

Ukraine pleaded for help from Australia six months ago. It hasn't received a reply

By [Matthew Knott](#) and [Rob Harris](#), Sydney Morning Herald/The Age, May 27, 2024

Ukraine has appealed directly to Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Penny Wong for an urgent shipment of Australian coal to help meet its energy needs as Russia bombards its power plants with missile and drone attacks.

The Eastern European nation lodged an official request with the government in December for a supply of coal but has yet to receive a response, leading officials to become increasingly worried a shipment may not arrive in time for the European winter.

In a letter to Wong sent on May 6, Ukraine's ambassador to Australia Vasyl Myroshnychenko said that "events over the last five months have increased Ukraine's need for energy security and the assistance of its allies in that regard".



Foreign Minister Penny Wong is considering a request from Ukraine to provide a supply of Australian coal. *CREDIT: ALEX ELLINGHAUSEN*

"The stark reality is that no power plant in Ukraine has been exempt from Russian targeting or not sustained [damage], and this is having direct impact on Ukraine's people and the quality of their lives," he wrote, adding that Russia had targeted Ukrainian power plants, oil refineries and heating facilities.

“You would appreciate that the need for energy security, including ensuring Ukraine’s remaining hydro-thermal generation capacity, has increased as a result of the most recent wave of attacks, and I therefore again ask for Australia’s consideration.”

Myroshnychenko said Ukrainian officials had assured him the country can make good use of Australian coal despite Russian attacks on Ukrainian thermal power plants.

Such a shipment would free up resources for Ukraine to invest in renewable energy sources such as solar and wind, he added.

Ukrainian officials have been concerned that Labor may be reluctant to send coal to Ukraine because of fears it could damage its climate change credentials.

Myroshnychenko told this masthead a decision would be needed soon for coal supplies to reach Ukraine by October when temperatures start falling, as it can take up to four months for a shipment to arrive.

“This is not a lifestyle choice for us. We need it to survive,” he said.

A spokesperson for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade said: “The Australian government is actively considering ways in which we can provide additional support to meet Ukraine’s high-priority needs.”



Ukrainian ambassador to Australia Vasyl Myroshnychenko is calling for more support from the Australian government in the fight against Russia. *CREDIT: KATE GERAGHTY*

The spokesman noted the government announced a new \$100 million assistance package for Ukraine in April, taking Australia's total contribution to over \$1 billion.

However, Australia [ranks among the lowest donors of all countries supporting Ukraine](#) as a proportion of gross domestic product, according to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy.

The Coalition has attacked the government for declining to commit to sending coal to Ukraine. Opposition foreign affairs spokesman Simon Birmingham said the initial December request should have received a speedy yes. He said it was “embarrassing” that the government had not provided an answer to Ukraine’s coal request.

“For six long months Labor has swept Ukraine’s request for thermal coal under the carpet when it should have been approved immediately,” he said. “Of all the goods that Australia can give to Ukraine, thermal coal is one of the easiest for us, so why is it so hard for the Albanese government to say yes?”

Whitehaven Coal, which shipped 70,000 tonnes of coal to Ukraine in March 2022 under a \$30 million deal with the Morrison government, has said it stands ready to provide more help.

“If called upon once again by an Australian government to make a shipment of coal available to support energy security for the people of Ukraine, we would look upon that request favourably,” [the company said in February](#).

Three major Labor-affiliated unions – including the Mining and Energy Union – have urged the government to grant Ukraine’s request, telling Resources Minister Madeleine King in December: “Ukrainian lives are at stake. Our unions will do all we can to facilitate this urgent humanitarian project.”

The government also looks likely to disappoint Ukraine by declining to send a senior minister to a peace summit being held at the request of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Switzerland in mid-June.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Wong will be in Australia for a planned visit by Chinese Premier Li Qiang while Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles has plans to travel in the Indo-Pacific at that time.

Myroshnychenko said the Ukrainian government would be “extremely disappointed” if Australia only sends a junior minister to the summit, which will be attended by world leaders including Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Joe Biden will not attend the summit, intended to map a pathway out of the war.

Targeted assaults on Ukraine's critical infrastructure are part of Moscow's attempts to hamper the production of weapons for the military and diminish public morale since the February 2022 invasion.

Kyiv has been forced to introduce planned power outages since strikes escalated in March to prevent Ukraine's remaining energy infrastructure from being overloaded, causing disruption to civilian life.

On May 8 Russia initiated yet another assault on Ukraine by launching 55 cruise and ballistic missiles, accompanied by 21 attack drones, on Kyiv's critical infrastructure, destroying several thermal power plants across the country.

This included the Trypillia plant, the main electricity supplier to Kyiv, Zhytomyr, and Cherkasy oblasts. At least two hydroelectric power plants also had to be decommissioned as a result.

The Ukrainian Ministry of Energy last week disclosed plans to import a staggering 19,484 megawatt hours of electricity from its neighbouring countries, surpassing the previous record of 18,649 megawatt hours in March.