



Six Seats Are Wagging The Coalition Dog

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The idea that Scott Morrison's election policies should be decided according to what he thinks is popular in electorates such as Wentworth in Sydney and Kooyong in Melbourne is like Donald Trump running for president by appealing to voters in Manhattan and San Francisco.

Yet when it comes to the [Coalition's climate change](#) policies that's what is happening. It's not quite as bad as Labor's position on the Adani coal mine because while the Coalition only has one message on climate change, Bill Shorten has two equal and opposite messages on Adani according to who he's talking to at the time.

As a result of byelections and redistributions the Coalition holds 73 out of the 151 seats in the House of Representatives. Labor notionally has 72 seats. The Coalition's problem at the election in a fortnight's time is it needs not just to hold seats, but win seats to get to a majority of 76.

[Obviously every seat counts.](#) But to watch Scott Morrison talk about climate change is to get the impression that some seats count more than others.



The Coalition's climate change policies and the way it talks about the issue are determined by the belief that voters in six Liberal heartland seats across the country, want "real action" on climate change.

These six seats – Warringah and Wentworth in New South Wales, Goldstein and Higgins and Kooyong in Victoria, and Curtin in Western Australia – are the tail wagging the Coalition's climate change dog.

When it comes to climate change it's as if the concerns about ever-higher electricity prices from voters living in the the nation's other 145 federal seats don't count.

The point has often been made about the disproportionate influence on politics that 520,000 Tasmanians have with their 12 senators compared to New South Wales, with a population of 7.9 million people, that also has 12 senators. But that doesn't compare with the power wielded by a single swinging voter in Wentworth who goes on the nightly *ABC News* and announces climate change will decide her vote.

A preoccupation with these six seats means that for example the Coalition can't even discuss the benefits of Australia withdrawing from the Paris Climate Agreement, or the advantages of adopting nuclear power, let alone have any Coalition MP repeat what the the country's chief scientist has admitted, which is that nothing Australia does to reduce its emissions of carbon dioxide will have any noticeable impact on the planet's climate.

Importance of climate change

There's good evidence that nationwide climate change is nowhere near as big an issue as it might, or it is pretended to be in those six seats. A few days ago an Essential Research poll revealed that when voters were asked about the importance of specific campaign issues on how they would vote, climate change ranked behind, in order, healthcare, national security and terrorism, management of the economy, jobs, education, and tax. Further, climate change only narrowly beat immigration and then housing as issues of importance. Fifty per cent of Greens voters said climate change was an important issue to them, for Labor voters that figure was 31 per cent, and for Coalition voters 16 per cent.

Despite results like this, somehow the effect of climate change policy on the Coalition is that it continues to make and unmake Liberal leaders.

Amid all the talk of the need for "real action" it's forgotten that the Paris Climate Agreement to which Tony Abbott committed Australia to when he was PM, and which was implemented by Malcolm Turnbull as PM requires Australia on a per capita basis to reduce its emissions more deeply than the United States, Japan, the European Union, or China. As Abbott announced in a press release at the time of Australia's commitment to Paris in August 2015, "Our [Australia's] emissions intensity and emissions per person will fall further than other developed economies."



Clearly to voters in some of the country's most affluent electorates, Australia making the heaviest reductions to its carbon dioxide emission in the developed world doesn't qualify as "real action" on climate change.

Eventually it might dawn upon the Coalition that when it comes to satisfying rich voters in wealthy electorates who say they want "real action" on climate change, more action will never be enough.

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