

Frydenberg hits back at Abbott's climate change claims



Federal Energy Minister Josh Frydenberg has hit back at Tony Abbott's comments, declaring "climate change is real". Picture: AAP Image/Dean Lewins.

Rachel Baxendale, The Australian, 11:52AM October 11, 2017

Energy Minister Josh Frydenberg has hit back at Tony Abbott, quoting the former prime minister's own words in the top job that the Paris agreement he signed up to was "economically responsible and environmentally responsible" and declaring "climate change is real".

Mr Frydenberg also said the Turnbull government would make an announcement by the end of the year on whether or not they will adopt Chief Scientist Alan Finkel's clean energy target.

On Monday Mr Frydenberg gave the strongest indication yet that the policy would be dumped.

Today he would not be drawn on the decision, as he unveiled a \$36m program to pay thousands of households in NSW, Victoria and South Australia to use less energy during peak periods.

The announcement comes after Mr Abbott's speech in London yesterday, in which he suggested climate change may be doing more good than harm, urging people to "Beware the pronouncement, 'the science is settled'," on climate change.

Labor states go it alone on CETJOE KELLY

A heated argumentGRAHAM LLOYD

Get paid to turn off the airconMICHAEL OWEN

'Scale back Paris commitment' Adam Creighton

Mr Frydenberg said climate change was real. "We take our advice from the scientific experts. We believe we need to reduce our emissions. That is why Tony Abbott signed up to the Paris agreement," Mr Frydenberg said. "I point out that, at the time, Tony Abbott said that the agreement Australia struck at Paris was a definite commitment and that it was economically responsible and environmentally responsible. "They were Tony Abbott's words. Now the Turnbull Government is continuing the work of Coalition governments to reduce carbon emissions but to do so in a way that doesn't compromise the affordability and the reliability of our system."

In 2015, Mr Abbott signed Australia up to a 26 to 28 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions on 2005 levels by 2030 at the Paris climate change conference.

Asked whether Mr Abbott was right that more people died in cold snaps than in the heat, Mr Frydenberg said he would not run a commentary on Mr Abbott's speech other than to reaffirm a commitment to meeting the Paris target. "Australia will meet those commitments, just as we beat our first Kyoto target, just as we're on track to beat our 2020 target," he said.

"We are doing it through a whole range of different mechanisms across the economy. We take climate change very seriously. We take our emissions reductions targets very seriously. That's why the government has acted."

Mr Frydenberg talked up the reward scheme for using less energy, saying incentives had been proven to work overseas and citing an example given by Australian Energy Market Operator CEO Audrey Zibelman of such an initiative in Texas saving \$600m over a weekend. "The point here is we want the lowest cost solution and building new power stations may not always be that solution," Mr Frydenberg said.

"This is a voluntary program. That's the key here. Households, businesses are asked to enter into voluntary arrangements only if they want to and only if they want to be paid for their contribution."

Mr Frydenberg reiterated his intention to announce a decision on the clean energy target before the end of the year. "We will stick to that. We will have more to say in due course," he said.

PM also quotes 2015 Abbott

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull also quoted Mr Abbott's pledge as PM following the Paris talks, that "Australia is a nation that when it makes international commitments of this kind, keeps them."

Mr Turnbull said the clean energy target was still being considered carefully. "We are consulting very carefully with other experts and institutions and stakeholders in the field, and when the government has completed its work, we will make an announcement at that time," he said. "But I can assure you we are, as you've seen, with every step we've taken to date, we are being guided by engineering and economics.

"There has been too much sloganising, too much politics, too much ideology and frankly too much idiocy, and we are not going to make the same mistakes that were made in the past."

The Prime Minister cited the example of South Australia, which he said had rushed into renewables without sufficient backup.

Business wants CET alternative

Business Council Chief Executive Jennifer Westacott says that if the federal government is not going to pursue a clean energy target, it needs to put an alternative on the table. Ms Westacott's comments came as two of Australia's most respected economic reformers, Keating government adviser Fred Hilmer and inaugural Productivity Commission chairman Gary Banks, called on the Turnbull government to scale back its commitment to the Paris emissions reduction agreement and instead revive a market-based mechanism to curb greenhouse gas emissions.

Ms Westacott said business needed a stable signal of how emissions would be treated in the economy into the future. "The Business Council had been a very strong supporter of the clean energy target, as have other business organisations, as a way to send this signal," Ms Westacott told ABC radio. "If the government is not going to pursue Alan Finkel's recommended clean energy target mechanism as a way of signalling emissions, then what is the alternative?"

“Let’s make sure that in doing that we’re sitting down with business and industry to make sure we get this right, because we’ve had some false starts with this.”

Ms Westacott said the Business Council had made it clear they did not want to see an extension of the renewable energy target once it had been completed, but said she was not aware of any modelling showing that target could be met without a mechanism. “Now clearly renewables are becoming cheaper, but that’s not the only story here. We want to see a technology-neutral approach,” she said.

Ms Westacott said she would leave other people to comment on Tony Abbott’s speech. “The business community across the world, the Business Council, has accepted that we need to take action on climate change,” Ms Westacott said. “Our issue is how you do it. How do you achieve the target that Mr Abbott’s government actually set, in a way that doesn’t impact on the competitiveness of our economy, and we have to take meaningful steps here, and companies have been leading the way on this. “They have been doing as much as they can. They have been investing. They now need a more certain framework to go forward.”