

## View from The Hill: It's the internal agitators who are bugging Scott Morrison on Adani

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

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Barnaby Joyce describes the contentious Adani coal mine, which is dividing the north and the south constituencies of both Coalition and Labor, as an “egg and bacon” issue.

“For the chook [the south] it’s a passing interest. For the pig [the north] – his ham is on the line”.

Whatever the government does, whatever Bill Shorten says, neither can win comprehensively on Adani, because of what’s a “Brisbane line” in views (many in Brisbane would think like “southerners” rather than “northerners”).

It’s a morass for each side; as one Labor man says, “we’re both in the same hole”.

Environment Minister Melissa Price – who since Scott Morrison appointed her has been near invisible - has before her a groundwater management plan for Adani.

Whether she will scrawl her signature in the next few days is an open question. Her spokesman simply says she’s “moving ahead” with the process.

When the election is called, as soon as the weekend, the government goes into caretaker mode. It would seem impossible, and certainly be inappropriate, to sign off without opposition agreement during that period.

Some from the Queensland LNP, including Resources Minister Matt Canavan, and Joyce (ex-Queensland LNP senator, now member for New England), are screaming for Price to act; southern Liberals are praying she doesn’t.

Joyce told The Conversation: “Many people in the south wouldn’t have a clue how to get [to Adani].”

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"This reeks of the south trying to tell central Queensland what to do. Central Queensland doesn't even want Brisbane telling it what to do, let alone Sydney and Melbourne."

Declaring Adani affects jobs and development and three Nationals seats (Capricornia, Flynn and Dawson), Joyce says it is "very important" Price "signs off this week".

Joyce made his case to Morrison last week, who told him the matter was going through "proper processes". Morrison said at a news conference on Monday there were some remaining administrative matters, and "we'll be taking the advice of the scientists when it comes to making those decisions. [...] They are quite minor matters in the scheme of the broader approvals that have already been provided".

Addressing a Brisbane lunch in the "faux" election campaign, Morrison tried to shrug off pesky protesters who interrupted him. He might have been thinking they weren't as hard to handle as his own troops.

The Courier Mail [reported](#) on Monday that the LNP's James McGrath had warned Price "that he will publicly call for her resignation if she fails to treat the Adani project fairly". According to the story: "In terse and blunt correspondence, Senator McGrath told the embattled Minister he would issue a press release calling for her ministerial scalp if Queensland jobs were thrown under the bus".

McGrath's office did not deny the report – his spokesman merely said "James is not commenting on private discussions with colleagues".

Senate leader Mathias Cormann, who had to field questions about the McGrath story at Monday's Senate estimates, was frank. "Obviously I would have much rather if he had not made that sort of communication but he has and you know we are where we are."

Shorten seized on McGrath's attempted strong-arming as a "bullying" issue. Such threatening behaviour was "not the appropriate use of political influence," he said.

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“The problem for the current Prime Minister is he has a mutiny - in fact, he has two mutinies,” Shorten said. “He has a mutiny on his southern flank in the big cities who say they’re concerned about [...] being accused of doing nothing on climate change. [...] But he’s got a mutiny on his northern flank, because he’s made promises there which he can’t sustain”.

The opposition leader is under similar pressures. Last year he was regularly being accused of trying to walk both sides of the Adani street.

Labor needs to sway votes in central Queensland to make some gains, and to keep votes, notably in the marginal seat of Herbert which it is in danger of losing. In contrast, in city seats like Batman, Sydney and Grayndler Labor MPs face heavy pressure from anti-Adani protesters who often stage protests outside their electorate offices.

Labor’s position is that Adani, if it passed all the environmental tests, should stand or fall on commercial considerations – and senior Labor figures are sceptical that the project is viable.

The opposition will not pre-empt any decisions an ALP environment minister might have to make under the legislation.

Pressed on Monday, Shorten didn’t want to be drawn on what Labor in government would do beyond “we will be guided by the best science and by the law of the land and we won’t be ripping up any contracts”.

It would wait on what the government did. As well, “we’ve also got to see what the Queensland government does. When we know all the facts then we can make the decisions”.

Meanwhile high-profile independent candidates challenging Liberals are climbing into the issue, which presses all the coal-and-climate-change political buttons.

Zali Steggall, Tony Abbott’s challenger in Warringah, tweeted: “The move to rubber stamp

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Adani before the election needs to be called out and stopped. It could result in a huge cost to the Australian people. Let's protect the Great Barrier Reef and all the jobs that come with it".

In Victoria, the spat has got personal.

Julia Banks, who defected from the Liberals to the crossbench and is running against Health Minister Greg Hunt in Flinders, tweeted about her new jewellery, "My team know I love earrings and that I want to #StopAdani - so they bought me these! Just like the Flinders community, we are all committed to #StopAdani and move Australia towards a renewable future".

This prompted Banks' former colleague, Liberal senator Jane Hume into a sharp retort. "You giggled and cheered when ScoMo reminded Labor that coal is Australia's second biggest export. You never once spoke out against Adani in the Party Room. Your principles are breathtakingly selective. I've let you off the hook for your hypocrisy long enough".

Ouch.

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

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