sided with the defence, determining that current laws do not permit the kinds of claims brought by the applicants (*Pabai v Commonwealth of Australia*, 2025).

The absence of relevant case law limits the courts' ability to intervene in government policy, as judges rely on established legal precedents to guide their decisions. As environmental lawyer and Greens MP Sue Higginson told *The Guardian*, this constructs "a self-serving circle of inaction on climate change" between government decisions and courts (Cox, 2025). As such, the legal system legitimises, protects, and further promotes the state's failures on climate change.

These ideas are akin to what Burke and Fishel (2025: 2) term the "sovereign ban of nature", referring to a constitutional structure enabling the state to treat nature as both a resource to be exploited and abandoned under national and international law. This framework legitimises ongoing

exploitation of Earth's resources and the suppression of human and more-than-human communities. More-than-human entities are viewed as objects for human use, with the rule of law embedding control, abandonment, and unaccountability into the constitution (Burke & Fishel, 2025: 28). These systems, working alongside global capitalism, mutually enable the abuse of the more-than-human world, resulting in a "zombie biome" sustained only for consumption and profit (Burke & Fishel, 2025: 37).

Necropolicy in the Capitalocene

The Australian government's policy response to climate change is in line with the observations made by White and Kramer (2015: 385) that "the state in a capitalist society is a capitalist state." Unsurprisingly therefore, the state tends to act to protect the interests of capital growth. When the state addresses the conflicts and dilemmas generated by capitalism, it tends to do so without directly confronting its underlying structural contradictions (White & Kramer, 2015: 386). Despite the somewhat obvious nature of these findings, given our continued reliance on national policies to reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions, we must interrogate the ways that policies continue to promote capitalist ideologies that are incompatible with climate change mitigation (such as fossil fuel expansion) and the ways that state and legal systems legitimise these.

Following McBrien (2016: 116), our current era is marked by the "Necrocene", emphasising the extinction accompanying capitalism's past, present, and future. As McBrien writes:

> Capital was born from extinction, and from capital, extinction has flowed. Capital does not just rob the soil and worker, as Marx observes, it necrotizes the entire planet… Capitalism leaves in its wake the disappearance of species, languages, cultures, and peoples. It seeks the planned obsolescence of all life. Extinction lies at the heart of capitalist accumulation. (2016: 116)

Foucault's concept of biopower refers to the regulatory techniques employed by modern states to control the population, including subjugated people allowed to die and those enjoying state protection (Foucault, 1978). 'Necropower'—the power over death—following Mbembe's (2003) work, builds upon Foucault's theory to understand the dynamics, structures, and mechanisms of power that determine what bodies are maimed and killed by the modern state. As Mbembe (2003: 11) writes, "the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die." Racism is central to Mbembe's work. Necropolitics are employments of power that subjugate certain populations through practices such as colonialism, apartheid, and slavery. This mirrors the subjugation of nonhuman life forms to the "zombie biome", as utility rather than intrinsically meaningful (Burke & Fishel, 2025: 37).

The associations between necropolitics and capitalism are clear. Various forms of subjugation follow the spread and domination of capitalist systems around the world, including exploitative labour, land and resource occupation, and private property laws (Malm & Hornborg, 2014). 'Necropolitics', hence, refers to strategies, techniques, weapons, and political practices put in place to exercise necropower. One such strategy, as we have seen earlier in this article, is a legal system reinforcing status quo practices and government policies despite their harmful nature. The subjugation that results strips people (or more-than-human life forms) of autonomy over their bodies and lives.

Building on McBrien and Mbembe's work, *necropolicy*, I suggest, is policy that actively or indirectly contributes to the destruction of more-than-human life forms through dedicated action, denial, avoidance, or incompetence. Necropolicy is imbued with necropower (Mbembe, 2003) as it separates those worthiest of survival from those destroyed in the process of capital accumulation and growth. Necropolicy is also the state's central control mechanism for managing its population and as such it constitutes a necropolitical technique and practise. A range of necropolicies are employed by the Australian government to sustain their colonial control over Aboriginal peoples and lands, for example. McBrien (2016) reminds us of capitalism's destructive forces—much of that destruction is guided by necropolicies. As such, necropolicies are death-bound. Australian climate change mitigation policies are necropolitical.

Climate change mitigation policies, such as those highlighted in this article, tend to be characterised by a necropolitical circle of inaction. By appearing to act on climate, while reinforcing harm to more-than-human worlds, necropolicies supports fossil fuel industries, and the growth of state-corporate interests. By framing climate change primarily in terms of economic and industrial concerns, government policies encourage superficial interventions while inhibiting deeper, more transformative solutions. Such policies both sit within and reinforce the capitalist logic of growth, harm, and their normalisation. The climate policies analysed here, hence, perpetuate a self-reinforcing cycle of validation and harm. Meanwhile, the legal system resists change and deeper scrutiny of government policy.

6. Death to capitalism and the post-Capitalocene?

The Australian government's climate policies do *just enough* to defer the addressing of climate change into the future. *Just enough* satisfies international agreements momentarily. *Just enough* appeases electorates. *Just enough* brings us closer to extinction and death. Doing *just enough* binds us to policies that harm ourselves and other more-than-human life forces. This deferral of climate change action sits somewhere between commission and omissions, allowing the continued extraction and harm. The slippage into death-boundedness that these policies sustain—subtly and over time—are, I argue, profoundly unsettling.

In contrast to the former Morrison government, the Albanese administration is seeking to position itself as pro-climate while silently expanding fossil fuel projects and exports. However, Australia's failed bid to host the 31st UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP31) in partnership with Pacific nations (DCCEEW, 2025d) served as a striking embodiment of the government's hypocrisy on climate.

For those of us wanting to experience *real* change in our lifetime—and who are ready to make certain collective sacrifices—, we must tackle fossil fuel dependency, champion the dismantling of mounting socio-economic inequalities, and the intensifying separations between the polluters and those living with the consequences. Moreover, we need to thoroughly address the state-corporate relations that underpin continued for-profit exploitation and death.

Degrowth is a movement that demands the radical transformation of our socio-political systems, the reduction of our energy consumption, and a shift from growth to redistribution. Degrowth proponents challenge the assumption that continued economic growth is normative and desirable and advocate for policies that prioritise human welfare and environmental stability instead. Degrowth, hence, refers to the intentional move away from production in order to reduce impact on more-than-human worlds. There is research to support the fact that high-income nations can foster positive social outcomes and limit energy demand by rejecting the imperative of economic growth

(Li *et al*., 2024). Given that "capitalism is growth-dependent" (Gleeson & Alexander, 2020: 358) we need to move away from capitalism to transition beyond the current growth imperative. I agree with Kallis and March (2015: 366-367) who contend that "what we need is to struggle for the institutions that will allow us to live with enough."

The necropolicies examined in this article define climate change in a particular way; as a problem to be solved, separate from the socioeconomic system, and as an issue government policies can address through economic and technical engineering. However, when policies continue to centre economic growth, the adoption of renewable energy merely increases overall energy supply, rather than displacing fossil fuels.

The shadowy discourses excluded from these policies are equally significant, such as how capitalism and its inequities remain the source of much harm, how these policies distract from necessary change, and the subjugation of more-than-human life forms embedded within them. These definitions and assumptions shape some potentialities and close others off in the same stroke. Possible solutions to climate change, such as the technological developments outlined in this article, emerge as plausible, while degrowth appears utopian and far-fetched.

To conclude, I turn to whether there is hope for a future beyond the death of capitalism, in an epoch succeeding the Capitalocene. McBrien (2016: 135, emphasis in original) reassures us that "the human being *can* be decoupled from Capital. Capital is extinction. We are not." Successful climate change mitigation, however, requires moving away from the Capitalocene, its problem representations, and solutions. We must start to reject the notion of growth at all costs and recognise the *extraordinariness* of harm to more-than-human words and as worthy of our sacrifices (Lundberg, 2022). This highlights the need to analyse how climate change mitigation reflects and enacts political ecological frameworks.

Currently, so-called "representative democracies" like Australia are profoundly compromised by various growth imperatives, making alternative avenues such as grassroots movements essential for driving change and to push government policy towards degrowth (Gleeson & Alexander, 2020: 373). Moreover, following Shokrgozar and Girard (2024: 59) there is "the necessity for repoliticizing climate mitigation, to overcome it being overshadowed by economic growth…" That is, we need to continue to highlight the neoliberal and capitalist dynamics that underpin current climate mitigation policies to reveal alternatives pathways and ideologies. Importantly, more relational understandings of the more-than-human and degrowth solutions need to be explored further. Affluent nations like Australia possess the advantage, means, and duty to take the forefront in driving this transformation. The countries profiting the most from status quo global capitalism must inevitably lead the way. For Australia, this must begin with discontinuing the financing of its welfare on fossil fuel production and exports.

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