

## Insights And Analysis

Opinion

# Labor's green obsession is blinding them to the shameful truth about Chinese solar panel production

While the US has impounded more than 1,000 shipments of Chinese-made solar panels under the suspicion they were made with forced labour, the Albanese government has been all too silent, writes Nick Cater.



**Nick Cater** SkyNews.com.au Contributor and Political Commentator

4 min read February 15, 2023 - 1:43PM

sky news .COM.AU



Human Rights Watch researcher Sophie McNeill has called on the Australian government to put "targeted sanctions on Chinese officials who stand accused of crimes against humanity in Xinjiang". "We have determined that China is committing crimes against humanity, against Uyghur Muslims and other Turk-Muslim minorities in..."

Joe Biden's government-wide effort to reduce carbon emissions has been stalled by vigilant US customs officials.

More than 1,000 shipments of Chinese-made solar panels have been impounded since last June under the suspicion that they were made with forced labour.

Their action is a courageous but costly one for the US energy grid as it means solar panels are in short supply at a time of high demand.



Labor's energy package, which has passed parliament, is meant to help fix the energy crisis – but it's more likely to do the opposite, says Sky News host Chris Kenny. Mr Kenny said it's being spun "successfully" for now, as a "political win". "Yeah,..."

The seized shipments include products from the likes of Longi Green Energy, Jinko and Trina Solar, which are freely on sale in Australia despite the Labor government's election pledge to cleanse our economic supply chains of the traces of modern slavery.

The Biden Administration followed through with its pledge by passing The Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, which puts the onus on suppliers to prove that imported products are manufactured on fair terms.

All the Albanese government has delivered so far is a discussion paper in which the words "China" and "Uyghur" do not appear.

Yet the odds that slave labour was used to manufacture Chinese solar panels bolted to Australian roofs is extremely high.

Some 40 per cent of the world's solar panels are made in Xinjiang province where more than one million ethnic Uyghurs are forcibly detained.

According to credible reports from the US Department of Labor and others, many prisoners have been coerced into joining forced labour teams, or "poverty alleviation programmes" as the Chinese delicately call them.

A 2020 report from the Canberra-based Australian Strategic Policy Institute found that 80,000 or more have been assigned to forced labour gangs in other parts of the country, placing China's entire output of solar panels under suspicion.



Wind turbines stand next to solar panels at a wind and solar hybrid power generation plant on January 1, 2023 in Hami, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China. Picture: VCG/VCG via Getty Images

British MPs last year voted to classify the forced detentions as genocide. In the US they are deemed to be crimes against humanity.

Yet there has been silence from the Albanese government, which finds itself compromised by its twin ambitions to repair fractured relations with our largest trading partner and eliminate carbon emissions in record time.

When your mission is to double the capacity of roof-top solar panels and treble the amount of industrial-scale solar and wind by 2030, it is difficult to be picky.

Energy Minister Chris Bowen says achieving Labor's ambitious 2030 targets will require the installation of 22,000 solar panels a day for the next eight years.

Nine months into government, he is already falling behind.

A lull in demand for household solar in 2022 meant the number of newly installed panels was around half that number.

This year the growth in industrial solar is likely to slow because of a shortage of shovel-ready developments.



The Australian's Judith Sloan says China is "basically a monopoly supplier" of solar panels and a "little less so of wind turbines". "And so, the recent cost increases have been late 20 to 30 per cent," Ms Sloan told Sky News host Andrew Bolt.

Australia was at the leading edge of solar technology at the turn of the century.

Since then, China has cornered the world market with heavy support from the Communist government, which aims to make China the sole renewable energy superpower.

The value of Chinese solar product exports in 2020-21 topped \$US 30 billion, roughly equivalent to the value of Australian coal exports in the same year or the value of oil exports from Kuwait.

The comparison is not idle.

If Australia continues the dash towards a goal of 82 per cent renewable energy in the grid by 2030, we will become energy dependent on China, which is also the world's largest producer of wind turbines and the largest refiner of minerals used to make lithium-ion batteries.

Ironically, China is poorly endowed with oil and natural gas, making it dependent on Russia and the Middle East.

The Zero-2050 goal suits China just fine, particularly since it will not have to meet the target itself as a technically developing nation.



Menzies Research Centre's Nick Cater says if Australia is getting dependent on China for its supply of wind turbines and solar panels, the country is in "serious trouble". "We are really in big trouble over this, and I think we have to address this question..."

It is no coincidence that the province that produces the largest number of solar panels is also home to a quarter of China's coal reserves, nor that precious water supplies in one of the most arid parts of China are diverted from farming to mining and the inefficient conversion of coal to liquid petroleum and gas.

The large companies have tried to diversify production by moving manufacturing to countries like Malaysia and Vietnam.

Yet without more transparency, it is hard to know if slave-labour built components are included in the finished product.

Xinjiang produces 45 per cent of polysilicon wafers made in the world which can be shipped for assembly elsewhere.

Advocates of renewable energy are reluctant to wrestle with the moral dilemma the Communist regime's enslavement of Uyghurs presents.

It is so much easier to condemn historical slavery than to accept that their single-minded obsession with green energy might be driving slavery today.

The evidence that there are negative consequences to the unseemly rush to decarbonise the economy jars with the prevailing narrative.

The extensive mining required to produce solar panels, wind turbines and batteries is discounted.



Sky News host Andrew Bolt says Australia is selling its economic freedom to the "most powerful dictatorship in history". Mr Bolt said while Prime Minister Anthony Albanese is at the Pacific Islands Forum in Fiji, "China is already busy right here stripping..."

The uncomfortable thought that accelerated global demand for cobalt driven by the Paris climate change agreement might be increasing demand for child labour in Ntly mines in the Democratic Republic of Congo is avoided.

So too is the desecration of the landscape in parts of rural Australia by wind turbines, transmission lines and solar factories.

The problem of disposing of spent solar panels which cannot be commercial recycled in 15 to 20 years' time can be put off for another day.

In energy, like any other policy matter, there must be room for trade-offs.

A compassionate and prudent government would weigh the competing aims of avoiding theoretical human suffering in the long term and ending human suffering right now.

It would confront the strategic threat of becoming reliant on our energy from China and start working on plan B.

In the meantime, the government should fulfil its election promise by adopting a private member's bill, the Customs Amendment (Banning Goods Produced By Uyghur Forced Labour) Bill 2021, that is currently languishing in Parliament.

Concerned Australians can sign an online petition, urging the government to do the right thing. <https://www.aph.gov.au/e-petitions/petition/EN4746>