

## RET is safe, Morrison tells crossbench



Rebekha Sharkie, left, and Cathy McGowan together in the House. Picture: Kym Smith

Ben Packham, Political Reporter

Rosie Lewis, Reporter, 12:00AM September 13, 2018

Scott Morrison has assured key crossbenchers he will not dump renewable energy targets as he hedges against the possibility of the Coalition losing the Wentworth by-election and finding itself in minority government.

Independent MP Cathy McGowan is pressuring the Prime Minister to produce an energy policy that supports renewable energy investment amid a push by some conservative MPs to axe measures to cut carbon emissions and to dump the Paris Agreement.

Ms McGowan met privately with Mr Morrison this week to discuss the issue, as the government confronts the possibility of losing Malcolm Turnbull's seat at the October 20 by-election and losing its parliamentary majority.

Ms McGowan and fellow crossbencher Rebekha Sharkie have declined to guarantee support for the government in confidence motions beyond the by-election.

Ms McGowan told *The Australian* she was not threatening to "put him up against the wall and shoot him", but wanted to work constructively with Mr

Morrison, who might soon have to rely on the crossbench to govern. “He says the (national energy guarantee) is dead. Well, what is he going to put in place that provides the good governance for the country around electricity?” she said. “I am using all the opportunities I have in this job to say to the government, ‘it’s not good enough’.”

Ms Sharkie told The Australian: “I’m deeply concerned the NEG’s now gone and I haven’t heard any talk about how we address emissions. You can’t be part of the Paris climate change agreement and not address emissions through energy. I don’t get it.”

In response to a question from Ms McGowan in parliament yesterday, Mr Morrison recommitted Australia to meeting its Paris carbon-emissions cuts through climate change policies that had inflamed tensions in the Coalition partyroom. “We will meet the 2030 Paris target,” Mr Morrison said. “Our suite of policies — which includes the emissions reduction fund, the small-scale and the large-scale RET, the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, and indeed what will be the great legacy of prime minister Turnbull, Snowy 2.0 — will all assist us in meeting this target.”

The competition watchdog recently recommended the small-scale renewable energy scheme be closed down by 2021, but said the large-scale scheme should phase out according to schedule between 2020 and 2030.

New Energy Minister Angus Taylor is on record as opposing the RET, while the chairman of the Coalition’s backbench energy committee, Craig Kelly, said he wanted to see both schemes re-examined for possible abolition: “I’m just waiting to see what the minister is coming up with,” he said.

The CEFC and the Australian Renewable Energy Agency should also be considered for cuts “as part of the new minister’s mission to bring down electricity prices”.

The Liberal Party, which is due to preselect its Wentworth candidate tonight, could face a strong challenge for the seat, particularly if high-profile City of Sydney councillor Kerryn Phelps stands.

If it lost the seat, the government’s numbers in the House of Representatives would fall to 75, forcing it to rely on the support of two independents to fend off confidence motions if Speaker Tony Smith remained in the chair.

The government might consider an independent speaker if a crossbenchers could be convinced to serve. Ms McGowan said she would not be interested in the role.