

## Two-horse race on a Paris road to ruin



Illustration: Eric Lobbecke.

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I recall as a child watching, heart in mouth, a bespangled woman riding around a circus ring, one foot planted on the back of each of two horses. What would become of her were they to diverge from their parallel paths? Of course, those well-trained animals never did.

But why did this childhood memory surface when thinking about our new government's policy towards the Paris agreement on climate change? Ben Packham and Greg Brown ("Out of respect, we'll always have Paris", 12/9) report Scott Morrison saying "Australia will stay in the Paris agreement because pulling out would alienate Pacific countries". Can the Prime Minister be serious? It would appear so, since his statement came "just days after Australia endorsed a new Pacific security pact that identifies climate change as 'the biggest single threat' to the region".

That endorsement was signed off by Foreign Affairs Minister Marise Payne, the Turnbull government's most notable failure, now promoted to the vacancy created by her dummy-spitting predecessor, Julie Bishop. Payne was attending a two-bit assembly of professional mendicants, the Pacific Islands Forum.

I can think of reasons, or at least rationalisations, why Morrison may have decided to keep Australia in the Paris Agreement rather than follow US President Donald Trump's excellent example in withdrawing from it, but the one reported is not among them.

Let's be blunt. The forum is a group of countries ranging from Papua New Guinea, a failing but (from Australia's viewpoint) important state riddled by corruption and kept afloat only by the richness of its resources and the magnitude of Australia's foreign aid donations, to various Gilbertian places such as Tuvalu, whose leaders recently were demanding that we do more to keep their toy "nations" from being engulfed by the Pacific Ocean, an asserted threat for which there is not the slightest factual foundation.

In accepting the ludicrous claim that climate change is "the biggest single threat" to the region, Payne and her equally hapless departmental advisers clearly overlooked the elephant in that room: Chinese military aggression, a real and growing threat likely to be compounded by the region's leaders' susceptibility to the usual Chinese bribery.

However that may be, Morrison now has one foot firmly planted on the Angus Taylor horse (directed at cutting future power prices and keeping the lights on) and his other foot on the Paris Agreement-driven horse, its reins now held by Environment Minister Melissa Price.

Doubtless even now the latter is being briefed by all those global warming alarmists in her department about the imperative need, under the Paris Agreement, to focus on cutting our emissions of carbon dioxide (the source of all life on our planet). Therefore, unless Price is simply to act as a cipher (and be rapidly seen as such), these two horses must soon begin to diverge. What then?

This hole in Morrison's stated policies is so obvious that one must ask, why would an intelligent man espouse it?

The answer, I suggest, is the same as that which has led him to a week's parliamentary and media embarrassment whenever asked why he has replaced Malcolm Turnbull. The straightforward answer to that question is that Turnbull was never up to the job; the only mistake his Liberal partyroom made in finally dismissing him was that it should have done so two years ago after his appalling performance in the July 2016 election.

But Morrison feels he can't say that publicly because to do so would outrage all those "moderates" (read lefties) on whose votes his own elevation eventually was based, and who still make up a clear majority of his ministry.

For essentially the same reason, Morrison feels he can't say that his party's attachment, under Turnbull, to all the global warming nonsense epitomised by Paris has been a mistake from the outset. By emphasising Taylor's role as "the minister for getting prices down" and gliding over the obligations (including significant financial ones to the Green Climate Fund) that Paris places on us, Morrison hopes to finesse his way through the contradiction.

It won't work. If Morrison is to succeed (as everyone who fears a Labor government must hope), policy changes will be needed to convince the disaffected conservatives to return to the Liberal fold. Few things will more greatly damage that prospect than what can only be called this Paris swindle.

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