

MEDIA RELEASE

Greenhouse Benefits from National Coal Initiative

An important step in Australia's long term response to climate change was taken yesterday in Canberra with the commencement of COAL21, a national initiative aimed at significantly reducing and eliminating emissions of greenhouse gases from coal based electricity generation.

COAL21 is a partnership between federal and state governments, the coal and electricity industries and the research community. The parties will work together to develop action plans for the demonstration and wide application in Australia of emission reducing technologies. These action plans will form the basis of a national approach to reducing emissions from coal, while maintaining Australia's competitive advantage derived from its low cost, primarily coal-based, electricity supply.

In his opening remarks to the inaugural meeting of the participants, COAL21 Chairman, Mr Tim Besley AC, noted that coal supplied 85 percent of Australia's electricity and is its most abundant energy resource.

"Coal will remain Australia's major source of affordable base-load electricity for many years," said Mr Besley. "We must therefore find ways to reduce greenhouse emissions.

"This is not pie in the sky. When linked with carbon dioxide capture and geological storage, the technologies needed to achieve significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from coal are already available or in an advanced state of development. It is a case of bringing the technologies together to produce a workable and affordable solution for Australia."

Mr Besley said that the COAL21 initiative, and the action plans that will be produced through it, will be a key input to future energy and environmental policy making.

He noted the key role played by the Federal Government in supporting the initiative and by the various State Governments through their participation. Mr Besley highlighted the wide range of industry and research participants that have already joined the initiative, with others expected to follow. Other community and industry stakeholders will be consulted as an integral part of the COAL21 process.

The COAL21 initiative is expected to complete technology action plans by the end of 2003, then focus attention on encouraging and supporting their implementation. It will also provide advice to government to ensure appropriate legislation and policy to achieve greenhouse gas reductions in an integrated way. Particular emphasis will be given to ensuring Australia's expertise contributes and has access to important international developments to secure lower emissions from coal based electricity generation.

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