

## Q&A: Malcolm Turnbull attempts to defuse negative campaign

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Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull with Tony Jones on Q&A. Picture ABC

Malcolm Turnbull has attempted to defuse Labor's negative campaign against him, declaring that his views on climate change and same-sex marriage have not changed while rejecting claims he aims to privatise the Medicare system.

Appearing on the ABC's Q&A program, the Prime Minister defended his plan to cut the company tax rate to 25 per cent over ten years in the face of strong Labor opposition, saying the reduction would assist small and family owned businesses in the first three years. Mr Turnbull was also pressed on the treatment of asylum seekers in a video question from an Iranian Kurdish journalist on Manus Island, but took a firm view in defending his government's strong border protection policies.

He defended the government policy of not resettling refugees on compassionate grounds, warning that any relaxation risked further asylum seeker deaths at sea while also acknowledging the tough conditions endured by those in offshore facilities.

However, the Prime Minister was not asked once about union reform in the longer than usual episode despite the election being called on account of the Senate's refusal to pass two industrial relations bills.

Pressed early on climate change, Mr Turnbull said he supported the 26-28 per cent cuts to emissions by 2030 on 2005 levels but flagged the prospect of increasing the targets within the next five years. "The thing that was so frustrating until Paris (climate summit) was that there was no global agreement, in particular between China and the US," he said. "Now we've got that and we are on

track to actually reduce emissions.” “I believe we’ll agree on higher targets. At least by 2020, if not earlier. But we are well set-up to meet them and meet them we will.”

Mr Turnbull was also forced to defend his stance on the decision to hold a plebiscite on same sex marriage, if reflected on July 2, rather than have the parliament determine the issue. A prominent advocate for marriage equality, Mr Turnbull explained that he was bound by the decision of the party room last year which accepted a plebiscite over a parliamentary vote. “I am the Prime Minister. But I’m not the dictator,” he said. “Some people like the idea of prime ministers that ignore their colleagues. I don’t agree with that.”

Seeking to dismiss Labor arguments he had abandoned his convictions, Mr Turnbull said he had been a public figure for many years and Australians knew what he stood for.

Pressed repeatedly on the marriage equality plebiscite, Mr Turnbull said that he would be “encouraging every Australian to vote yes” so that loving partners of the same sex could marry just as he and wife Lucy had been for over the last 36 years.

Mr Turnbull also provided an assurance that no decision had been taken by cabinet in respect of outsourcing the Medicare payments system, rejecting suggestions he had backflipped in recent days by ruling out changes. Instead, he argued the system was badly outdated and needed to be brought into the 21st century, framing the task as a challenge for government across a range of service delivery areas. “There was no position to reverse,” Mr Turnbull said. “But the point is this - the payment system has to be updated.” “It has to get to a sort of smartphone era. I think, as we all know, it is pretty out of date. But we will revive it or renew it. We will modernise it but we will do so within Government.”

Mr Turnbull condemned Bill Shorten for claiming his government planned to privatise Medicare as an “extraordinary lie” aimed at frightening people. He labelled it one of the “saddest and most desperate things” in the election campaign and vowed it would “never ever be privatised.”

On the economy, Mr Turnbull also sought to defuse the Labor attack on his company tax rates which are phased in over a decade to achieve a 25 per cent rate across the board for all business. Pressed on whether the benefit of those tax cuts would go to foreign shareholders, Mr Turnbull provided a reminder the cuts were phased-in over time to benefit small and family owned businesses first. “If we are re-elected, next financial year, beginning July 1, there will be a 2.5% reduction in company tax ... for companies with a turnover of \$10 million or less. The next year it will be \$25 million or less. The next year it will be \$50 million or less and then there will be another election,” he said. “Those companies, they are small and medium companies. They are overwhelmingly Australian owned and family owned. And if you then chose to return us to Government in 2019, you would go then to \$250 million, \$100 million turnover, \$250 million turnover, \$500 million turnover.”

“There aren’t too many multinationals and no giants companies there. And then there will be another election in 2022. See - the big companies would only get a tax cut under our proposal three elections away.”

Mr Turnbull was caught by surprise at one stage of the program when he was shown a video question from an Iranian Kurdish journalist on Manus Island with the Prime Minister asking for more details about the man. ABC host Tony Jones told Mr Turnbull the man met the criteria for a genuine refugee but had been detained for three years on Manus. He questioned whether there was any hope of his release. Mr Turnbull said that, if the man qualified as a genuine refugee, he was free to

stay in Papua New Guinea but reaffirmed the option to come to Australia had been closed by his government. He also warned the unpicking of John Howard's Pacific Solution when Kevin Rudd was elected in 2007 had led to 50,000 unlawful arrivals and about 1200 deaths at sea. "It was a catastrophe," Mr Turnbull said. "Now we have been able to restore the security on the border. The people smugglers are out of business."

"We have had no unlawful arrivals, no unauthorised arrivals, no people smuggling expedition successful for well over 660 days. It is a very long time."

Pressed again on the issue, Mr Turnbull empathised with the plight of people who went through the offshore processing system but warned that any relaxation of the policy would only see more people end up in detention.

"None of us have hearts of stone," he said. "All of us understand how harsh it is."