Beyond Climate Active: Why Australian corporate climate leadership shouldn't end at its borders

Anil Bhatta

Managing Director, Carbon & Clean Energy Solutions (CCES)

My first carbon project was in 2005. Since then, I have had the privilege of working on carbon projects across Africa, Asia, Australia and Latin America. Those experiences have shown me that when climate finance reaches communities on the ground, its impact extends far beyond emissions reductions.

One example is the clean cooking carbon programme I managed for World Vision Australia in Ethiopia, which has reinvested more than USD 2 million in carbon revenue into locally managed, women-led cookstove cooperatives. That finance has supported micro-loans, local enterprises, and livelihood opportunities, demonstrating how climate finance can create lasting economic and social value beyond emissions reductions.

More recently, I supported the development of a nature-based carbon project in Africa that is creating new opportunities for corporates to channel climate finance into landscape restoration and community development. These are exactly the kinds of outcomes that climate finance can deliver when it is directed where it is needed most.

As Australia transitions beyond Climate Active, this moment presents an opportunity not to step back from climate action, but to rethink what corporate climate leadership looks like. While Climate Active may have concluded, the role of Australian businesses in supporting global climate action has not. Rather than asking whether companies should continue purchasing international carbon credits, we should be asking how Australian businesses can continue mobilising corporate climate finance to deliver genuine environmental and social outcomes, both at home and abroad.

Climate change is a global challenge. Greenhouse gases do not recognise national boundaries, and neither should the partnerships and investments needed to address them. While much of the discussion surrounding the Paris Agreement focuses on limiting global warming to 1.5°C, another equally important principle is international cooperation. Article 6 recognises that countries can achieve more by working together, mobilising climate finance and advancing sustainable development alongside climate mitigation.

Australia has developed internationally recognised expertise in carbon markets. As Australia assumes the role of President of Negotiations for COP31, we have an opportunity to build stronger international partnerships that connect Australian businesses with high-integrity climate solutions across the developing world, mobilising corporate climate finance where it can create the greatest environmental and social impact, consistent with the spirit of the Paris Agreement.

Australian businesses have spent years strengthening their climate strategies, embedding sustainability into their operations and reducing emissions across their value chains. Those commitments remain essential. However, reducing emissions within Australia's borders is only part of the solution.

Many Australian businesses source products, materials and services from developing countries across Asia, Africa and the Pacific. These regions often face the greatest climate risks yet have the least access to climate investment. Rather than viewing international carbon projects simply as a source of carbon credits, Australian businesses can use corporate climate finance to create lasting value for the communities and landscapes that underpin their global supply chains.

Importantly, these investments should complement, not replace, a company's own efforts to reduce emissions across its operations. Climate Active may have concluded, but Australia's opportunity to demonstrate global corporate climate leadership has only just begun. The next chapter should be defined not by the carbon credits companies purchase, but by the partnerships they build, the communities they strengthen and the lasting climate impact they enable.

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