

JUDITH SLOAN

We'd be better off on policy without Barnaby Joyce



Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce.

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I personally don't care how Barnaby Joyce conducts his private life. I do care if there has been public money used to make his life, and the life of his new partner, more convenient and remunerative.

But the thing that sticks in my craw the most is that the Nationals leader is a dud when it comes to policy matters.

The consummate retail politician — a reputation now tarnished — he may be, but when it comes to spending public money on, or directing regulatory favours in the direction of, rural and regional Australia, the Deputy PM sees no limits. He completely lives up to the label of agrarian socialist who is only too happy to spend other people's money on his pet projects.

Let me run through some of the appalling policy positions he has pushed, to the detriment of the national interest and ordinary Australians:

- He supported re-regulation of the sugar industry in Queensland even though several hundreds of millions of dollars of public money was used to compensate farmers for the deregulation of the industry;

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- He endorsed the building of the dubious, vastly expensive inland railway even though there has been insufficient scrutiny and cost-benefit analysis of the project;
- He equivocated about the building of a mine in his electorate while professing support for the resources industry more generally;
- He insisted the pesticides/agricultural chemicals regulatory agency be shifted from Canberra to his electorate even though the case was not established — an instance of pure pork-barrelling;
- The Murray-Darling Basin Plan is on the point of collapse but Joyce has been missing in action;
- He has been silent about alleged theft of irrigated water in the northern parts of the basin; and
- He takes credit for rising agricultural prices when answering questions in parliament, which is both witless and bizarre.

It is passing strange that Joyce's party could be called the National Party because its politicians behave in ways that support sectional interests while damaging the nation as a whole. Joyce wouldn't understand the concept of the national interest if it hit him in the face. Senator Matt Canavan is twice as smart as Joyce and has a reasonable grip on what constitutes good policy that serves the national interest.

If Joyce were not to survive the current scandal, Australia would be better off in policy terms.



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