

FLAT WHITE

ScoMo, net-zero, that deal – and the death of the Nationals?

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Getty Images

Like MPs from other political parties, the Nationals are motivated by self-interest with rare infusions of the public interest represented by Matthew Canavan and few others. Apparently, enough rural MPs have been persuaded by opinion research purporting to show that rural seats' voters believe the loud voices declaring "net zero" will be good for the regions. Others realise that any funding and regulatory

compensations offered for sacrificing mining and farming would be meagre.

Deputy Nationals leader [David Littleproud](#) says that cast iron guarantees can be offered to protect regional Australia. He claims the Nationals have triumphed in “securing but also growing regional jobs into the future.” This is absurd.

Perhaps Littleproud is deviously trying to excuse his support for a net zero policy to which he was already in agreement, as he must know the infeasibility of such guarantees. They would require something akin to those extended to low-quality renewable energy suppliers. These come in the form of 15-year contracts for a subsidy paying the difference between the value of their own generation and that of commercial supplies from coal.

Even car manufacturers in the heyday of protectionism could not cut such deals.

Experience shows that there are no prospects of rural communities extracting meaningful compensation – rural Australia was in fact the chief paymaster of yesteryear’s industry protectionism and, as Barnaby Joyce has estimated, landowners were bilked for \$200 billion in costs as a result of measures taken by governments (including Coalition Governments) to prevent land clearing in order to take credit for meeting the emission goals Australia agreed to under the 1997 Kyoto Convention.

Joyce endorsed net-zero policy with the claim, “Heroics that have no outcome, heroics that leave nothing but a rhetorical flourish ... is not an outcome that the Nationals party room supported.” In fact, there can be no formula that will compensate Australia for the damage a net-zero policy would cause with its consequent increased energy prices and the suppression of otherwise profitable mining opportunities.

Regional Australia will be more harmed than the rest of the nation. The Nationals will now see revitalised vultures circling their strongholds. One Nation, United Australia, Advance Australia, the Shooters Farmers and Fishers will be among this testing the accuracy of public opinion research that suggests rural Australia favours net zero. The outcome could fracture the Nationals and, indeed, the Coalition.

Doubtless, the Prime Minister has reasons to go to Glasgow with a bagful of costly promises to support the US, UK and EU. Perhaps foremost is that, having been persuaded of dangers presented by an aggressive Peoples Republic of China, he must reinforce US protection for Australia. If so, he misunderstands the strength of the hand Australia has as an ally and major source of global mining and agricultural products.

Ruminations on methane as a greenhouse gas have engendered juvenile ambit proposals by the Glasgow Treaty pen-people. At the heart of these are attacks on meat production to suppress methane emissions. These will easily be turned aside. The PM will however claim that his personal intervention prevented disaster happening and that we should all be grateful. That will please the woke mainstream media but will surely not persuade the electorate that we needed to sacrifice our national energy assets to win a concession that was never realistically losable.

Alan Moran wrote the chapter "Current trends and perspectives in Australia" in [Local Energy Markets](#) edited by Tiago Pinto et al and recently published by Elsevier.
