

Barnaby Joyce's coal plan powers up detractors



Queensland Nationals MP Keith Pitt in parliament, Picture: AAP

Exclusive

Ean Higgins, 11:00PM October 15, 2018

Barnaby Joyce's call for the federal government to favour new coal-fired power stations over the proposed \$4.5 billion Snowy 2.0 pumped hydro project yesterday reignited the coal-versus-renewable debate, with a second Coalition backbencher expressing doubts about the scheme's viability but an eminent environmental economist saying to dump it would be irresponsible.

As reported by The Australian yesterday, the former deputy prime minister said Snowy 2.0, for which Snowy Hydro is expected to seek government sign-off in December, had blown out in cost, with new transmission infrastructure bringing the total estimate to \$6.5 billion.

Queensland Nationals MP Keith Pitt, an electrical engineer, said the viability of Snowy 2.0 would depend on the cost per megawatt hour and other factors likely to be in a yet-to-be-released final feasibility study, but on the face of it, it looked dubious.

"My gut feeling is that if you include the cost of transmission and ancillaries, I think it will be very expensive, but still not as expensive as wind and solar," Mr Pitt told The Australian. If, as he expected, the cost per megawatt hour turned out to be extremely high for Snowy 2.0, the money would be better spent on

building coal-fired power stations that got around the problem of intermittent energy of renewables.

“Building things based on ideology usually means taxpayers get it in the neck,” Mr Pitt said.

Emeritus professor Tor Hundloe from the University of Queensland said calls for new coal-fired power stations defied reality on economic grounds, if no other. “A new coal-fired power station is more costly per kilowatt than either solar or wind, and certainly more costly than hydro,” Professor Hundloe said. “Where Barnaby gets it wrong,” he said, was in misunderstanding the function of pumped hydro.

At times of high production of renewable energy, solar in the middle of the day and wind in the middle of the night, it was financially viable to use those renewable energy sources to pump water up into higher storage dams to let it flow back to generate electricity at peak demand, thus getting around the intermittency issue with solar and wind.

In this form, it could provide both baseload and quickly despatched power, Professor Hundloe said. “Around the world, there is a hell of a lot of pumped storage hydro, and they would not exist if they weren’t cost-effective,” he said. Professor Hundloe said Malcolm Turnbull, who championed Snowy 2.0, “will be recorded in history books as a statesman as the initiator of this project, while all other prime ministers during the ‘electricity wars’ will go unrecognised due to their failure”.