

Saviour Malcolm Turnbull has turned out to be a dud – and is headed for electoral defeat

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Malcolm Turnbull has revealed himself as a political and policy dud.

BLUNTLY, and to put it quite simply, Malcolm Turnbull is a dud.

No, that's not an acronym for a three-word slogan. But as "Dr Google" tells us: "A thing that fails to work properly or is otherwise unsatisfactory or worthless."

Some other alternatives are: "a malfunctioning or failed idea; an unfulfilled expectation; something that does not do what it is supposed to do."

You would think that after the last six months — and most particularly, last week — this would be an unexceptional statement. That the expectations, indeed the dreams — fantasies — of last September, would by now have completely evaporated.

Turnbull was supposed to lead the nation out of the policy wilderness and in the process save the Coalition government from the political perdition to which Peta (Credlin) via Tony (Abbott) had supposedly condemned it.

Instead he has revealed himself as not simply a political dud but also — his supposed strength — a policy dud as well. He is quite simply floundering completely out of his depth and without the faintest idea of how to even just touch bottom again.

Well, when I say "revealed" except not, it would appear, to the "intelligentsia" more broadly and to the Canberra Press Gallery more narrowly, very narrowly.

That is to some extent understandable. The Gallery is both emotionally and ideologically invested in Turnbull as primarily “the non-Abbott”.

He is the very model of their ideal prime minister — someone who not simply occupies the broad centre, but believes in all the “right things” that they do, and could sit easily in either of the major parties; as indeed he essentially has done over the years, at least, intellectually. The parallel, you might say, of a Donald Trump.



Bill Shorten may win the election by default. Picture: Peter Ristevski

This fundamental appeal — to the Gallery — of the “idea of PM-Turnbull” has survived the “reality of PM-Turnbull” because it has also directly intersected with another “accepted wisdom” held all but universally by both the Gallery and the broader intelligentsia.

This is that the opposition leader, Bill Shorten, is unelectable. For as soon as you concede that Turnbull is not just seriously but perhaps even terminally flawed as a politician, you have to entertain the idea of Shorten actually winning the election, even if just by default.

Today’s Newspan in our sister paper The Australian should provide us with a fascinating update.

But I’ll state my assessment now: Turnbull is heading for defeat, whether in July or September.

As a sort of defence mechanism to the explosive consequences of the two realities colliding — the dud PM with the unelectable opposition leader — the leading lights of the Gallery are easily persuaded that each Turnbull policy failure is a political masterstroke.

The latest, stunning and — to anyone outside “the circuit”, the road that circles Parliament House, our version of Washington’s “Beltway” — embarrassingly obvious example, was his effete effort to force the states to impose their own income tax.

After its failure, Turnbull claimed it was a moment of great “clarity” — that, in essence, the states had been exposed as not wanting to raise the money they wanted to spend on schools and hospitals.

What completely bypassed the Gallery was that he was claiming this “moment of clarity” in a media grab of totally mixed messages, that will nevertheless provide all too much “clarity” to voters.