

South Australian blackout puts questions on value of wind power

Andrew Bolt, Herald Sun, October 10, 2016 12:00am

Subscriber only

IT was three years ago that I advised South Australia's Liberal leader to get himself a stick of gelignite and blow up a wind generator.

Yes, we were at a party but, no, I wasn't drunk.

I told the startled Steven Marshall this was the best way to cut through with a great message and win the election. "Put the clip on YouTube and you'd tell the world South Australia would be open for business," I said. No to more wind farms. Yes to cheaper power. Message sent.

I even helpfully mimed pushing the plunger, but Marshall backed off hastily and never took my advice.

And, of course, he lost the election a year later to Labor's Jay Weatherill, the guy you now see on TV desperately pretending his state's huge wind farms didn't cause South Australia to black out two weeks ago.

But if you think blowing up a wind generator is crazy, consider this: Labor last month blew up a coal-fired generator.



Labor and the Greens have denied any problem with wind power.

Absolutely true: the Playford coal-fired power station in Port Augusta — put out of business by Labor’s green policies — had its towers brought down by explosives. And that clip is on YouTube.

The world sure got that message: South Australia is closed for investment in heavy industry, and so, soon, will be the rest of Australia if we don’t learn from its madness. Blowing up the Playford station was Labor saying yes to wind farms and the country’s highest power prices, and saying yes to the country’s highest unemployment, too.

In fact, it was also saying no to any power at all, as we now see.

We are used to activists lying about global warming and green power, but the spin over what really happened in South Australia has been extraordinary. It is a sign of panic, as politicians and green energy carpetbaggers see their lucrative boondoggle collapsing.

For a start, it is simply false for Labor leader Bill Shorten, desperate to deny that the blackout was caused by South Australia’s dangerous dependence on wind power, to blame instead “the fact that 20 transmission towers were blown down by almost cyclonic winds”.

BLOG WITH ANDREW BOLT

First, wind gusts of 100km/h or less are nothing like “cyclonic”.

Second, as the Australian Energy Market Operator revealed in its interim report last week, 15 of the 22 towers damaged in the storm were actually damaged after the blackout, and could not have caused it.

Third, as that preliminary report noted, yes, the weather did cause “multiple transmission system faults”, with three lines knocked out, but the “generation initially rode through those faults”.

The system simply took more coal-fired power from Victoria through the interconnector, a kind of giant extension cord to give South Australia the stable baseload power to balance all its on-again, off-again wind power. But then South Australia suddenly lost electricity from six wind farms within a few seconds, for a reason the report says is still unknown. The report does not blame fallen towers,

One strong suspicion is that the wind farms themselves failed, since they cannot operate in high winds and can even be destroyed by them. Whatever the cause, the state’s generation records for those last seconds show the main interconnector from Victoria suddenly trying to balance wildly gyrating power demands on a line already operating near capacity.

Overloaded, the system then tripped like a fuse box, and a whole state went dark in a way not seen in Australia for half a century.

The spin from Labor and the Greens — denying any problem with wind power — has been reckless. People’s jobs, even lives, depend on the electricity flowing.



South Australian workers at a tower destroyed by the storm.

But you can see why Bill Shorten is sweating. Federal Labor has promised — or threatened — to make Australians take 50 per cent of their electricity from wind, solar and our existing dams. Astonishingly, it wants to make this huge switch in just 14 years. That's why this blackout has so scared Labor and the Greens.

The public is now waking up to this madness, and to the falsehoods that inspired it.

Let's expose the five biggest.

FALSEHOOD ONE: We can afford Labor's green energy target. In fact, just to meet the targets set by Labor in Queensland and Victoria would force us to build 4800 wind generators at an estimated cost of \$41 billion. And those states would then have a power system as dodgy as South Australia's.

FALSEHOOD TWO: This green energy creates lots of "green jobs". In fact, it costs jobs. The wind power industry gives full-time jobs to just 1230 Australians, according to the Bureau of Statistics. But if the Victorian Government goes ahead with policies to close the giant Hazelwood coal-fired station, that alone would cost the jobs of 1000 Hazelwood workers. Worse, other businesses would be hit with power price rises of up to 5 per cent, enough to probably kill the power-intensive Portland aluminium smelter, for one, with its 750 workers.

FALSEHOOD THREE: Australia will save the planet by switching to green power. In fact, cutting our emissions makes no measurable difference to global temperatures, which is why politicians refuse to say how much temperatures will fall as a consequence of the billions they are spending. Ask them yourself: for all this pain, how much will we gain? By how much will temperatures fall?

I've asked everyone from the Liberals' Greg Hunt to Labor's Penny Wong, from alarmist Tim Flannery to populist Kevin Rudd, and not one will answer.

FALSEHOOD FOUR: We are doomed if we don't cut the temperature. In fact, the warmists' predictions of doom keep bombing. In 2007, Climate Council boss Flannery warned that "even the rain that falls will not fill our dams and our river systems". In 2008, the weather bureau warned that drought could become "our new climate". In 2012, the Australian Conservation Foundation warned it "will be less and less likely that we can feed the human population". But what do we see instead? Years of good rain. Dams filling. Rivers flooding. A record world harvest of grain crops.

FALSEHOOD FIVE: the public still believes this warming scare. In fact, even a survey for the embarrassed Climate Institute last month found just 30 per cent of Australians still believed the world was warming and humans were mostly to blame.

Most Australians are now sceptics. The great warming scare is failing, which explains the panic over South Australia's blackout. The lights went out. But for many Australians, a light bulb went on.

Pardon? Here were storms bringing the rains the warmists told us were gone, and switching off the green power the warmists told us would stay. Green power, gone with the wind. No need for that gelnite now, Steve.

Order Andrew's new book, Bolt — Worth Fighting For, at heraldsun.com.au/shop. Also out now: a reprint of his earlier sold-out book of columns, Still Not Sorry.

Comments, 1 hour ago

Ian Lowe, Emeritus professor of science, technology and society at Griffith University in Queensland, said "The SA blackouts had nothing to do with the State's move to clean energy. The distribution network was affected by a storm. The problem would have been exactly the same if SA used coal or nuclear power to provide its electricity".

Roger Dargaville, Deputy Director, Energy Research Institute at the University of Melbourne says these kinds of failures in the National Energy Market (which covers the five eastern states) are "extremely rare". "The NEM experiences a range of extreme weather on a regular occurrence and a vast majority of the time copes well", Dargaville says. "The system contains multiple levels of redundancy and safety mechanisms, however it is impractical if not impossible to build any complex system that is completely 100 per cent reliable". Providing additional redundancy to insure against such events would not only be extremely costly, but it would still not completely guarantee against further extreme events, Dargaville says.

Professor Ken Baldwin, the Deputy Director of the Research School of Physics and Engineering at the Australian National University says there is "almost unanimity" of views amongst experts in the electricity sector that the South Australian blackout was the result of transmission failures caused by an extreme weather event, which had nothing to do with the State's high level of renewable energy.