

Slaying the Dragon of Net Zero Emissions

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The Queensland Nationals Senator Matt Canavan is a jewel of parochialism, a darling of nutty consternation. As a member of a party historically hostile to cutting fossil fuel emissions, he has been, for the most part, at home. But some of his colleagues have had environmental conversions, hammering out an understanding with their Liberal counterparts about a net zero emissions target by 2050.

This understanding was only reached after much hollering and fuss prior to Prime Minister Scott Morrison’s visit to the climate change conference in Glasgow in 2021. But Canavan was having none of it and [was delighted](#) by the conference’s end that countries had agreed to “phase down” rather than “phase out” coal burning.

The communique of COP26 was, according to the Queensland Senator, a “green light” for Australia to keep digging and “supply the world with more coal because that’s what brings people out of poverty.” There had “never been a higher demand” for coal and a virtuous Australian fossil fuel market would be happy to feed it.

With an election campaign in full swing, Canavan has again attempted to slay the net zero emissions dragon, taking the lead from LNP candidate for the seat of Flynn, Colin Boyce. Boyce had [suggested](#) that the commitment to net zero was flexible, permitting “wiggle room” and a distinct lack of fidelity.

On the ABC’s *Afternoon Briefing* program, Canavan went one further in [roundly proclaiming](#) that “net zero is ... dead.” With such remarks, the accord reached between the Liberals and Nationals about achieving net zero emissions by 2050 seemed, not only shaky but erased. “[UK Prime Minister] Boris Johnson said he is pausing the net zero commitment, Germany is building coal and gas infrastructure, Italy’s reopening coal-fired power plants. It’s all over. It’s all over bar the shouting here.”

With the election campaign in full swing, these remarks proved unwelcome to his government colleagues. “This is not the party’s position, that’s not the Coalition’s position and it’s not the government’s position,” Morrison [confirmed](#). “That’s his view, it’s no surprise, he’s held it for a long time, it’s been resolved and our policy was set out very clearly.”

The Nationals MP Michelle Landry was less diplomatic. “Pull your head in, Matt,” she waspishly chided, while Victorian Nationals MP Darren Chester [suggested](#) that Canavan had lost not merely the argument but a sense of perspective. “Matt Canavan is becoming like the Japanese intelligence officer who refused to accept World War II was over and hid in the Philippines jungle for 30 years.”

Former Nationals leader, Michael McCormack, [did the media rounds suggesting](#) that Canavan’s remarks were “not helpful”. The issue of emission targets had been resolved. “There are enough sensible people in the National Party to ensure people know we are committed to it.”

The discordance in government ranks was a boon to the Labor Party. “The Liberal and National Parties are in open warfare about their net zero emissions policy, in the middle of an election campaign,” [came the assessment](#) from Labor Senator Murray Watt.

Anyone familiar with the Canavan copy book will be touched and dismayed by his entertainingly grotesque readings of climate change. In 2021, [he tweeted photos](#) of snow filled scenes in regional New South Wales mocking the idea that there was a rise in global temperatures. He has also been unsparing about the authors of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. “One of the IPCC authors was quoted as saying he hoped this report would scare people so it would help change their vote,” [he recalled](#).

climate change pic.twitter.com/CT5pYjL9oL

— Proud Aussie Matt Canavan (@mattjcan) [June 10, 2021](#)

The senator has also [become a socialist](#) of sorts, at least when it comes to fossil fuel polluters. Far from being demonised, those in the industry should be coddled and cushioned from the predatory behaviour of banks refusing to fork out financing for new mines. “Global banks that want to control who has a job in Australia should be locked out of our country.” Australians should well “pay higher interest rates but that would be worth it to protect our independence”.

In 2020, [he told an](#) Australian national program that the idea of zero emissions was never something that had been put to the electorate. “The Australian people have never voted for net zero emissions... We seem to try and get bullied into these positions that the Australian people didn’t vote for.” He also attacked the Paris climate agreement as “transferring industrial wealth from the west and from Australia to China, a country that’s bullying and threatening us.” (It must surely strike Canavan as ironic that China’s [demand for Australian commodities, notably iron ore](#), remains insatiable.)

With such attitudes, Canavan is bound to win a fair share of votes. His unabashed hostility to environmental activists and his adoration of coal continues to sell well as a message in parts of his home state. It is proving less convincing in Australia’s metropolitan centres,

increasingly terrified by a planet on the boil.

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