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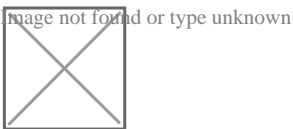
'Half-baked' Climate Policies Hurt Liberals In WA

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There will be no shortage of theories about the Coalition's performance for months to come. In Western Australia alone, the swing of -10.5 per cent was three times the national average. Yet, it'd be naive to attribute this entirely to Premier Mark McGowan's personal popularity.

What often masquerades as post-election analyses are narratives manufactured to legitimise preconceived agendas. Moderates blame conservatives, insisting we got smashed because we've shifted too far to the right. Conservatives blame moderates, insisting we got smashed because we've shifted too far to the left.



Liberal WA senate candidate Sherry Sufi says the Coalition tried to please everyone with its climate policies and in the end pleased no one, which drove people to Labor, the teals or the Nationals. CREDIT: ALEX ELLINGHAUSEN

If the Liberal Party is to become relevant again, lessons must be learnt. Until recently, the Coalition had a consistent track record of striking a balance between tackling climate action and protecting jobs in the resource sector.

Tony Abbott took over from Malcolm Turnbull in 2009 to resist his support for Kevin Rudd's emissions trading scheme. Abbott nearly brought down the Gillard government in 2010 offering voters a clear policy alternative to Labor on climate.

Critics are saying 2022 was a referendum on climate action. So was 2013. How is it that the Coalition scored a landslide 90-seat majority then?

It's simple, what Abbott offered was a clear, credible and consistent alternative to Labor and the Greens. Voters knew what was on the menu and the majority voted against a price on carbon.

Turnbull then defeated Abbott for the Liberal Party leadership in September 2015 and by 2017 put climate back on the agenda with his national energy guarantee, again splitting the Coalition party room in half. The result was yet another leadership spill, won by Scott Morrison in August 2018. Until now, the Coalition had provided voters an alternative on climate.

August 2018 also saw Greta Thunberg emerge on the world stage. Making the most of social media, her viral posts did more to draw the urgency of climate action to the world's attention than



any other activist to date. In 2021, the Morrison government released its Net Zero by 2050 policy to match global expectations.

After a decade of opposing ETS, carbon tax and NEG, the perception that the Coalition was by this stage the party which puts jobs and regional Australians ahead of inner-city climate targets was already cemented in people's minds.

Yet the Coalition designed its talking points on Net Zero to please everyone. The soundbites "technology, not taxes" and "expand choices, not mandates" convinced no one in the end. The conservative support base thought Net Zero went too far. Climate activists thought it didn't go far enough.

Institute of Public Affairs research found that in WA alone, Net Zero's restrictions on new coal, gas and oil projects could cost \$114.76 billion in foregone economic output, equivalent to 35.8 per cent of annual gross state product, which could prevent the creation of about 186,276 jobs.

The calculation was based on the 12 gas and LNG projects currently in the construction pipeline in WA, which are expected to commence roughly over the coming decade.

These alarming figures are a far better explanation to account for WA's 10 per cent swing than simply putting it all down to McGowan's popularity.

Much of the media portrayed Net Zero as relying on technology that hadn't even been invented yet. LNP Senator for Queensland Matt Canavan took a principled position against Net Zero mid-campaign with wide-ranging consequences.

It paid off in the regions as the Nationals managed to retain their seats. Except in the minds of the inner-city elite, it only left further doubt that the Coalition couldn't be trusted on climate.

In an attempt to please everyone, the Coalition managed to please no one in the end. Climate activists ran their own candidates across teal seats and won.

The extent to which Australia should cut its emissions when it accounts for just over 1 per cent of global emissions, is a contested policy space.

That's why there should be proper debate and community input about the role of government in facilitating the transition from fossil fuels to clean energy. When two sides of politics put the same dish on the menu, one half-baked and the other fully baked, voters think, "we might as well order the latter".

The greatest lesson for the Coalition here is to stick to its principles and establish a policy agenda that will appeal to aspirational Australians in the suburbs and regions, rather than pandering to an inner-city elite who were always going to vote against the Coalition eventually.

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