

## An inconvenient truth for Gore



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Climate champion Al Gore has given a frank assessment of the latest UN report into the dangers of global warming. Interviewed by US public broadcaster PBS, Gore said the language used by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in its report on limiting global warming to 1.5C had been “torqued up” a little to get the attention of policymakers.

This was appropriate, he said, because climate change was a global emergency that posed “an existential threat to human civilisation on this planet”.

There has been plenty of “torquing up” as conflicting signals buffet what is supposed to be a milestone in implementing the Paris Agreement in Poland next month. Peak stupid in climate change politics usually is timed to coincide with key decisions that have to be made to keep together a UN process in which the annual bill for meetings alone is calculated at more than \$150 million.

Internationally, the conflicting signals include the demise of German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the rise of authoritarian president-elect Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. Together with Donald Trump’s withdrawal of climate change funding and threats to leave the Paris Agreement altogether, **the**

**global sentiment going into Poland is vastly different from that coming out of Paris.**

Analysis by the pro-action Climate Home News is that **“the alliance of rich, emerging and poor economies that sealed the Paris climate deal is falling apart”**. In many countries, it says, **climate scepticism and economic nationalism are usurping the international green enthusiasm of 2015.**

Even countries that remain committed to climate action are consumed by domestic concerns, such as Brexit in Britain and political instability in Germany.

**But in Australia, “torquing up” continues to reach new heights.** In a speech to the National Press Club this week, Australian Conservation Foundation chief executive Kelly O’Shanassy out-torqued the IPCC. “If we continue to burn coal and gas for decades to come, we will kill the 1.5 degree target, we will not have a habitable planet and hundreds of millions of people will die,” she said.

Tech billionaire Mike Cannon-Brookes tweeted from his recently purchased \$100m harbour-front mansion a modern-day equivalent of “let them eat cake”. Cannon-Brookes’s answer is a \$200 prize for a new logo for “fair dinkum” power that is reliable, renewable and cheap.

However, the real torque is the way in which small deceptions, repeated often, are allowed to become fact. The results of a recent survey of company directors illustrate the point. Federal opposition climate change and energy spokesman Mark Butler says: “We’ve also seen the biannual survey of company directors for the first time place climate change, or action on climate change, at the top of the list of challenges that company directors think the federal government should be acting on.”

**A full reading of the Australian Institute of Company Directors report shows otherwise.** The leading economic challenges cited are rising global economic protectionism, global economic uncertainty, energy policy, taxation system, high energy prices, red tape, low productivity growth, the China economic outlook and **then climate change. Climate change is considered a major long-term issue for government to solve.** But what business wants the government to concentrate on now is energy policy, tax reform and infrastructure.

Likewise, it has become an article of faith among many that the Wentworth by-election was swung by climate change, which would be a dominant issue at the

next election. The ACF has activated a lobbying effort in marginal seats to push the issue. “We are making this the climate election,” O’Shanassy says.

But research by Essential Media shows that pushing **renewable energy is a first-order issue only among those who already vote Green**. According to Essential’s October 23 report, the most important issues for the federal government to address in the next 12 months are cost of living, improving the health system and housing affordability. **Promoting renewable energy was a first-order issue for only 7 per cent of respondents. Overall, the issue of renewables ranked eighth** behind the major concerns and then job creation, improved wages, economic growth, national security and terrorism.

What is not in dispute is the cost of the low emissions transition so far. **Nathan Vass, founder of the Australian Power Project, which is championing a continued role for coal, says renewable energy subsidies at state and federal levels to date amount to \$42.5 billion**. Across that same period 10 coal-fired power stations have been taken out of action and, **according to the Australian Competition & Consumer Commission’s recent report, electricity prices have increased in real terms, adjusted for inflation, by 56 per cent**. For the \$42.5bn spent, **greenhouse gas emissions from the power sector have risen by 50 million tonnes a year or 40 per cent since 1990. Globally, greenhouse gas emissions are back on the rise after slowing with the global financial crisis**.

Ironically, it is the US that is bucking the global trend: its emissions fell 2.7 per cent last year, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. Reported emissions from large power plants declined 4.5 per cent since 2016, and 19.7 per cent since 2011 due mainly to a switch from coal to natural gas from fracking.

US EPA acting administrator Andrew Wheeler says the Trump administration has proven federal regulations are not necessary to drive CO2 reductions. **“These achievements flow largely from technological breakthroughs in the private sector, not the heavy hand of government,” he says.**