

## Tackling coal, wind and ire

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It must be the first time an absence of electricity has delivered a much-needed bout of shock therapy. But South Australia's blackout has sparked a long overdue debate about renewable energy that has focused attention on energy policy and flushed out the crazy extremes of green-Left politics. Severe storms tearing down transmission lines and lightning strikes taking out a generator triggered the crisis, but questions remain about why this cascaded into a statewide shutdown and why, even 24 hours later, power was not restored in some locations. Expert analysis suggests fragility in the system created by more than 40 per cent reliance on renewable energy may have played a role. So while it is absurd to blame the crisis on wind power, it is also silly to suggest that South Australia's preoccupation with building renewable capacity at the expense of reliability and cost is not a factor.

Malcolm Turnbull, who has always been a strong advocate for emissions reduction and renewable energy, was right to draw the debate back to fundamental principles and the core responsibilities of government. "We've got to recognise that energy security is the key priority," the Prime Minister said, "and targeting lower emissions is very important but it must be consistent with energy security." Under Mike Rann 14 years ago, South Australian Labor promised to boost energy reliability and put downward pressure on prices by building an additional interconnector to NSW. Labor has been in power every year since that pledge yet only this year has Premier Jay Weatherill committed to a study of the interconnector project. In the intervening years the Labor government has been preoccupied with becoming a "world leader" in wind energy as it aims for a renewables target at 50 per cent of capacity. The push has already helped force the closure of two coal generators and some gas power stations. The state's power prices have been ensconced as the nation's highest and now, after this week's blackout and following on from a crisis in July, it is seen to have the least reliable system.

Yet in the face of these problems Greens MP Adam Bandt has called for even more renewable energy to combat global warming, saying this is "the best way to prevent these kinds of storms". Given Australia produces just 1.3 per cent of global carbon emissions and South Australia produces less than one-tenth of those, Mr Bandt seems to ascribe heroic powers to the wind turbines of our smallest mainland state. At least he is consistent. Nick Xenophon has grabbed more than his share of the media limelight claiming South Australia has "relied too much on wind", even though his fledgling party took a 50 per cent national renewable energy target to this year's election. Mr Turnbull has picked this issue correctly. The national target of 23.5 per cent is ambitious enough and Labor governments in South Australia, Victoria and Queensland risk driving prices up and creating even more power crises with their inflated targets of up to 50 per cent. An urgent national meeting of energy ministers can't come soon enough because, for now, they seem to be dancing in the dark. Federal Energy Minister Josh Frydenberg is urging an end to what has been an "ideological approach" to emissions reduction plans. "We have to put a priority on energy security and,

dare I say it, energy affordability," he says. This is the right approach, it is what most voters would support and it is certainly what good economic management demands.