

It was all a bit much for me to see Environment Minister Greg Hunt wallowing in the signing of the Paris Agreement on emissions reduction in New York this week. His commitment to its ratification by year end, after opposing the pricing of carbon and attempting to close down the renewables industry, is nothing short of blatant hypocrisy.

Further, it was galling to hear him boast that, “We’re now on track to meet and beat our..targets and our Paris 2030 targets are strong and ambitious and they have been welcomed and hailed”, and then to attempt to create the impression that “our domestic climate change policies” have and will continue to deliver “real outcomes”.

This ignores the fact that the Climate Change Authority (that the government is still committed to abolishing) recommended 2030 targets about double the declared 26-28% target (off a 2005 base) adopted by the government. Even if those modest targets are met, we will still remain one of the highest emitters per capita.

Hunt also claimed that “Australia is open for renewable energy business and investment”. This must have been very “tongue-in-cheek” given his government has caused investment to collapse by some 80-90%, destroying some 15,000 jobs in that sector in recent years. All the while, encouraging the development of new coal mines and gas projects, and cutting the 2020 RET by some 20% to 33,000 GwH.

Despite what Hunt claims, his government has not yet come anywhere near a realistic and responsible recognition of the magnitude and urgency of the climate challenge, as dictated by the science. Nor has it developed policies that will deliver even modest, but inadequate, targets for 2030.

Australia has seen a succession of political leaders simply play short-term politics with the issue, at times supporting (say) a carbon price, at other times opposing, as their political circumstances dictated. Howard, for example, admitted to doing just that when speaking to Nigel Lawson’s gathering of climate deniers in London in late 2013, finishing up by admitting that he remained an “agnostic” on climate, preferring to rely on his “instincts”.

Clearly, when some 97% of climate scientists, atypically, actually agree on the problem and its urgency, it is not a question of “religion”, but of science; and not a question of “instinct”, but of scientific fact.

Post Howard, we have had to endure the periods of Rudd/Gillard and Turnbull/Abbott turmoil, and now sit with Turnbull again, but with him having committed to keep the Abbott, obstructionist, climate policies.

This is a tragedy. Australia could have led the technological revolution that is fundamental to an effective response to the climate challenge. This would have seen a host of new businesses and new jobs, in renewables, in energy efficiencies, and in the development of alternative technologies, as well as saving “old jobs” in many of our heavy, power intensive industries.

When I think back to my environment policy of the early 1990s, which called for a 20% cut in emissions by 2000, off a 1990 base, I feel we will have lost some 30 years of opportunities if the government sticks to where they are on climate policy.

However, I suspect, indeed hope, that this comes to a head in this election campaign. Shorten is in a strong position to “wedge” Turnbull on climate, by confirming his commitments to an ETS, and a 2030 target for renewables of 50%. Both are fundamental elements of a genuine response to the 2030 emissions reduction targets. I also suspect independent Tony Windsor could wedge Barnaby Joyce on this issue.

I declare an active business interest in such a technological revolution, having been involved for over 15 years in many such activities. However, I am at a loss to see how, as a nation, we can let established (and potentially quite profitable) technologies sit on the shelf. These include opportunities to refine coal, or to more effectively store wind and solar power, or to produce base-load solar at the world’s lowest cost, or to generate electricity and ethanol from sugar cane, among others. None have been effectively commercialised to date.

Turnbull has raised significant expectations with his rhetoric on innovation, and how we have to make a “transition” from an economy/society based on a resources boom, to whatever. Effective and genuine climate policies are fundamental to both.

Shorten can wedge Turnbull on climate

Written by The Conversation USA

His challenge is to make it happen by putting some substance behind the rhetoric.

Disclosure

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Read more <http://theconversation.com/shorten-can-wedge-turnbull-on-climate-58400>