

Terry McCrann: Malcolm Turnbull's power plus — and minuses

Terry McCrann, Herald Sun

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MALCOLM Turnbull and Josh Frydenberg have opted to try to keep the lights on.

They have not chosen to deliver you the cheap and plentiful electricity — and, importantly, gas — that you used to get and you still could and indeed should get into the future.

**ENERGY BOSS BACKS MALCOLM TURNBULL'S POWER PLAN
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They have also turned their — and the government's collective — back on what is not only a golden opportunity to win the next election but arguably the only way to do so: nailing Labor leader Bill Shorten on his commitment to guarantee even higher power prices and blackouts.

Yes, the foreshadowed ditching of the Clean Energy Target (CET) was a “step in the right direction”; a step towards the guaranteed share for baseload, for real as opposed to fake (wind and solar) energy, that I called for last week.

But it was not a step far enough. In particular, the government's proposed policy mix would promote more gas-fired rather than the coal-fired electricity which has been the basis of our previously cheap, plentiful and reliable electricity.

This would not only mean (unnecessarily) more expensive — gas-fired — electricity, but it would be a double negative.

It would also reduce the availability of gas to be used as gas, while also making it more expensive in that form.

In sum and in short, this is not a step that would take the government over the line to join Tony Abbott, as I also wrote last week, on the side of energy sanity. Which is probably — at least in part — why Turnbull, for one, couldn't take it.

So, ultimately, while it is certainly much better than the current mess — and is light years away from the insanity that a prime minister Shorten in de facto

coalition with Richard Di Natale and his crazy Dark Greens would (disturbingly, arguably, will) deliver — it just doesn't cut it.

That's if it even ever goes anywhere. Certainly to me, watching the Turnbull-Frydenberg press conference on Tuesday, I had an overwhelming sense that I was watching an exercise in pointlessness. That I was witnessing another one of those Turnbull "light bulb moments" which would just fade away.

Let me start with the most important part — the politics.

THE decision by Shorten and Labor to double down on wind and solar insanity, by embracing a ludicrous 50 per cent RET (renewable energy target) should have been an "open sesame" to a PM and a government locked into a seemingly unstoppable slide to a landslide loss in 2019.

It was the sort of opportunity you could only wish for but never realistically expect. To say nothing of the opening it provided to actually marry good policies — moving decisively back to energy sanity — with good politics, realistically offering to deliver cheaper power prices to both consumers and business.



Minister for Energy and the Environment Josh Frydenberg and Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull. Picture: AAP

How could an Opposition be so stupid; sitting on a seemingly permanent 55-45 two-party lead, all it had to do was shut up and just count the days down to the election and an inevitable shift to the other side of the chamber.

Yet, given that opportunity, Turnbull has said: no thanks; I'll prefer to just slide to defeat.

True, it would have required him not only to “step over the sanity line” that Abbott had drawn in the sand, but actually embrace a replay of Abbott's 2013 clarity-delivering and election-winning “axe the tax” political and policy dynamic.

But it would also, not exactly incidentally, have neutralised Abbott as a backbench force/irritant. Or alternatively, been the mechanism for bringing Abbott back into the tent.

Even if Turnbull is not aware of former US president Lyndon B. Johnson's advice that it was better to have such a “son-of-a-female dog inside the tent micturating out.....” or words to that effect, he should start to understand that electoral success in 2019 actually starts and finishes with Abbott.

Why? Because, quite irrespective of electricity prices, the 2019 election will be won — or more likely, lost by the government — in Queensland.

The one and only key to that outcome is Pauline Hanson. And the key to winning One Nation preferences to the Coalition rests with Abbott, even if it was Abbott that was the spearhead for the Howard government's assault on Hanson in the late-1990s.

All very interesting politics, maybe; but more importantly, it's keeping the other 24 million of us — totally unnecessarily — on the insanity side of the Abbott Line.



Minister for Revenue and Financial Services Kelly O'Dwyer with new ASIC chair James Shipton.

A FATHER AND SON SAGA

THE new corporate cop is a good choice. Importantly, he does not look like a second choice. Indeed, we could end up with a better ASIC head than both the incumbent and the prime minister's first choice of successor.

James Shipton has an appealing mix of coalface investment banking and, importantly, post-GFC regulatory experience.

There's an interesting twist to his selection (and, it's important to stress, no more than that). He's the son of the late Liberal federal MP, Roger Shipton. Shipton was succeeded by Peter Costello in the blue-chip seat of Higgins who was in turn succeeded by none other than Kelly O'Dwyer — who announced his son's appointment on Tuesday.

Even more interestingly, in the week of the 30th anniversary of the Great Sharemarket Crash of 1987 that swept away all the '80s entrepreneurs, and before the "Costello succession", Shipton pere refused in 1990 to make way for none other than John Elliott.

Let's hope Shipton fils is similarly resistant.