

Turnbull labels coal opponents 'delusional'

Ewen Schwarten, Sunday Age, July 16

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has mounted a defence of coal-powered electricity, saying those who think the resource doesn't have a future are 'delusional'. Addressing the Liberal National Party state convention in Brisbane, Mr Turnbull hit out at the state Labor government's "reckless" plans to ensure Queensland's energy supply was carbon neutral by 2050 and said Australia had an interest in ensuring the future of coal.

"Those people who say coal and other fossil fuels have no future are delusional and they fly in the face of all of the economic forecasts," he told the crowd of party faithful. His sentiments were greeted with applause by the crowd, who a day earlier had passed a resolution urging a future state LNP government to promote and support the coal industry.

The convention is also considering a resolution to call on the Turnbull government to withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord, which is likely to be debated on Sunday.

Mr Turnbull devoted a significant portion of his 20-minute address to energy policy, warning of the impact of renewables on power prices and the security of the electricity grid. He said Queensland's efforts to source 50 per cent of its electricity supply by 2030 would see it follow the path of South Australia, which has been hit by high prices and supply issues.

"We know what happens if you allow left-wing ideology and politics to drive your energy policy. You get unreliable and unaffordable power, and business is driven out of your state," he told the crowd.

"Now, what the Palaszczuk government is seeking to do here is undermine your competitiveness in the interests of chasing green votes in the inner city and you can't allow them to get away with it, and we won't."

He said as the world's largest exporter of coal, Australia had an interest in demonstrating that clean coal could play a role in a low-emissions energy future.

Mr Turnbull later told reporters ideology had no role to play in the energy policy debate. "The critical thing to do with energy is to plan it, you've got to be businesslike about it," he told reporters on the Gold Coast. "That's why I say our policy is based on engineering and economics, not on ideology and politics."

Earlier, Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce passionately called on his colleagues in Queensland get behind Mr Turnbull, calling him their one and only captain. He said it was a hard job being the prime minister, with so many divergent interests at play.

"But he is unrelenting," Mr Joyce said. "We've got to get behind him now. We are going to run out into this paddock and we will run out with one captain and it's going to be Malcolm Turnbull."

It comes a day after the Nationals leader told federal Liberals to drop "bullshit arguments" and concentrate on things that matter to voters. He warned on Friday that the war of words between Mr Turnbull and Tony Abbott would hurt the Liberal-Nationals in Queensland.