

# Malcolm Turnbull too smart to read the political mood of the room

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Every time Malcolm Turnbull enters a room, he believes he is the smartest person in it.

He is almost always wrong in that belief because he has always been confused on the point of difference between the words “bright” and “smart”.

I have never doubted his stratospheric intelligence quotient. It is probable that he is within the top one half of 1 per cent of the population when it comes to IQ. That means he will be the brightest person in every room he enters.

“Smart” is something entirely different from “bright”. Smart is about not just realising what the options are but knowing which option can be sold to a sceptical mob that views all politicians with the greatest suspicion. Moreover, a truly smart person will instinctively realise that human frailty exists in every one of us, regardless of IQ. It stands to reason that a group of others with reasonably high intelligence might be able to pick what will fly with the electorate and what will not.

Fortunately, there are some very smart people in the government. Unfortunately, they are too often ignored by a Prime Minister who believes he knows best. There is a growing recognition in the higher echelons of the Liberal Party that a very long election campaign could turn out to be a disaster on the conservative side of Australian politics. The last week has provided them with a terrifying example of why they were right to have that fear.

Last week began with the realisation Scott Morrison was not in the PM’s inner circle. This came from Turnbull’s own mouth and it was not a good sound or a good look. Nothing could have prepared his colleagues for the fiasco of trying to do a deal with the states that would allow them to levy an income tax on their citizens.

Having rung around the front and the back benches, I assure you no one knew of that little gem. It didn’t matter whether your seat was in the inner, outer, full or dress circles, on this you were kept in the dark.

The problem for those in the government is that coming to an agreement with the PM is meaningless. He can, and does, agree to a course of action in the cabinet room or whatever room in which he has met with colleagues and advisers, then walks to the next microphone and says something completely and utterly different.

It may have been a short walk but Turnbull needs only seconds to change his mind and revert to the dark days of his time as opposition leader when his failure to consult proved fatal. The only real change is that he does consult now and he does come to an agreed course of action before he unilaterally decides that only he knows better anyway and ditches the agreement.

With more than 12 weeks to go before an anticipated July 2 double dissolution, this week has proven beyond doubt the PM’s lack of discipline and displays of hubris could prove disastrous for the - Coalition. No one in his party now believes he can maintain real discipline for a fraction of that time.

As one cabinet minister said to me “Malcolm has been saved because his stupidity was so massive the policy died in a day”.

While that may be one take on the failed state income tax policy, a more realistic one is that the mob will be further alarmed at the PM and his ratings will continue to fall.

It is quite extraordinary to listen to his back and frontbenchers voice lack of confidence in the boss. The man who came to office and won a party ballot on the basis he would be the great conciliator and consulter has made a mockery of the trust placed in him.

The political elites may well call his intervention last week “brave” and I even heard one say it may have “strengthened” him — they have the same capacity as Turnbull to read the mob. The state income tax policy could never have been sold to them.

Naturally in trying to defend Turnbull, the line has to be something must be done about greedy premiers begging for money and refusing to accept accountability. Last week, the greedy showed they were much smarter than the bright and the arrogant.