

Canada's lesson for Australia

Memo to Julia: carbon taxes don't grow in popularity
the more you try to pitch them

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We all know the Australian news media is obsessed with ruinously expensive policies to combat man-made global warming. Hardly a day goes by without a newspaper article or radio broadcast or television bulletin mentioning Julia Gillard's proposed carbon tax. But if you haven't read Gerard Henderson or heard Andrew Bolt in the past fortnight, you wouldn't know about the recent Canadian election result and the lesson it holds for Australia's carbon debate.

The upshot from the 2 May poll is that Canadians don't want the government getting involved with plant food, otherwise known as 'carbon emissions'. They don't want to trade in plant food. They don't want to worry about having to curtail their inadvertent plant food production if it's going to hit them in the hip pocket. They don't want to have to think about how much having to pay for plant food will cut into their monthly budget. So the Canadian people returned to power — with a parliamentary majority this time — the only party that has continually rejected international peer pressure to create an entire trading system out of plant food: Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservative party.

Canadians have effectively, out of self-interest, shunned the implementation of the warm and fuzzy theory by voting en masse for the party that isn't buying into it. Australians did the same at the last election in support their own similar resource-based economic future. Yet Julia Gillard has been so politically foolish as to do a backflip and push the carbon tax issue, despite its overwhelming unpopularity. Memo to the Aussie PM: learn from the Canadian experience.

Polls over the past couple of years have consistently shown that although Canadians believe that greenhouse gases contribute to global warming, support for a carbon tax or an emissions trading scheme drops considerably when voters are asked if they'd mind paying more for their gas and home heating oil bills as a result. (Sound familiar?) Support is lowest in the westernmost province of British Columbia, where the provincial government has already started adding their own carbon tax to things such as gas.

The election wiped out the country's

centre-left Liberal party — once humbly known as the 'natural governing party' — punting its leader, Michael Ignatieff, who will now have all the time in the world to ponder the nuances of considering a carbon tax both necessary and stupid, depending on the audience in question. One would think he might have learned something from his predecessor, former Liberal leader Stéphane Dion, whose carbon tax proposal effectively decimated any political ambitions.

Ignatieff, the Harvard and Oxford academic leading the Liberals, couldn't de-nuance a point or stick with a clear, consistent message to save his life. So he managed to annoy and confuse an entire nation. This left forming the official opposition to the socialist New Democratic party, a party that has fantasised about a carbon tax and credit system to the point of coming up with an extra \$21.5 billion to add to government coffers within four years, apparently through shameless gold-digging: diving into the pockets of companies to punish them for producing what the socialists feel is too much plant food. How exactly? Through a system that doesn't exist yet. Right — and I want to buy a mansion, put it on Mars, and commute to Earth every day. The Conservative majority will ensure that the socialists never get any sharp toys to play with. They'll just be fun to watch, but harmless, like the guy yelling at his newspaper in the subway train.

The thought of cracking down on plant food was amusing before the economic meltdown when we had nothing much better to worry about. In fact, that's how I knew, while living in the US, that Australia had achieved perfection: when I heard that the people Down Under had elected a prime minister who claimed that climate change



'It's me, I'm crossing the road.'

was the 'great moral challenge' of our time.

But now that things have taken a bit of a turn for the worse, smart governments are taking stock of their assets and resources to set themselves up for a competitive advantage in this world economy. Out of Harper's five campaign points, one of them states: 'investing in the development of Canada's North'. He hasn't been sending patrol ships, an icebreaker and troops up there, and periodically chasing Russian jets out of the region, to protect polar bears and caribou. There's black gold up there and the stage is being set. Similarly, Canada's Athabasca/Alberta Oil Sands contain 173 billion barrels of crude, according to a government report. At a time when US governments are vowing to reduce dependence on Mid-East oil in light of constant unrest, conflict and ideological friction, Canada is positioned as the quiet girl next door who grows up to be a hottie and suddenly has something everyone wants.

The stupidest thing Canada could do right now is sell out its competitive advantage and buy into this crock of a carbon trade scheme. Of course, the deep thinkers who came up with this had to take the food right out of plants' mouths, just like they took the corn out of the gobs of starving African kids by suggesting it's better for the Earth that we convert it to ethanol and shove it into our gas tanks.

If they really wanted to do something about the environment, they'd pick on local urban pollution like sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, and particulate matter — the things that make us cough. The problem is that local pollution can be too obviously measured by anyone with a set of eyes or lungs, and doesn't permit the implementation of a new worldwide tax scheme based on an invisible boogeyman.

Know who has implemented a carbon credit system? Richard Branson and Virgin Airlines. Flight attendants come around during your trip to ask if you feel guilty enough taking your trip across the Atlantic to cough up a few extra bucks in 'carbon offsets' — which are then used for things like building power plants in India and Indonesia. Branson salutes you for your generosity as his Virgin Galactic spaceship blasts off, spewing a ton of rocket fuel into the atmosphere. Hopefully he's not using the new breakthrough NASA 'environmentally friendly rocket fuel' which they announced a few years ago, described as producing by-products of... 'carbon dioxide and water'. In other words, guilt-inducing Earth poison which some feel should be guilt-taxed into oblivion.

The news from Canada suggests that Julia Gillard is taking a big gamble if she thinks the people will eventually warm to a carbon tax. They won't, and the result is a disaster-in-the-making for any carbon-taxing politician who faces the people.