



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Carbon Pricing
SPEECH

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BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

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Speaker Bernardi, Sen Cory

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Senator BERNARDI (South Australia) (15:38): Scarcely has there been a more accurate and succinct motion condemning the deception of the Australian people by any government. Prime Minister Gillard's broken promise to the Australian people can be summed up in her immediate promises before the election. Just six days before the election, on 16 August 2010, Prime Minister Gillard said: 'There will be no carbon tax under a government I lead.' Those were her words, meant to soothe the concerns of the Australian people, who knew a carbon tax would be ineffective, would not help the environment and would only add to the cost-of-living pressures that they were already crumbling under.

That was not the last time Prime Minister Gillard had mouthed that platitude or something similar. On 20 August, four days later, she said: 'I rule out a carbon tax.' She made a crystal-clear promise to the Australian people and four days later reiterated it—confirming her previous words—when she was justifying the brutal knifing of the former Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, also saying there needed to be a 'community consensus' before a price on carbon could be introduced.

Let me confirm for the record that we will be referring to this price on carbon. However, it is not a price on carbon at all; it is a price on carbon dioxide—which the government will maintain is a pollutant even though her own pollutants agency does not recognise it as such. We know this is about spin and sophistry to cover up for a Prime Minister who does not have a mandate to introduce this very poor policy. It is not grounded in political validation through an election. It is not grounded in a validation of the science. It is not a validation of any justification—

Senator Polley interjecting—

Senator BERNARDI: I hear the interjections about the GST from Senator Polley on the other side. The extraordinary delusions of the Labor Party—they refuse to acknowledge the simple fact that Prime Minister Howard, in proposing a GST, took it to an election and put it very clearly in front of the Australian people. There seems to be a stark difference, Senator Polley, between our approach of levelling with the Australian people and the approach taken by this Prime Minister, who is about deception and spin.

Senator Polley interjecting—

Senator Bilyk interjecting—

Senator BERNARDI: I will just remind you, Senator Polley and others on that side that it was the 'real Julia' we heard from during the election, the one who spoke without scripted notes. Remember, she was not going to have scripted notes—they all trotted out that line after their policy launch—except for the fact that she had them in front of her. The lies that have been told by this Prime Minister and this government are extraordinary.

That is why the coalition is asking for this government to renew the faith of the Australian people, to redress the breach of trust with the Australian public that is leaving such a bitter taste in their mouths. The voters of Australia did not elect a parliament or a government that supported a carbon tax. Voters did not force a carbon tax onto a reluctant Prime Minister. This Prime Minister forced it upon herself, and she wants to force it onto the Australian people. She maintains that her backflip on her 'no carbon tax' election promise is not a breach of the trust of the Australian people—it is necessary to redress climate change. Yet they will not tell us what the environmental benefits will be.

Many people tell us what the consequences of this carbon tax will be. We know that it will put up the price of electricity, which Australian families are already suffering under. At \$26 a tonne, it is estimated it will put 25 per cent on the cost of electricity. But of course the main pressure group within the ALP, which is the Greens, wanted to start at \$40 a tonne and then raise it to \$100 a tonne. Imagine the impact that would have on every Australian family. The price of electricity will filter through to every other goods and services provider because most of those involve the use of electricity. We also know that the price of transport will rise, putting even more

pressure on the costs of living. We know these things because they are self evident. Everyone seems to recognise and identify them except the government.

We also know that jobs will be exported because industries will be forced to close. In Port Pirie in South Australia, 35 per cent of the workforce is directly or indirectly employed through the smelter. We could see that smelter move offshore, taking with it the efficient emissions and recreating the emissions in a far less efficient manner overseas.

Of course, that does not matter to Prime Minister Gillard or the Labor Party, because what they are interested in is taking more money from the pockets of the Australian people. Make no mistake, this is about a big tax to prop up a big-spending government. Yes, they are going to give some money back in the form of, maybe, some pension relief or some tax relief—we are not sure yet—but they are going to keep the majority of it. They are going to keep the majority of the revenue taken from this big tax—estimated to be \$12 billion in its first year—to try to balance their books. Not for them is the normal way of Australian families, where they cut their cloth to fit their purse and where they have to tighten their belts, which families are asked to do all the time. That does not enter the vernacular of this government. They are happy to waste as much money as they possibly can, always seeking short-term benefit, to the long-term detriment of our nation.

The coalition put to the government—and we put it to the Australian people—that the only legitimate way this government can introduce this big new tax is, firstly, to seek the assent of the Australian people. We would, of course, prefer an election, because that is the time-honoured way in which it is done, but we also understand that, with the balance of power of the Independents in the House, the government is not prepared to go to an election right now. So we say: why not seek the authorisation of the Australian people by way of a plebiscite? In the Prime Minister's earlier spin and rhetoric when she brutally knifed Kevin Rudd, she said that she would not introduce a CPRS, a carbon tax or any other price on carbon dioxide emissions without a broad based consensus. I hate to break it to those on the other side but a broad based consensus is not simply the word of paid mouthpieces like Professor Ross Garnaut and Dr Tim Flannery. It is not about them just making up stuff and saying, 'This is outrageous; we're all going to be destroying the planet unless we can implement a tax.' But that is exactly what has happened. It is about getting the Australian people onside and knowing that this is going to be an effective and positive policy for the country. The Australian people know that it is not. They know that this is a tax that has been foisted upon them without authorisation, without justification and without explanation. This is an extraordinary position for a government to take, and it is a very disappointing position for any government to take. I can fully understand how there may have to be some subtle shifts in policy positions, but I cannot understand how something that has been so unequivocally ruled out can then be ruled in without any further reference to the Australian people.

The unfortunate thing is that the coalition will strive valiantly to make the Australian people aware of what this government is doing to them. But, I regret to say, I fear their awareness may come when it is too late. If this carbon tax gets through the parliament and is implemented, it will only escalate until the coalition can get in and repeal it. Whether it starts at \$10, \$15, \$20 or \$25, what we know is that, over the next four years or until this government is gone, it will continue to rise and the 'benefits' will continue to hurt the Australian people, because the benefits of this tax are benefits for other nations. The benefits will create industry in other nations, and they will create jobs in other nations. We will see emissions exported to other nations, where they will get larger, and every Australian will suffer when they turn on their lights, when they open their fridge and when they drive their car. The only one who will not suffer will be this Prime Minister, who will be put out to pension with her superannuation. She will have to wash her hands of the consequences of her heinous policy position. This is a tragedy for Australia, and this government needs to level with the Australian people.