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Senator BERNARDI (South Australia) (16:31): In following Senator Moore to discuss this topic, I do make the point that Senator Moore referenced the issue—I will paraphrase here, Senator Moore—that it is time to stop the argy-bargy and work together constructively to get an outcome. That is generally the way of those who are getting what they want. They want to work constructively because they know that the capitulation of common sense and reason is almost complete on the other side. When it is outreach and working together, it means doing what those on the other side of the chamber actually want. That is a problem because the energy crisis this country undoubtedly faces is a direct product of the policies that have been enacted by successive governments over the last decade. Now, belatedly, honourable senators and MPs are being dragged kicking and screaming to recognise the disaster that they have created. I say that it is belatedly because it has been obvious to all and sundry who want to see and who can study the facts for themselves and to those people who bother to talk to people in business about the crisis of electricity. It has been obvious to all and sundry who have taken the time to talk with pensioners and families who are struggling to pay their electricity bills if the lights are even on. That, once again, is a direct product of the people in this place and the decisions that have been made over many years.

It is government policy that is responsible for the electricity crisis in this country—nothing else. It is government policy that has created the problem. There are no ifs or buts. There is this foolish pursuit of renewable energy targets that has compromised our electricity security, not only most notably in my state of South Australia, but right across the country. I say it is foolishness because everyone knew that renewable energy was intermittent, unreliable and uneconomic yet they pursued this green dream, thinking that, somehow, we can pave our way to nirvana. Well, it has all come crashing down because the renewable energy industry itself is completely unsustainable without taxpayer dollars, and those taxpayer dollars are being borrowed. At the moment, about \$40 billion a year overall is being borrowed, but some of that is being channelled into the renewable energy sector, which has so egregiously let down the people of South Australia and is letting down the people of Australia. In my state of South Australia, we had what was effectively a five-day power failure. That is Third World stuff. For five days, a state in a First World country was without power. Businesses lost tens of thousands of dollars, and millions of dollars in some instances, in stock because the lights and the refrigeration were not kept on. Business investment in places like Port Lincoln, where they want to build cold storage facilities, has been absolutely stopped. Millions of dollars worth of investment has been stopped because they cannot rely on the electricity generation. We see businesses in small country towns and larger businesses in major metropolitan centres buying diesel generators to back up the unreliable electricity supply—and why? Because of the ideological pursuit of a 50 per cent renewable energy target.

That is Labor's policy and, until a few moments ago, it was Senator Xenophon's policy. Senator Xenophon cannot escape unscathed here, even though he is crab-walking away from his own belief system, because he was the one who was pursuing this renewable energy policy with some sort of special zeal. Then, when it was turning catastrophically bad, he decided he would tax the taxpayers more by demanding and insisting upon \$70 rebates and subsidies for everyone who was suffering under the policy that he created. Now, today, he has done the little mea culpa. He said, 'Maybe the 50 per cent renewable energy target was a bit ambitious.' He sacked his best mate from being a candidate for his next party in South Australia, whatever it is called, because his mate belled the cat and said it was a ridiculous policy. I wonder if his mate is going to be reinstated. That will be something for Senator Xenophon to announce to the South Australian people—I got it wrong for so many years. My mate got it right. Maybe he should be leader of the Nick Xenophon Team.'

But the responsibility does not just lie with the Nick Xenophon Team. It lies with everyone who has tried to cobble together some amalgam of fiction married to an ideological agenda that is being imposed from afar. Apparently, because we are resource rich, we are a prosperous nation and we have bountiful products with which to produce electricity, we are somehow destroying humanity. It is simply not true. Cheap, reliable and abundant electricity is the recipe for economic and human progression. If you have any doubts about that, go to a place like South Australia, where it is not cheap and it is not reliable. Our industry is suffering. Our state is suffering. If you want to extrapolate it out, go to a place where there is no real electricity connected in any meaningful form.

Compare the quality of life, the life expectancy, the health and welfare outcomes and the economy there with those places that are generating cheap and plentiful electricity.

Yet, notwithstanding the crisis that our country faces, the ideologues are still pursuing this green dream. They are shutting down coal fired power stations with nothing to replace them. In South Australia, of course, the Labor government faces a political crisis because, in March of next year, after what is expected to be a stinking hot summer with plenty of power blackouts due to the green energy schemes that they have insisted upon, they will be looking to have a quick fix. Do you know what the quick fix is? They are going to go out and lease or purchase a whole bunch of diesel generators to back up their green dream. Diesel generators are probably the most inefficient, most polluting form of generating electricity known to man. I have heard reports that in another green oasis, that second life experiment called Tasmania, where the Greens been running the show far too long, they have got diesel generators there. It costs something like \$11 million per month to fuel these diesel generators and to subsidise them. In South Australia, the government is going to be switching those on in about November or December just so they can get through the politically expedient period of three or four months without any blackouts. The cost of that is going to be tens of millions of dollars, which is going to be more than it would cost to fund the Port Augusta power station to keep it operating, burning coal for another couple of years until they can build another gas-fired power station or thereabouts.

Then we have, of course, the crisis with gas that Senator Xenophon talked about. I understand that gas contracts are wrong, are not acting in our interests and we have been done over on some of them. But there is this tie-up of resources. There is an inability for people to explore the gas or unconventional gas in some areas, to access a bountiful resource, because, once again, green ideology seems to have infected every major party. It started on the crossbench with one or two and it has crept its way around this chamber. I am happy to tell you and am happy to tell the people of Australia that Australian Conservatives are not buying into it.

Our energy policy is remarkably simple: stop subsidising any of it. Let the market do its work. I have heard time and time again about a market pricing mechanism. Leave it alone and the market will work it out. Become agnostic about how your electricity is delivered and generated and allow investment to take place. I do not care if it is windmills, solar panels, batteries, gas, coal or nuclear—there is the other thing missing in this debate. No-one seems to want to talk about the N-word, nuclear.

They do not want to talk about it because it might challenge some of their own beliefs, but I can tell you right now that, if a nuclear power station stacks up economically, we need to open our minds to having one built. There is no doubt about that, because that is a zero-emissions way of generating electricity. That would satisfy those catastrophists who have bought into the Marxist agenda of global warming, which is not happening. It will also provide base load power. I know there are concerns about that, but the new generation of reactors—the modular reactors—can be dealt with in a safe and efficient manner. In actual fact, if we decided to get really smart, we would explore the nuclear fuel cycle, including the safe storage of radioactive material, as a generator of revenue for this country.

That is what we need to open our minds to in this country, but instead we are doing every single consumer in this country a disservice. With every insistence that we fund another renewable energy project or somehow demonise the coal industry, we say it is okay for us to dig it up and ship it to India for them to burn, because we recognise their right to have cheap, reliable electricity. Or we send it off to China to burn over there, because we think they deserve cheap and reliable electricity. But somehow the Australian people do not deserve it—and what is it? Senator Moore referenced Senator Brandis's answers in question time today. Senator Brandis said—and I will paraphrase—that our commitment to the Paris Agreement was 'not an obligation but an undertaking' or words to that effect. So why the hell did we sign it in the first place? What's the point? It is not going to make one jot or tittle of difference to the climate. The only thing it is going to do is impede our economic development in favour of other people's economic development. And who the heck is an unelected international body to tell us or to instruct us or to obligate us to fulfil their fanciful dreams, particularly when the world's largest economy and emitter has just walked away from it? We should do the same.

If we are serious about solving an electricity crisis, we need to change the mindset in this place. That means we have to accept there is a place for any type of electricity generation if it is economic and if it is sustainable. When I say 'sustainable', I do not mean you have to have it committed for 100 years, but, if the crisis is baseload energy and someone wants to build a coal-fired power station, we should allow them to do it and we should allow them to do it with certainty. That means that if government is going to be a technology agnostic and wants to get the

best results for the Australian people, it will say, 'We will not change the environmental conditions attached to that project for the life of the project.' If governments in the future break that agreement, they will then have to compensate the generator for it. In other words, they would do so at their own peril, because that is how we will give investment confidence to this country. It will be the same. We should have an open mind to nuclear power or thorium reactors, which people are continually telling me about and that are even more efficient again. We simply cannot close our minds to this, because otherwise we are not dealing in reality.

The crisis we face right now is going to get worse before it ever gets better. It will simply not get better if we are relying on Elon Musk and his battery storage technology. You can send \$100 million on batteries and it will keep South Australia alight for six minutes or something like that, I am not sure, and then 10 years later you can replace them again and spend another \$100 million to keep it alight for another 12 minutes when the wind has been blowing and the sun has been shining. Let me tell you, it is a very dark day for a lot of people in hardship in this country. It is a dark day because they do not want to turn their heater on and they do not want to turn their lights on, because the cost of power is out of control.

I come back to it: the only reason it is out of control is because the market has been distorted. It has been distorted by taxpayer-funded subsidies. In effect the taxpayers are paying twice, because they are paying the bills of the government and the interest costs on the money that the government borrows to throw in to international renewable energy generators, wind and solar farms, who then pass on the higher costs of their generation to the Australian consumer. They are subsidising coal and gas out of existence. The intermittent gas generators cannot afford to fire up their plants, because they are competing, when the wind is blowing, with something that is subsidised to zero. This is madness. It is utter madness, and it says almost everything about the failings of government, but not just the current government.

We have been through this many times. We had 'the great moral challenge of our time'. Remember when Prime Minister Rudd said that? And then, of course, we had the different approach of Ms Gillard. She said there would be no carbon tax under a government she led and then she introduced one. Then when Prime Minister Rudd came back he was remarkably silent on that climate change malarkey in his three weeks in office—a vindicating stroll around the country. Then we had Mr Abbott, of course, who repealed the carbon tax, but did initiate the Renewable Energy Target scheme. He claimed to have reduced it to 26 per cent or something along those lines. We have all in one way, shape or form gone along with this to solve political problems.

The difficulty now is that it is a political problem but it is also a massive economic problem for our country. That economic problem, as I said, is caused by government policy. It does not matter if you call it an ETS or a RET or a LRET or a CET or any other acronym. It comes down to this: the government interfering and distorting a market, damaging Australia's economic prospects and damaging individual Australians' quality of life. That is what we are facing. Until we recognise that and everyone in this place and in the other place faces up to that fact and says the only way to solve this is to ditch the ideology, ditch the theology attached to it and ditch the green dream which will never be reached. We have to open up the market to what it does best—that is competition, that is certainty and surety and that is survival of the fittest.

That will guarantee the best outcomes for the Australian consumer. It will guarantee us a place at the First World table where electricity stays on. The South Australian experiment is gradually being exported right around the country. It is being exported there through the ideology of Labor governments, Liberal governments and Nick Xenophon wannabe governments. The only government you can rely on to clean it all up would be a conservative government. I know that that is highly likely, at the next election anyway, but the aspiration is there for everyone else to follow. If you want a policy agenda that is going to act in Australia's interest, dump the ideology. Open your minds to what is required to make a difference in our people's lives and our economic future.