Transcript: Chris Bowen sums up UN climate talks at doorstop
COP31, Antalya, Turkey
November 22, 2026

Minister for Climate Change and Energy, Chris Bowen: Well, a lot of good things happened at this COP. A lot of events which told the clean energy story. A lot of commitments made, like the more than 90 countries that signed the electrification pledge, for example, and all that is good work and a great thing, but not enough when it comes to climate action. And unfortunately, we're unable to reach agreement on a cover decision, and that's disappointing. Very disappointing. Very disappointing. Ultimately, looking back, many parties who were people of good faith had very strong red lines on a couple of big issues, and despite many many attempts, and on-reflection, those red lines, on behalf of different parties, were just not able to be met. An obvious issue is the transition away from fossil fuels, where some parties insisted that it must be mentioned, other parties insisted that if it was mentioned they would not be involved. So let me say a couple of things about the transition away from fossil fuels. Firstly, it is the result of COP 28, which is still in force. It hasn't been mentioned at COP 29 or COP 30, but it's still the position of the COP because it was adopted. That's the first point. It is the position of the COP. Secondly, and more importantly, transition away from fossil fuels in the real world is inevitable. It's happening. It's happening at speed, and it's irreversible. And work will continue outside the process and inside the process on what needs to happen. We did say this COP would be a COP of implementation, so we proposed things to help implement the transition away from fossil fuels, like the electrification agenda, which would reduce emissions, if that was achieved 35% by 2035, by as much as removing every plane and car in the world. That's why we fought so hard for it. It was worth fighting for. I regret we didn't get there. Actually, there was lot of support for it. That wasn't the deal breaker. Deal breakers were other things, like as I said, how we talk about fossil fuels, and to a certain degree, climate finance. As I said, people of goodwill worked very hard. I haven't slept in the last three nights. We've been negotiating all the way through. But more importantly, people of delegations came at it and gave it everything that [indistinct], and that's discipline. But the process goes on. I still believe multilateralism matters, and I still believe good things, as I started with, happened at this COP. It just would have been good to have some more of them. I do want to pay a particular shout out to my friends from the Pacific, who, as Minister Tabuya of Fiji said in her intervention, we met many times each day. And one thing we did do, despite the disappointing plenary session, I believe through the whole COP 31 process, is elevate the issues of the Pacific in a way which is sustained. The pre-COP in Tuvalu is still talked to me about by people here who say, you know, in Tuvalu we saw so much and we learned so much about the impacts of the climate of climate change on those nations who have almost at stake, the small, low-lying developing states, developing islands, and I think that will continue. We did great work on oceans. I'm very proud of it. Again, it's not reflected because the COP cover decision wasn't adopted, but the words are there and will inform the process going forward. So I do just want to thank the Australian delegation who worked their guts out. I'm not the only one who was pulling all nighters. I think last night, [indistinct] Australia left nothing on the field, trying to find solutions to reach what I now see as unbridgeable red lines. The situation coming into this COP was the most complicated and fraught geopolitical environment in living memory, and also, in ways I very much sympathise with, the impacts of climate change getting worse with the recent summers in the northern hemisphere, for example, and El Nino ravaging so many communities with worse to come for us. I think that

changed the dynamic as well. And things that were manageable in the past, in previous COP's like the last two, where people wanted certain words mentioned but didn't get them, it became a variety of red lines. So life goes on. I do want to thank everyone who worked so hard. Not only the Australian delegation, the interpreters, the cleaners, everyone here. Of course, I was here all night. I saw a lot of the work that went on all night. And we do want to thank the government people in Turkiye for their great partnership. We'll take a few questions.

Journalist: [indistinct]
Bowen: Well, one thing that did happen, another thing that happened this COP, is a lot of the mandates were approved, the negotiated mandates. Not all, quite a lot were most were settled. That's a good thing. That's the ongoing work program in the UNFCCC. What happens now is that individual countries are quite confident, as we were, will continue in our renewable transition and reconvene in Ethiopia next year and see if we can't make forward progress.

Journalist: What's your assessment of how the presidency functioned, particularly over the last two days, and you've been an advocate of this dual presidency model. Is that still the case going forward?
Bowen: Dual presidency model worked fine. That wasn't the issue. The presidency, you know, as we always do, 195 countries must be unanimous. That's that can be that can be ok, but when positions are so strong, that's a that's a very big challenge for any presidency, joint or individuals, to come to the global context.

Journalist: Thank you. If this process can't get to an agreement on an implementation year, not a Paris year or even a Glasgow year, what can be done to make this process work in the future?
Bowen: Fair question, Lisa. I mean, I would make the observation that I think the fundamental root of the problem is that when COP was created, for reasons I understand, it was made consensus only. That's a very tough ask, and you also need consensus to change consensus, which is a particular challenge. We had we we tried to also progress UNFCCC reforms, efficiency reforms. That needs effectively unanimous agreement as well. I think it's still important. I think multilateralism matters. You know, we had setbacks in Copenhagen, and then not that long later, great success in Paris. Glasgow was down to the wire; almost failed. I think we were actually quite close at this COP to the cover decision. I mean, the number of issues, while those red lines were very strong, that parties disagreed about the end were very small. So there was broad agreement about the broader agenda. Just a couple of things, which in the end were irreconcilable. And so that is that is a challenge. But I also think climate action, as I said, goes on through other processes. So I think the Santa Marta dialog will become increasingly important. Doesn't replace COP. It's just another way of doing it, and ultimately, domestic action continues. I'll take a couple.

Journalist: Just to pick up on that, this COP is happening in a year where there's an energy crisis, where the UN has said the world will overshoot 1.5. What do you think it says that countries couldn't address those concerns?
Bowen: Well, I think that's, I think it's very disappointing. I also think those two things were part of the reason why the tension was so high. I think the 1.5 overshoot, combined with the climate impacts that we're seeing around the world, really increased the ambition of some

parties, and I share that ambition. But that made those red lines irreversibly reconcilable. So, and the energy crisis also just while it was in some senses an opportunity because countries realised that more renewables is more sovereignty and more reliability. The sun has to travel 150 million kilometres to the Earth, but it doesn't have to travel 150 kilometres of the Straits of Hormuz. Nevertheless, in the end, the sort of pressure in the system was very high.

Journalist: What responsibility do you feel?
Bowen: I take my, I take my share of responsibility. Ultimately, you know, people can judge what could have been done or couldn't have been done. Ultimately, it's a party-driven process [indistinct]

Journalist: [indistinct]
Bowen: We put everything, we put everything in the first text to bring out the issues and find out people's red lines. Transparency can be uncomfortable. We said we'd run a transparent COP. I believe we did. We put everything in the first text to show all the other parties what other people said.

Journalist: [indistinct] many of the delegates in there that were rejecting the cover decision were simply saying that it did not meet the moment. The language was not strong enough to reflect the seriousness of climate change. What do you say to that?
Bowen: Well, one of the challenges was, as I said before, was stronger, more ambitious language would have, I strongly believe, led to vetoes by other parties. And we tried, as I said, fossil fuels. We tried to strike a balance. In the end, what we put to parties was, well, let's recognise the existence of the UAE convention or the UAE consensus, I should say, which was the expedition of the transition away from fossil fuels, where it was first built in. So if we refer to that, that is in effect reminding people that is still the policy. In the end, it was good faith attempt. It wasn't enough. I might take one more.

Journalist: [indistinct]
Bowen: Well, I would have been happy with transition away from fossil fuels being the text, but that was not going to get support from parties, and ultimately, I took the view that, given its existing position of COP, that as I said, it wasn't wasn't in Baku, wasn't in Belem, and at that point, parties lived with that because we could say it's still the position of COP is just not explicit this time for reasons I understand parties couldn't this time.

Journalist: It was your idea to go for a cover decision. Retrospectively, do you think it would have been better for this COP?
Bowen: Well, I think we had no chance to announce a better cover decision. All it would have been was the mandated negotiated items, which are important. But we, I think we, well, obviously I'm disappointed we didn't get there. I'm very disappointed. We still progressed important conversations that wouldn't have been able to be progressed without a cover decision, like Oceans, the world's largest climate regulator, and so important in my part of the world and in you know many parts of the world. Access to finance for small island developing states. We had you know there was good supported language in the cover decision about that. Without the cover decision in the draft, none of those issues were being uploaded. And as I said before, while I would have preferred them adopted, they're there. And I think parties know that that wasn't the issue. I think everyone knows that wasn't the

issue. So those words can be drawn upon in a non-formal sense. They can be drawn upon for countries to work on in the future.