

Plea to politicians on energy: stop the brawling

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Eighteen groups ranging from business energy users and suppliers through to the union movement and environmental advocates have issued a plea for political leaders to “stop partisan antics” and work together to achieve energy reform.

The appeal comes as three conservative state oppositions – in Victoria, Queensland and South Australia – promise that in government they would scrap independent state renewable energy targets in favour of a single national approach.

The groups’ statement follows the current hyper blame game in the debate about South Australian power failures, the role of renewables there and elsewhere, and the way forward to a more secure national system.

The Turnbull government has used SA blackouts to attack the Weatherill government and target Labor generally over the ALP’s strong commitment to renewables.

Energy policy is likely to feature heavily again in this parliamentary week, in the wake of the heat wave.

Malcolm Turnbull continued his partisan note in welcoming the state oppositions’ announcement. “The result of unrealistic state-based targets has been huge power bills for families and businesses and unreliable supply,” he said.

“Bill Shorten wants to adopt South Australia’s failed ideological experiment which will lead to even higher power bills and more blackouts.”

In their statement the groups say: “There is simply no room for partisan politics when the reliability, affordability and sustainability of Australia’s energy system is at stake.

Plea to politicians on energy: stop the brawling

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

"The status quo of policy uncertainty, lack of co-ordination and unreformed markets is increasing costs, undermining investment and worsening reliability risks. This impacts all Australians, including vulnerable low-income households, workers, regional communities and trade-exposed industries."

Those signing the statement include the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Industry Group as well as the Australian Energy Council and the Energy Users Association of Australia.

The groups say "finger pointing" will not solve Australia's energy challenges.

"More than a decade of this has made most energy investments impossibly risky. This has pushed prices higher while hindering transformational change of our energy system. The result is enduring dysfunction in the energy sector."

Urging a "mature" debate, the groups say reform cannot happen without federal and state agreement "and policies can't last and motivate investment without broad cross-party support".

Politicians, federal and state and across the spectrum, need to come together to find solutions, backing and working with the Finkel review into the future security of the national electricity market, the groups say.

After the preliminary report of the Finkel review gave a favourable mention to an emissions intensity scheme Turnbull, under pressure from the conservatives in his ranks, quickly ruled one out.

The groups' statement says: "As the preliminary report of the Finkel review correctly notes, many of the technological, economic and consumer trends transforming our energy systems are irreversible. Policy and market designs need to evolve if investors are to deliver the energy services Australians require at a price they can afford. A raft of reforms are needed to encourage and support flexibility throughout the system.

Plea to politicians on energy: stop the brawling

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

"The next stage of the Finkel review should be an opportunity to explore these possibilities and develop a comprehensive and integrated suite of reforms. Policy should be implemented promptly with broad based political support."

The full list of groups is: Australian Aluminium Council, Australian Conservation Foundation, Australian Council of Social Services, Australian Council of Trade Unions, Australian Energy Council, The Australian Industry Group, Australian Steel Institute, Business Council of Australia, Cement Industry Federation, Chemistry Australia, Clean Energy Council, Energy Efficiency Council, Energy Networks Australia, Energy Users Association of Australia, Investor Group on Climate Change, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council, The Climate Institute, and WWF Australia.

Political donations reform

Opposition Leader Bill Shorten will introduce a private member's bill on Monday for reform of political donations.

The legislation would:

-

reduce the donation disclosure limit from the current level of \$13,200 (indexed to inflation) to a fixed \$1000;

-

prohibit foreign donations;

-

ban "donation splitting", where donations are spread between different branches of political parties and associated entities to avoid disclosure;

-

Plea to politicians on energy: stop the brawling

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

ban anonymous donations of more than \$50;

-

link public funding to campaign expenditure; and

-

Introduce new offences and increased penalties for abuses of the political donation disclosure provisions.

The opposition says it is pursuing the issue of real-time disclosure through the parliamentary committee on electoral matters.

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond the academic appointment above.

Authors: Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Read more <http://theconversation.com/plea-to-politicians-on-energy-stop-the-brawling-72849>