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GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS FALL IN 2009 ACROSS AUSTRALIA'S EASTERN STATES

A new report has revealed that greenhouse gas emissions from energy-use in Australia's eastern states fell by 1.8 per cent in 2009. The Greenhouse Indicator Annual Report, released today by The Climate Group, shows that across Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia, annual emissions were 5.3 million tonnes lower in 2009 than the previous year. This followed a rise in emissions of 1.3 per cent in 2008.

Now entering its fourth year, The Climate Group's Greenhouse Indicator tracks the main sources of greenhouse emissions (those produced by coal, natural gas and petroleum) on a weekly basis.

South Australia registered the biggest percentage drop in emissions last year, down 4.2 per cent or 730,000 tonnes. The biggest absolute decrease was in New South Wales, which cut its emissions by 3.2 million tonnes, a drop of 3.1 per cent. Emissions in Queensland were down by 852,000 tonnes or 1.1 per cent while in Victoria, emissions were down 543,500 tonnes or 0.5 per cent on the previous year.

The biggest contributor to the fall in emissions was a decrease in the amount of electricity produced from coal. Coal generation fell by 3.1 per cent (or 5.5 million megawatts hours) resulting in 4.9 million tonnes less emissions than in 2008.

Overall, electricity generation in 2009 was 1.9 per cent less than the previous year. This was partly due a fall in electricity demand of 0.6 per cent and also because of less surplus electricity being produced to meet demand from Tasmania. As a result, electricity generation followed demand more closely in the four states than in 2008.¹

Emissions from petroleum also fell by 0.8 per cent, or 700,000 tonnes with all states seeing a decrease with the exception of South Australia, which rose marginally.

The overall carbon intensity of electricity production was virtually identical to 2008.² The proportion of electricity produced from coal, dropped slightly from 89 to 88 per cent although generation from brown coal (the most carbon intensive coal) rose by 1.2 per cent in Victoria. The share of gas-fired generation rose from 8.4 to 9.3 per cent and the share of scheduled renewable generation increased slightly from 2.7 to 2.8 per cent.

The fall in emissions occurred despite robust population growth in all four states of between 1.2 and 2.6 per cent. Despite the global financial crisis, each state also recorded overall growth in Gross State Product of between 0.2 and 1.4 per cent. However, the rate of growth was significantly less than in previous years, which will have relieved inflationary pressure on emissions levels.

¹ In 2009, net electricity exported to Tasmania from the four states was 2.2 million MWh. In 2008, it was 4.8 million MWh.

² In 2009, greenhouse intensity of electricity generation was 0.9267 tonnes CO₂e per MWh. In 2008, it was 0.9282 tonnes CO₂e per MWh.

With annual mean temperatures consistently above average, 2009 was the second warmest year on record. New maximum temperature records were set in numerous cities early in the year. The overall impact on emissions has been limited with lower demand for heating over winter being counter-balanced by more demand for air-conditioning during the warmer summer.

Compared with 2000 levels, emissions from energy-use were still significantly higher across all states with the exception of South Australia, which was 3.2 per cent lower. Collectively, all states were up 9.6 per cent on equivalent emissions in 2000. Of the states that have increased their emissions since 2000, Victoria saw the smallest increase, up 1.2 per cent, followed by NSW with 7.1 per cent and Queensland with 31.9 per cent.

The gap in emissions above equivalent 1990 levels was more substantial. South Australia was up 1.1 per cent, NSW up 23.7 per cent, Victoria 30.5 per cent and Queensland has more than doubled to 102.5 per cent of 1990 levels.

Rupert Posner, Australia Director of The Climate Group, said:

“Any decrease in emissions is good news and 5.3 million tonnes is a substantial saving. If we were to continue to cut by this much each year, emissions from energy would be almost 20 per cent lower by 2020.

“Unfortunately, this isn’t the whole story as low rates of growth have helped keep emissions down. As the economy returns to more robust levels of growth, continued reductions will be much harder to achieve unless we start to change the way we produce and use energy in a much more meaningful way.

“As the country with the highest per capita emissions in the world – we need to be doing much more to reduce our carbon footprint.”

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Note to editors:

About the Weekly Greenhouse Indicator

The Climate Group has tracked greenhouse emissions from energy use in Victoria, NSW, Queensland and South Australia on a weekly basis for three years through its unique Greenhouse Indicator.

The Greenhouse Indicator provides accurate and real time information on greenhouse gases produced each week from energy use. It includes the major sources of greenhouse emissions that can be tracked accurately each week and is a unique tool designed to bring greater understanding to the issue of climate change and to help track greenhouse gas emissions in selected Australian states. It was developed with advice from some of Australia’s best experts in the field.

For more details and an explanation of the Indicator’s methodology visit www.theclimategroup.org/indicator