



Matter of Public Importance Debate:
A Price on Carbon
Chamber of the House of Representatives
22 March 2011
Sharon Grierson MP

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (4.35 pm)—It is a great pleasure to rise on what I see as a Matter of Public Importance set by this incompetent Opposition—an own goal, all its own work. It is quite ironic to be speaking on a motion that speaks of the failure to act competently or provide factual information. I noticed when the Leader of the Opposition was speaking, he was not speaking from carefully prepared and scripted remarks. So I suppose again: no gospel truth, nothing we can rely on, and acts of deceit quite possibly.

What a great opportunity to outline what it feels like to be part of a competent government: a government that does act in the national interest, that is committed to reform, that will make the tough decisions and that will make those decisions informed by evidence and sound advice, just as we acted competently in the global financial crisis—again providing leadership in the national interest; again, a government that will contribute to the international stage to resolve the challenges of this century.

We will continue to act competently. We will continue to make the reforms that are needed, because we are not afraid to create our future for this nation. We are not afraid to introduce the big reform agenda that we are prospering and delivering. We will not use fear, we will not use scaremongering and we will not diminish the economic and scientific evidence put forward by Australians, fine Australians, great Australians and great Australian institutions—institutions like the CSIRO and economic advisers like Ross Garnaut.

We will not tear down those things that make this a great nation: the power of science, innovation and knowledge; the wealth derived from the skills and talents of our people; the value of economic policy informed by experts. We will continue to act competently and we will deliver the big reforms such as the National Broadband Network (NBN), which will transform the way we live, the way we do business and the way we engage with each other. Big reforms such as the NBN will create new economic opportunity for regional Australia. We will continue to invest in infrastructure such as the Hunter Expressway and the Australian Rail Track Corporation, infrastructure through which we can envisage the possibility of high-

speed rail on the east coast of Australia, and we will continue to have a national ports strategy and freight strategies and to look at our airport strategies. These things were lacking for 12 miserable years. We will keep finding ways to use the revenue from the mining boom to invest back into our economy for future prosperity, and we will do the big one—the price on carbon.

I know the power of reforms because I am the member for Newcastle. I know that the path to prosperity is through reform and change. The economic transformation of Newcastle over the last 10 to 15 years from a heavy-industrial, one-company town to a leading centre for innovation, productivity and prosperity is something that we can be proud of. We have gone from 17 per cent unemployment in the mid and late 1990s to five per cent unemployment now in 2011. Over 88,000 jobs have been created in my region in the last decade— and why? Because we invested in high-tech and in knowledge; we invested in innovation.

We diversified our economy and took on the skill challenge. By the end of 2010, employment in knowledge-based industries had increased to the point where it was around 66 per cent higher than employment in goods-producing industries such as coal.

What a turnaround has occurred—and why? Because of the reforms undertaken by the Hawke, Keating, Rudd and Gillard Governments. We know now that our future prosperity will depend on putting a price on carbon. That is something we embrace and have waited for far too long. Business wants some consistency.

They want some certainty and they want to know what things will look like in the future. They want to know what they can do to create the optimum outcomes for themselves, and the most powerful market signal will be a price on carbon. We also know that it is the early adopters in this world, in business and in life, who thrive and survive. Yet I look across at the Neanderthals on the other side and despair for the nation should they ever regain government. They have no imagination, they diminish those who could advise them well and they rush headlong into a divided world of scaremongering and fear.

A price on carbon will allow industry to start auditing and measuring their carbon footprint and to do the economic modelling that could make their businesses successful. They will know the cost of that pollution, and they will then know the opportunity for new investment and what it is worth. They will know what the use of offsets will do to create businesses of the future. I know a little bit about those wonderful businesses of the future because in Newcastle we have the Australian Solar Institute, the Clean Energy Innovation Centre, the Smart Grid, Smart City initiative, the CSIRO Energy Transformed Flagship and the energy centre for the nation – all delivered by a Labor Government. We know that these innovation centres will create the future, but I want to tell you how hard that will be without a price on carbon.

Last week Commercialisation Australia and AusIndustry met at the Newcastle University Institute for Energy and Resources, which was also funded and set up by

this Labor government. We were looking at two great products. One was solar paint—water based paint— and the other was geothermal capacity to increase the efficiency of existing power plants. Commercialisation of those ventures is very attractive to overseas markets, but it is not attractive to Australian markets because there is no incentive to invest in these new products.

How tragic it would be if these great innovations were to go overseas. Yet that is what the opposition would see happen. Neanderthal man across there—the Leader of the Opposition—has aligned himself with the climate change sceptics. He has aligned himself with people who deny science and deny the future, he has diminished the credible voices that would shape that future and he is certainly committed to political expediency.

He has gone from the argument that climate change is 'crap' to the following, which he said at his press conference on the day he took over the leadership:

"Look, certainly I think the politics of this issue have changed. I don't think my assessment of the science or of the policies ever changed that much. I think all that really changed was my assessment of the politics of the issue."

So we have over there a leader who will use political expediency. He does not care about the science and he does not care about the economic benefits; he only cares about the politics of this issue. I guess he has put forward his credibility and his competency in this MPI discussion. His complacency saw him put forward a last-minute policy on climate change that was unfunded at a cost of \$10 billion. Who would pay for that? The Shadow Finance Minister answered that question today. He said, 'You have to actually cut spending to pay for things.' That is exactly what they will do it if they want to have their action agenda on climate change—they will cut spending.

Yet Tony Abbott would not say where he would make those spending cuts. As the Leader of the Opposition during the election campaign, when costing of his election commitments found a \$10 billion hole. That is the real Tony, a fairly incompetent Tony and one whom I think brings great disrepute to the party he supposedly belongs to.

The Leader of the Opposition also spoke about a kinder, gentler polity in this parliament, but we have not seen that today; instead we have again seen the power of scaremongering and disrespectful language. I tire of the misogynist language of the Leader of the Opposition—the use of the phrase 'the knitting circle', the repeated use of the words 'she' and 'shrill'—which serves to diminish and insult and personalise. It is not good enough for someone who sees himself as a future Prime Minister.

Then, of course, we have the member Cook wanting to talk today. He was hidden from this parliament for the last couple of days, but he must be getting his act together now. All he wants to do is to say that the immigration policies of the Howard government were successful. No, they were not. We remember the

dishonesty of SIEVX and we remember TPVs that made asylum-seekers have to beg to survive in this country. It was a ruthless regime that paid absolutely no attention to international events. I think it is shameful that the other side tried to diminish the parliament and diminish this nation.