

Australian power cuts

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HOLLOW Australian power cuts have led the Australian government to reach completely the wrong conclusions about the Australian energy system. I would hazard a guess that they are deliberately misleading conclusions based on ideology rather than fact. The Australian electricity system developed on an autonomous state by state basis. After a series of power cuts in the 1980's most states except the Northern Territories and Western Australia were interconnected and in 1998 the National Electricity Market regulator was established which controls trading between them. The great majority of Australia's electricity comes from coal. Exact up to date figures seem hard to find but its about 75% with about 13% from natural gas and about 14% renewables. The biggest contribution to renewables was hydro very closely followed by wind. The renewables is spread far and wide although some states have a lot more capacity than others. For example Tasmania gets 99% of electricity from renewables. Most of this is hydro, but the systems have always been very controversial with huge anti-logging battles in the 1980's. Australia's electricity usage is disproportionately high, in 2015 253TWhs compared to the UK's 337TWhs. In addition Australia's coal use has got to make it one of the most coal dependent countries on earth. The problems started in September when a violent thunderstorm in South Australia led to a power transmission line tripping followed by some wind farms, then the Victoria interconnector. Unfortunately the state was importing a large amount of electricity at the time (air con use was very high). Some people say there were [software glitches](#) as well. In any case there were large scale blackouts. Subsequently there have been more problems (in other places as well) due extremely high temperatures in the Australian summer. This has led to more power blackouts. The political right in Australia are extraordinarily reluctant to admit to the merest existence of man made climate, much less do anything about it. Irony counter overload, this is despite Australia being one of the few developed countries that is really being affected by climate change. Such is the state of denial that one MP waved a bit of coal around in the Federal Parliament and said there was nothing to be afraid of. The liberals obviously believe that wind power brought South Australia down. What you cannot say is that this is the case. The strongest thing you can say is that wind power was not meeting all the states needs. A whole series of events brought the system down in a "50 year event". The problem is that 50 year events are getting more common. The solution to part of the problem is more solar. In Northern Europe we have increasing problems in summer with our excess solar electricity. This is because we use little air con (although its use is increasing). However solar output meshes perfectly with demand in Oz. In addition you are using by it and large where its generated putting less demand on the system transmission. Another thing that may make the current government think is that a lot of the coal powered power stations are coming to the end of their lifetimes. These will be difficult and expensive to replace. Neil

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