

Rita Panahi: Major parties share blame in energy lunacy

Rita Panahi, Herald Sun

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MADNESS comes in many forms. Rambling about grand conspiracy theories, refusing to vaccinate your children against deadly disease and watching TV show Yummy Mummies are all signs of an unsound mind. Then there's political lunacy that's afflicted successive governments at federal and state level.

VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT KEEPS MODELLING INTO ENERGY POLICIES SECRET AUSTRALIA WILL PAY FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY TARGETS

Politicians from both Labor and the Coalition have opted to deliberately handicap the nation with exorbitant energy prices in a misguided effort to save the world.

It is madness for a prosperous country blessed with significant natural resources to have citizens who cannot afford to heat their homes in winter nor cool them in summer. We have pensioners and working people whose electricity and gas bills cause such hardship that they wrap themselves in layers of clothing or blankets rather than turn on the heating.

Australian households and businesses are paying more for gas and electricity than is necessary. South Australia is leading the way in the insanity stakes and has the dishonour of having the highest electricity prices in the world. No wonder businesses are fleeing the state while charities report that power prices are pushing many into poverty.



South Australian premier Jay Weatherill with Tesla's Elon Musk. Picture: Facebook

Meanwhile, the Weatherill Government is putting its faith in entrepreneur Elon Musk and hoping the world's biggest battery will prevent future blackouts and national ridicule. But, as former Labor powerbroker and federal environment minister Graham Richardson points out, Musk's greatest talent seems to be relieving governments of billions of dollars in taxpayer funds.

Remarkably, Premier Jay Weatherill thinks his miracle battery will become a tourist attraction. The chances of children pestering parents to take them to see the big battery are about as remote as SA's chances of self-sufficiency. Ignore the theatrics from confused Coalition conservatives; they, with Labor, are very much as one when it comes to energy; Labor is just more ambitious with its targets. Surveys show voters are more concerned by the rising cost of energy than emissions targets, yet governments back policies that will inevitably lead to higher prices.

Energy policy is of huge importance to the majority of voters but what choice do they have at the ballot box when the major parties are singing from the same hymn sheet? The Coalition's primary vote sits at a disastrous 35 per cent and, while Labor would win an election held today in a landslide, its primary vote is not much better at 36 per cent.

Last month's Newspoll on energy policy revealed that the majority of voters wanted the government's top priority to be energy prices rather than emissions. Sixty per cent wanted the federal government focused on fixing energy prices compared with 24 per cent who wanted the focus on meeting "targets to cut greenhouse emissions". The numbers were even more stark for Coalition voters with a 63 to 17 per cent split. Labor voters were also more concerned by pricing (57 per cent) than emissions (29). Even a third of Greens (37) wanted pricing prioritised over emission targets while the figure for One Nation voters was 73 per cent.



The closure of Hazelwood will see a jump in prices that consumers can ill-afford; and then there are issues of reliability. Picture: AAP

In Victoria we are about to experience some of the pain South Australians have felt in recent years. The closure of Hazelwood will see a jump in prices that consumers can ill-afford; and then there are issues of reliability. Then there is the gas crisis, a predictable and, worse, self-inflicted calamity.

Successive state governments have failed to capitalise on the state's abundant natural resources and saddled households and businesses with soaring bills. Years of inaction, failure and a shocking lack of foresight have delivered skyrocketing gas prices, expected to double by 2030.

By giving into the shrillest special interest groups, both Labor and the Coalition have embraced policies that jeopardise supply.

PRIME Minister Malcolm Turnbull has pleaded with gas suppliers to provide reliable, affordable gas but the states and territories are ultimately standing in the way of progress. Turnbull, too, shares plenty of the blame. He has refused to scrap or reduce the Renewable Energy Target that requires at least 23.5 per cent of Australia's energy production to come from clean energy sources such as wind and solar by 2020. The target may even be lifted thanks to the Finkel Report. In Victoria the Dan Andrews' government has its own RET of 40 per cent by 2025. It has also lifted taxes on power plant operators and played a part in the closure of Hazelwood.

Turnbull can rail against federal Labor's 50 per cent target and the state RETs but he is guilty of adopting the same stifling policies.

The Coalition has a chance to differentiate itself from Labor on a policy that is critically important to most voters. Focusing on cheap, reliable energy ahead of emissions targets would give voters a choice at the next election and win back some of the support the Coalition has lost in recent years.

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