

Response to Referendum Council's report on Constitutional Recognition

The Turnbull Government has carefully considered the Referendum Council's call to amend the Constitution to provide for a national Indigenous representative assembly to constitute a "Voice to Parliament".

The Government does not believe such an addition to our national representative institutions is either desirable or capable of winning acceptance in a referendum.

Our democracy is built on the foundation of all Australian citizens having equal civic rights – all being able to vote for, stand for and serve in either of the two chambers of our national Parliament – the House of Representatives and the Senate.

A constitutionally enshrined additional representative assembly for which only Indigenous Australians could vote for or serve in is inconsistent with this fundamental principle.

It would inevitably become seen as a third chamber of Parliament. The Referendum Council noted the concerns that the proposed body would have insufficient power if its constitutional function was advisory only.

The Referendum Council provided no guidance as to how this new representative assembly would be elected or how the diversity of Indigenous circumstance and experience could be fairly or democratically represented.

Moreover, the Government does not believe such a radical change to our constitution's representative institutions has any realistic prospect of being supported by a majority of Australians in a majority of States.

The Government believes that any proposal for constitutional change should conform to the principles laid down by the 2012 Expert Panel, namely that any proposal should "be capable of being supported by an overwhelming majority of Australians from across the political and social spectrums".

The Referendum Council said the Voice to Parliament was a "take it or leave it" proposal for the Parliament and the Australian people. We do not agree.

The Council's proposal for an Indigenous representative assembly, or Voice, is new to the discussion about Constitutional change, and dismissed the extensive and valuable work done over the past decade – largely with bipartisan support.

We are confident that we can build on that work and develop Constitutional amendments that will unite our nation rather than establish a new national representative assembly open to some Australians only.

The challenge remains to find a Constitutional amendment that will succeed,

and which does not undermine the universal principles of unity, equality and “one person one vote”.

We have listened to the arguments put forward by proponents of the Voice, and both understand and recognise the desire for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to have a greater say in their own affairs.

We acknowledge the values and the aspirations which lie at the heart of the Uluru Statement. People who ask for a voice feel voiceless or feel like they’re not being heard. We remain committed to finding effective ways to develop stronger local voices and empowerment of local people.

Our goal should be to see more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians serving in the House and the Senate – members of a Parliament which is elected by all Australians.

The Government has written in response to Mr Shorten’s call for a Joint Select Committee, and have asked that the committee considers the recommendations of the existing bodies of work developed by the Expert Panel (2012), the Joint Select Committee on Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (2015) and the Referendum Council report (2017).

The Coalition continues to aim to work in a bipartisan way to support Constitutional recognition.

[Doorstop with the Minister for the Environment and Energy, the Hon Josh Frydenberg MP](#)

PRIME MINISTER:

Nick and his wife run a great Australian family business. A small business which has grown from Fyshwick to Sutton and he’s having great success because he’s investing in his business.

Nick you were saying that you have built this business up through your own retained earnings over the years?

NICK SMITH – THE BAKER AT SUTTON:

Yes that’s correct. Been working at it for about six, seven, eight years now.

PRIME MINISTER:

So what you make you’re putting back into the business.

NICK SMITH:

Yep, my word.

PRIME MINISTER:

And how many people do you employ now?

NICK SMITH:

Between the two shops, about 60.

PRIME MINISTER:

60 jobs. So this is a small family business that's got 60 employees. That's why we are so focused on backing business, backing Australian family businesses. That's why we've brought down company tax for businesses like Nick's, so he's got more money after tax to invest back into his business and provide more jobs.

But a vital part too, of managing this business, is the cost of energy.

Now Nick what are you spending on energy here, electricity?

NICK SMITH:

It's about, on this site alone, it's about \$15,000 a quarter.

PRIME MINISTER:

Right, \$15,000 a quarter – \$60,000 a year. That's a lot of money. It's a big part of Nick's overhead.

That's why we have put out there a National Energy Guarantee plan. It's been recommended to us by the Energy Security Board and they, the experts in this field, have said that this will reduce wholesale generation costs over the period to 2030 by 20-25 per cent, putting downward pressure on Nick's bill, reducing the generation component.

And of course, we're also taking the steps to ensure that people get on the right deal. So Nick will be able to go onto the *Energy Made Easy* website and see if he can get a better deal. He's very alert to that, to constantly seeing, to making sure that he's got the right deal.

You know, a big part of the cost for electricity is not just generation, the cost of actually making the electricity, we've got to get it to Nick. That requires all the poles and wires and the cost of those has been going up over the years, in particular, because the energy companies have been able to go to the courts to appeal the decisions of the energy regulator. That sort of gaming and using the legal system to jack up prices by over \$6 billion in recent years, that's been brought to an end because Josh has succeeded in persuading the Parliament to abolish those Limited Merits Reviews.

So right across the board – the National Energy Guarantee, what we're doing

on the cost of poles and wires, what we're doing making sure people are getting on the right plans, what we've done to bring down the wholesale price of gas – everything is focused on supporting business, supporting families, supporting jobs.

That's the big difference between our approach and that of Labor.

Labor does not have one policy that supports investment and supports employment. They do not have one policy that will bring down energy prices. In fact, every one of their policies as we know – and we know this from bitter experience – is calculated and designed to make energy more expensive and less reliable.

Australians can't afford Labor's continued undermining of business and enterprise.

Everything we're doing is focused on supporting enterprise, investment and jobs. And as you've heard me say before, jobs and growth is not just a slogan, it's an outcome. 371,000 created in the last year, 85 per cent of them full time. But that depends on economic policies that support business and it depends on affordable and reliable energy. That's the plan we've set out. That's what we're delivering.

Now I'll ask Josh, who is doing a great job as the Energy Minister, to say a bit more about the importance of affordable and reliable energy. Josh.

THE HON. JOSH FRYDENBERG MP – MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY:

Thanks Prime Minister and thanks Nick and thanks to your wife Louise for warmly welcoming us here to this wonderful bakery. Thank you for employing so many Australians. Skilled people doing wonderful things.

As the Prime Minister said, the National Energy Guarantee is a credible, workable, pro-market policy that is designed to get more reliable and affordable power.

Just in recent days, the Business Council of Australia representing over one million workers through the companies that make up its members, has written to the state premiers asking them to support the National Energy Guarantee, saying it provides the most workable and practicable solution forward for an effective energy policy in the country.

We also found out yesterday that the Labor Party's policy of an emissions intensity scheme will lead to higher electricity prices, by around \$200 whereas the National Energy Guarantee will lead to a saving of up to \$115. That's more than a \$300 difference between the Coalition's policy and the Labor Party's policy.

As the Prime Minister said, that is just one component of the energy bill, on top of all the work we are doing to drive down gas prices, to rein in the power of the networks and to get millions of Australians a better deal from their retailer.

So lower power bills means more jobs. More jobs for the bakeries here. More jobs for the butchers. More jobs for the manufacturers, for the plastics and glass companies that we've visited in recent days.

Thank you.

PRIME MINISTER:

Great, thanks very much Josh and Nick. Any questions?

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, the AWU says that it has got records of the \$100,000 donation to GetUp! that was made by the national executive in full accordance within the rules. Do you accept that?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well that's really a matter for the Registered Organisations Commission. They're investigating it and the AWU has got questions to answer.

Bill Shorten has questions to answer – why his union was making \$100,000 donation to GetUp!, an organization I might say is opposed to more of the industries that employ members of the AWU. But those are questions for Mr Shorten to answer.

I just want to say the hysterical attack by Brendan O'Connor on the integrity of the Australian Federal Police is a disgrace. Bill Shorten should disown that and apologise for that immediately.

The police keep us safe, they keep us safe from crime, they keep us safe from terrorism and they uphold the rule of law.

The AWU should comply with the law and when they have spokesman like Mr O'Conner that would prefer to defend the thugs and the criminals in the CFMEU than stand up for the police that keep us safe, that shows you a lot about the values of the Labor Party of Bill Shorten.

JOURNALIST:

I did have an energy question but since we're on the topic I'll ask this one first.

PRIME MINISTER:

Right, okay.

JOURNALIST:

Labor has suggested these raids are the result of a witch-hunt by the Turnbull Government against Bill Shorten. What is your reaction to that?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well again that is, that shows the lack of respect the Labor Party has for the Australian Federal Police and the rule of law.

The AFP are completely independent as Labor know, and as indeed Mr Shorten has said on previous occasions. He knows that as well as all of us do.

This is just the desperation of a Labor Party that is a wholly owned subsidiary of the CFMEU – a trade union that treats the law as nothing to be concerned about.

Look at Sally McManus, the head of the ACTU, she goes on television and says unions should be entitled to break the law.

Well you know what? They're not. Everyone's got to comply with the law. That's what the rule of law means. The rule of law means that everyone is bound by the law, and that includes unions and it's about time Labor and Mr Shorten recognize that Australians will not accept their continued defence and complicit support of the CFMEU, a union whose rap sheet is as long as your arm, have got dozens of union officials before the courts. And of course you've seen the appalling language and threats in Queensland that they've made against workers at North Oaky.

JOURNALIST:

The AWU and Bill Shorten of course were investigated by the Royal Commission. Did it make mistakes? Was it not thorough enough?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I've got no comment other than to say that the Royal Commission had a very long inquiry, made some very valuable recommendations, many of which we have now been able to legislate through the Parliament.

JOURNALIST:

But it cleared both of those entities and certainly Mr Shorten. Why does the ROC now need to go back over those coals?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, look, these are again, we set up, institutions like this are set up to uphold the law and they are conducting an investigation and they should be allowed to do that. And the political abuse that we've seen heaped on police by the Labor Party is a disgrace.

JOURNALIST:

The media were actually tipped off yesterday, were there before AFP officers. Does that not imply government involvement in this and is this a smear campaign like the Opposition is saying?

PRIME MINISTER:

Again, the only smear, is the smear Labor is trying to conduct against the Australian Federal Police. They are accusing the Australian Federal Police of being politically motivated, that is a disgrace. Bill Shorten knows that's a lie and he should apologise for it.

JOURNALIST:

Federal Police say that guarding your Point Piper residence is diversion away from drug operations and other operations. Will you move to Kirribilli House and if not, why not?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well let me say this, the police arrangements in respect of our home are the same as has been the case for previous prime ministers, including Kevin Rudd of course whose home was in Brisbane. And that is the fact.

And our track record on keeping Australians safe, whether it is providing the police, our intelligence agencies or the ADF with the financial, legal, technological tools they need to keep us safe speak for themselves. 13 terrorist plots disrupted since 2014. That is a record of the persistence, the professionalism, the commitment of our agencies. They're the best in the world and I call on the Labor Party to support them, to stop this continued denigration.

The rule of law applies to everybody. What happens is, when there is an investigation that affects a union, immediately the Labor Party attacks the police.

Just consider what John Setka said about the Australian Federal Police, in that speech at the rally in Melbourne, to which Bill Shorten sent a greeting message.

Setka's attack on the Australian Federal Police was abusive, vile, disgusting.

Has Bill Shorten disassociated himself from that?

When is Bill Shorten going to stand up for the rule of law?

When is he going to say to Australians the Labor Party will dissociate itself from the CFMEU and its thugs and criminals?

When is he going to have the courage to do what Bob Hawke did with the Builders Labourers Federation?

The reason he won't is money. The CFMEU is the biggest donor to the Labor Party. Labor is a wholly owned subsidiary of a trade union that regards the law as something of no account.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, how was this matter brought to the attention or referred to

the ROC? How does that process work?

PRIME MINISTER:

Matters are referred to the ROC, Registered Organisations Commission, but as to what they investigate and how they investigate it is entirely a matter for them.

JOURNALIST:

Was this matter referred by the government?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well this is a matter that the Registered Organisations Commission is investigating independently and they should be allowed to do their work, full stop. And it's about time that the labor party stopped interfering and trying to use their threats and the media to intimidate the agencies including the AFP whose job it is to enforce and maintain the rule of law.

JOURNALIST:

I understand it's an independent investigation but I'm just asking about where the referral came from?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well the matter is being referred to the Registered Organisations Commission. They are entitled to investigate.

Look, police, agencies, various regulatory agencies have many matters referred to them. The Labor Party, Mark Dreyfus is always referring things to the Australian Federal Police. He is. He is. He is always doing that. And they look at all of these things. They look at all of this information and it's their duty to consider them independently and objectively and then take such action as they believe is appropriate.

Now If I can be very clear, I stand for the rule of law. I stand for defending and respecting the agencies that enforce it and uphold it and keep us safe.

And the question for Bill Shorten is where does he stand?

Does he only support the Australian Federal Police and the rule of law when it doesn't impact on him?

Is he like Sally McManus that thinks the law should apply to everybody except big trade unions?

The rule of law applies to everyone – unions, business, governments – everybody.

It's about time Bill Shorten told us where he stands. Does he stand for the law, for the rule of law and the agencies that uphold it? Or is he going to

just continue to be an apologist for unions that break, defy and hold the law in contempt.

JOURNALIST:

Just on energy Prime Minister-

PRIME MINISTER:

Alright one more, and so good to get back on energy.

JOURNALIST:

Jay Weatherill has confirmed that he will not be backing your national energy plan?

PRIME MINISTER:

I think you're drawing a long bow there. I don't think he's done that.

JOURNALIST:

Do you think it's dead on arrival at COAG?

PRIME MINISTER:

Absolutely not.

JOURNALIST:

Have you spoken with state premiers, chief ministers, all of them? Have they guaranteed they're on board with your process?

PRIME MINISTER:

I spoke to all of the premiers with the exception of Dan Andrews – but we have been in touch. We've been messaging as they say. But I've spoken to them about the National Energy Guarantee and as I said, a couple of days ago the private conversations are different to the public rhetoric, as is often the case.

Look, this National Energy Guarantee – let's push away all of the, you know, Jay Weatherill's frenzied rhetoric, public rhetoric – let's look at it objectively.

The National Energy Guarantee is a recommendation from the Energy Security Board. The Energy Security Board was appointed by COAG, most of whose governments are Labor governments. It is composed of an independent chair and a deputy chair, Kerry Schott and Clare Savage – universally respected and admired experts in this field. Added to that, you have the Chair of the Energy Market Commission, John Pierce who makes the rules. You have the Chief Executive of the Energy Market Operator, Audrey Zibelman – enormous experience both internationally and of course, now she's actually managing the National Electricity Market. And of course you have Paula Conboy, who is

the energy regulator.

So these five people are the five smartest most experienced people you could find. That's why COAG put them there.

Now, what did Alan Finkel say? Alan Finkel said, go and set up the Energy Security Board – COAG did that. Ask them for their advice. That's what we've done, we've got the advice.

This advice is advice that comes from an expert group appointed by COAG, appointed by those Labor premiers and chief ministers and indeed by Josh, who sits on that board.

So you know, the modelling that the AEMC is undertaking, that will all be completed by November.

I think you'll find a lot more commonsense emerging from COAG than some of the media statements would suggest.

JOURNALIST:

Are you open to a process of negotiations with states over some elements of the plan?

PRIME MINISTER:

The plan will obviously be discussed but I think that it is a very, very clear recommendation.

Look I'd just ref you to, I think, was it the Bloomberg clean energy group?

MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY:

Yes.

PRIME MINISTER:

They described it as a very elegant solution.

You know, there have been – the endorsement, the unanimous endorsement across the board from people involved in the minerals industry, the people involved in the clean energy and the renewables sector – the support for this plan is near unanimous. And that is because for the first time, it brings together climate and energy policy, levels the playing field, ends the subsidies, enables us to achieve those three goals – the triple bottom line of affordable energy, reliable energy – you've got to keep the lights on as South Australians have learnt, and the problems when that doesn't happen – and of course meeting our Paris emission reduction target.

So it is a great plan. It wasn't written by me and Josh, it was written by the Energy Security Board. Nobody knows more about this industry than those people. And they were put there by COAG, by more Labor governments than Coalition ones.

So on that note, thank you all very much.

[ENDS]

Doorstop with the Minister for the Environment and Energy and Assistant Minister for Social Services and Multicultural Affairs

SENATOR THE HON. ZED SESELJA, SENATOR FOR ACT AND ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS:

Welcome to Hume in the ACT – it's great to be here.

And thank you to Rob and Peter and Graham and all of the team here at Viridian here in the south of Canberra for the tour. Great to be seeing really thriving business here doing some great stuff.

Great to have our Prime Minister here, great to have the Minister for Energy, Josh Frydenberg who is doing such a sensational job. I'll hand over to the PM.

PRIME MINISTER:

Thank you very much Zed, it is good to be here.

Now, we're here at Viridian Glass, which is part of CSR and Rob Sindel is the Managing Director of CSR and Peter Moeller is in charge of the glass business, and Graeme here has hosted us here at this plant, all of us here.

Energy is all about jobs.

The National Energy Guarantee drives down wholesale energy costs, as the Energy Security Board has told us.

It delivers reliable power and it ensures we meet our international obligations.

So, affordability, reliability, responsibility.

Now, Rob, just tell us how big CSR's energy bill is.

MR ROB SINDEL – MANAGING DIRECTOR & CEO, CSR:

It's about \$110 million a year. So, \$60 million of that goes to gas-

PRIME MINISTER:

Come a little bit closer.

MR ROB SINDEL:

\$60 million of that's gas and about \$50 million of that is electricity.

PRIME MINISTER:

Right. Now, as you know, we've taken some strong action on gas recently to ensure there's enough gas for the east coast market. What have you seen that's – what has that done to the gas suppliers and gas market?

MR ROB SINDEL:

So we're a big gas user, obviously, in our glass business and bricks business.

We've had to enter the wholesale market for gas to ensure we have supply. So we've sort of cut the retailers out of that in certain parts of our business.

What we've also seen is the spot price come down, which is very beneficial.

The work you and the Energy Minister have done to guarantee the supply has meant spot prices have come down, and that's great for us as an organisation.

It's great for the people, actually. 4,200 employees. Our objective every day is to keep those people in work.

PRIME MINISTER:

That's our objective too. That's what the National Energy Guarantee is about. That's what all of our energy policies are about, that Josh and I have been developing and rolling out.

It's about ensuring Australians have affordable and reliable power – vitally important for households and families, but vitally important for jobs. These jobs depend on affordable energy.

Peter, how important is energy, the cost of energy, to making glass? Just talk a bit about that, and the jobs that you support at Dandenong where we were in February, and then at all of your plants around the country.

MR PETER MOELLER – EXECUTIVE GENERAL MANAGER, CSR:

Energy is probably the most important cost factor in the manufacturing of raw glass.

PRIME MINISTER:

Yep. Come a little bit closer. Energy is the most important factor?

MR PETER MOELLER:

Energy is the most important factor in the production of raw glass. It represents about 16 to 17 per cent of the total cost and we're paying about \$20 million of energy costs totally – a big majority of that is paid in Dandenong, predominantly for gas.

PRIME MINISTER:

Okay, so bringing that spot price of gas down, as we've seen, as Rob was saying – that improves your business and it makes the jobs more secure?

MR PETER MOELLER:

It's very important to us because we are in a global competition, and we need to be able to be competitive in that market.

PRIME MINISTER:

Yep.

MR PETER MOELLER – EXECUTIVE GENERAL MANAGER, CSR:

And with the increase in energy costs, if that continues and all of a sudden we have to put a question mark on the sustainability of our competitiveness. So that's very important.

PRIME MINISTER:

Right. Yeah. Peter and Rob, tell me – the Energy Security Board have said to us – they are the experts in this area, and we're relying on their advice. They've said to us that the National Energy Guarantee that they've recommended, that policy they've recommended – will provide greater investment certainty and will result – they estimate – in wholesale energy costs coming down by 20 to 25 per cent over the period through to 2030.

What's that going to mean for your businesses here, CSR overall, and of course for the glass business?

MR ROB SINDEL:

I think the most important part for us, and what we liked about the National Energy Guarantee, was the reliability and certainty. Because the rule number one is, if this factory or any of our factories don't have power, they don't operate.

You can't have people standing around. So reliability – we like the fact that you've put reliability and also the affordability at the top of the list.

PRIME MINISTER:

Yep.

MR ROB SINDEL:

To continue to subsidise one source of energy over the other, we don't think

is sensible because we want secure, affordable power. That's what we liked about the plan.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well thank you very much. And thank you for hosting us here.

So, Josh, we're now at the stage with the National Energy Guarantee where we've had it recommended to us by the Energy Security Board – they are the five most experienced people in the electricity and energy business.

So we've got that advice. We're adopting it. We're taking it on to COAG. So the next step now is to present it to the – to persuade COAG to go ahead with it.

How important do you think it is for the other jurisdictions, the states and the territories, to support this?

Just talk to us about the critical importance of getting energy policies right, and delivering the affordability and the reliability that Rob and Peter and Graeme need to secure the jobs here and around Australia.

THE HON. JOSH FRYDENBERG MP, MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY:

Thanks, PM, and thanks to Zed for having us here, and thank you to Viridian Energy.

The Turnbull Government has created 371,500 jobs in the last 12 months. And we're hungry for more.

And as the Prime Minister says, lowering power bills is the key to job creation.

Now Dr Finkel made it very clear that we needed a national approach to emissions reduction and to energy policy. All the states within COAG signed on to that recommendation, now here's their chance – with the National Energy Guarantee, a recommendation by the experts – to live up to that commitment that they have made.

It's a credible, workable, pro-market policy that delivers lower prices and a more reliable system. No subsidies, no taxes, no trading schemes.

What we've heard from the company here, just as we've heard from manufacturers in Australia – the BCA, the Ai Group, ACCI, BlueScope, BHP, Grocers Association, Irrigators Council – the list goes on – have overwhelmingly endorsed the National Energy Guarantee as the way to take Australia forward, with a comprehensive policy that focuses on reducing prices, creating a more reliable system, and staying true to our international commitments.

PRIME MINISTER:

Great. Thanks very much, Josh. Thank you.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, as you say the most important thing is getting states on board. So have you been in conversation with the state premiers and what are they telling you?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, I've had conversations with several of them. I know Josh has been talking to the energy ministers. But I think the next step is the energy ministers' meeting in November?

MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY:

Late November.

PRIME MINISTER:

Late November, and obviously there is modelling underway now, as you know, so that'll be – that's the next step.

JOURNALIST:

Are they receptive, PM?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, the conversations I've had, they've been very receptive. But there's often, as you know, a mismatch between the private conversations and the public rhetoric. But there it is.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, just on another issue, you're due to meet the-

PRIME MINISTER:

Sorry, hang on, go to you first.

JOURNALIST:

Thank you. You're due to meet the Israeli Prime Minister next week. What will you say to him about the stalled extradition of the Melbourne school principal Malka Leifer on alleged sex offences?

PRIME MINISTER:

What I'll say is that justice demands that she be brought back to Australia to answer the charges.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, why has the government been so apprehensive about joining China's Belt and Road Initiative? Are national security concerns-

PRIME MINISTER:

Can we just focus on energy for a little bit more just before we move on to foreign policy?

JOURNALIST:

This links in with energy – there's \$300,000 being spent every minute on welfare. Would you like to see the welfare bill come down? How can we make that happen?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, what we need to do is ensure that the welfare dollar is spent effectively in a way that – spent on those who need it, spent most effectively. Obviously, particularly with working-age benefits, the object is, wherever possible, to ensure that people are able to return to work.

The best form of welfare, as we all know, is a job and so that's why we have so many programs that are designed to ensure that people are able to return to the workforce because that clearly is the best for them and for their families.

But, you know, Australia, as the AIHW report observed last week, as Zed was reminding us earlier, Australia has by world standards a very targeted welfare system. It's means-tested, as you know and that's one of the reasons why it is more effective than in many other places.

JOURNALIST:

Deloitte says that we could be at a turning point and see wage growth very soon. Is that welcome news for you?

PRIME MINISTER:

I am thrilled to see it, delighted to see it. Look, as the Treasurer has said, there are better days ahead.

We've seen very strong jobs growth – 371,000 in the last year. 85 per cent of them full-time. "Jobs and growth" is not just a slogan – it's an outcome.

What we are now looking to see is growth in wages because they have been, wages growth has been slow by historic standards. So we want to see wages growth and I'm very pleased to see Chris Richardson's forecast that we're going to see strong wages growth. That's good news.

JOURNALIST:

PM, will the NBN ever deliver a commercial rate of return when it now has to compete against 4G and 5G?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, look, the NBN was a calamitous train wreck of a project when we came

into government in 2013. Billions and billions of dollars were wasted by Labor, and there was no way to get them back, okay?

So, as Communications Minister, I had to play the hand of cards I was dealt – as I often used to say, you know, in the words of the Irish barman when asked for directions to Dublin: “If I were you, I wouldn’t be starting from here.” No one would have wanted to start from where Labor left us.

So, we have done the best we can getting that project on track.

Now, it is on track in terms of the rollout. They are activating many more households and premises a fortnight than Labor did in six years, but there have been real problems – both with the installation experience and with people not getting the speeds that they believe they’re paying for, or that they have paid for.

We are very, very focused on improving on both of those counts.

Of course, as the network expands, you will always get more complaints because if you’ve got 3 million customers, you’ll get more than if you’ve got 50,000. Plainly. But one complaint is one complaint too many.

So I am determined to ensure that we address those issues, and that people get the speeds they have paid for.

JOURNALIST:

It was supposed to be a commercial enterprise, so can you ever see that money being returned to the taxpayer?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, Chris, I think there’s a reasonable question mark over that.

I mean, when it was started under Rudd, you may remember, Kevin Rudd said this was going to be fantastically commercial and that the public would be lining up to invest in it. Well, that’s nonsense.

If we had gone down Labor’s route of fibre to the premises, it would have taken, say, another eight years to complete and another \$30 billion.

So if you think the commercial criteria are challenging now, imagine what they would be if you loaded another \$30 billion of cost onto it.

Now, it is challenging. At the moment, it is estimated to deliver a return of around 3 per cent, which is not – it is enough to keep it on the government’s balance sheet, as a government asset, but it certainly is not a commercial return that the stock market would expect.

JOURNALIST:

It was supposed to be 6 per cent.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, there's no way it would reach that.

Look, it is, again, we were dealt a very, very bad hand of cards by Labor and we are doing the best with it to get it rolled out. But I have to say this is the fastest rollout of any telecom service in the country's history.

JOURNALIST:

One final point on this because it is the issue-du-jour-

PRIME MINISTER:

Sure. The only risk you have is that I will give you more detail than you want.

JOURNALIST:

Too much detail is never enough on this, Prime Minister. Could you tell us, in hindsight, was the project a mistake?

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes.

JOURNALIST:

Has it been a massive waste of money?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, it was a mistake to go about it the way they did – setting up a new government company to do it was a big mistake. If you want to look at a country that did this exercise much better, it's New Zealand, and what they did there was they basically ensured the incumbent telco, the Telstra equivalent, split its network operations away from retail operations and then that network company which is called Chorus became, in effect, the NBN.

The virtue of that was you had a business that knew what it was doing, that was up and running, that had 100 years of experience getting on with the job and the Kiwis have done this at much less cost.

So the way Labor set it up was hugely expensive and there are many billions of dollars wasted – and I've said this many times, it's a fact of life – that we can't recover.

So having been left in a bad place by Labor, what we are doing is ensuring that we deliver it as quickly and cost effectively as possible but I have to say to you, again, one complaint is one complaint too many.

I know that a lot of people are not getting the deals they paid their retail service providers for. I have been talking to the chief executive of NBN about it frequently and talking to the ACCC about it. I was talking to Rod Sims on the way here. As you know, ACCC has got a whole exercise and inquiry into this and they will be making those retailers be very upfront about what

speeds they're offering, how that compares, you know, are they able to deliver them and they'll be ensuring that everything is being monitored.

There will be 4,000 monitors put in place by the ACCC around the country to monitor broadband performance.

I am relentless in my efforts, as is the minister, in ensuring people get the best experience, the best deal from the NBN possible. The management is doing a good job too but again, it was not a great hand of cards to be dealt but that's alright, we'll play them the best we can.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, could it be good for Australian jobs to sign up to the Belt and Road Initiative? Are national security concerns there legitimate?

PRIME MINISTER:

The reality is we have a very constructive investment relationship with China. There is massive Chinese investment in Australia and considerable Australian investment in China too, I might add.

In terms of Belt and Road, it is an initiative, an objective, an agenda is possibly the best way to describe it of the Chinese Government and we obviously welcome Chinese investment that meets our foreign investment guidelines. But we prefer to focus on specifics, on specific projects and investments.

So there's, you know, rather than engaging in generalities – and perhaps I'm betraying my past business experience – I prefer to focus on specifics and there is no shortage of Chinese investment and opportunities for that in Australia and indeed of course Australian firms invest in China too.

JOURNALIST:

Can you guarantee that mobile data users won't be penalised in any way to pay for the NBN?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, there is no plan to impose any restriction on, you know, mobile data.

Can I just make a point about mobile data? The latest figures I have show that the average use of data on a mobile plan is around 15 gigs a month. For NBN customers, fixed line or indeed wireless, fixed wireless customers, it's around 150. So, you can see the advantage of the fixed-line network is that it provides enormous capacity.

What Bill Morrow is talking about in terms of wireless is more enhanced antenna services, you know, in large multi-dwelling buildings, you know, apartment buildings.

Look, it is a competitive environment, but I just want to repeat we are doing

everything we can to ensure the NBN delivers a great service. We're doing everything we can to ensure that the telcos, the retail service providers, deliver to their customers what they promise.

And one complaint is one complaint too many. So we are not going to be satisfied with anything other than 100%. I know it can't be achieved, but that's the goal.

Thanks a lot.

[ENDS]

Doorstop with the Hon. Josh Frydenberg MP, Minister for the Environment and Energy and Senator the Hon. Zed Seselja, Assistant Minister for Social Services and Multicultural Affairs

SENATOR THE HON. ZED SESELJA, SENATOR FOR ACT AND ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS:

Welcome to Hume in the ACT – it's great to be here.

And thank you to Rob and Peter and Graham and all of the team here at Viridian here in the south of Canberra for the tour. Great to be seeing really thriving business here doing some great stuff.

Great to have our Prime Minister here, great to have the Minister for Energy, Josh Frydenberg who is doing such a sensational job. I'll hand over to the PM.

PRIME MINISTER:

Thank you very much Zed, it is good to be here.

Now, we're here at Viridian Glass, which is part of CSR and Rob Sindel is the Managing Director of CSR and Peter Moeller is in charge of the glass business, and Graeme here has hosted us here at this plant, all of us here.

Energy is all about jobs.

The National Energy Guarantee drives down wholesale energy costs, as the Energy Security Board has told us.

It delivers reliable power and it ensures we meet our international obligations.

So, affordability, reliability, responsibility.

Now, Rob, just tell us how big CSR's energy bill is.

MR ROB SINDEL – MANAGING DIRECTOR & CEO, CSR:

It's about \$110 million a year. So, \$60 million of that goes to gas-

PRIME MINISTER:

Come a little bit closer.

MR ROB SINDEL:

\$60 million of that's gas and about \$50 million of that is electricity.

PRIME MINISTER:

Right. Now, as you know, we've taken some strong action on gas recently to ensure there's enough gas for the east coast market. What have you seen that's – what has that done to the gas suppliers and gas market?

MR ROB SINDEL:

So we're a big gas user, obviously, in our glass business and bricks business.

We've had to enter the wholesale market for gas to ensure we have supply. So we've sort of cut the retailers out of that in certain parts of our business.

What we've also seen is the spot price come down, which is very beneficial.

The work you and the Energy Minister have done to guarantee the supply has meant spot prices have come down, and that's great for us as an organisation.

It's great for the people, actually. 4,200 employees. Our objective every day is to keep those people in work.

PRIME MINISTER:

That's our objective too. That's what the National Energy Guarantee is about. That's what all of our energy policies are about, that Josh and I have been developing and rolling out.

It's about ensuring Australians have affordable and reliable power – vitally important for households and families, but vitally important for jobs. These jobs depend on affordable energy.

Peter, how important is energy, the cost of energy, to making glass? Just talk a bit about that, and the jobs that you support at Dandenong where we were in February, and then at all of your plants around the country.

MR PETER MOELLER – EXECUTIVE GENERAL MANAGER, CSR:

Energy is probably the most important cost factor in the manufacturing of raw glass.

PRIME MINISTER:

Yep. Come a little bit closer. Energy is the most important factor?

MR PETER MOELLER:

Energy is the most important factor in the production of raw glass. It represents about 16 to 17 per cent of the total cost and we're paying about \$20 million of energy costs totally – a big majority of that is paid in Dandenong, predominantly for gas.

PRIME MINISTER:

Okay, so bringing that spot price of gas down, as we've seen, as Rob was saying – that improves your business and it makes the jobs more secure?

MR PETER MOELLER:

It's very important to us because we are in a global competition, and we need to be able to be competitive in that market.

PRIME MINISTER:

Yep.

MR PETER MOELLER – EXECUTIVE GENERAL MANAGER, CSR:

And with the increase in energy costs, if that continues and all of a sudden we have to put a question mark on the sustainability of our competitiveness. So that's very important.

PRIME MINISTER:

Right. Yeah. Peter and Rob, tell me – the Energy Security Board have said to us – they are the experts in this area, and we're relying on their advice. They've said to us that the National Energy Guarantee that they've recommended, that policy they've recommended – will provide greater investment certainty and will result – they estimate – in wholesale energy costs coming down by 20 to 25 per cent over the period through to 2030.

What's that going to mean for your businesses here, CSR overall, and of course for the glass business?

MR ROB SINDEL:

I think the most important part for us, and what we liked about the National Energy Guarantee, was the reliability and certainty. Because the rule number one is, if this factory or any of our factories don't have power, they don't operate.

You can't have people standing around. So reliability – we like the fact that you've put reliability and also the affordability at the top of the list.

PRIME MINISTER:

Yep.

MR ROB SINDEL:

To continue to subsidise one source of energy over the other, we don't think is sensible because we want secure, affordable power. That's what we liked about the plan.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well thank you very much. And thank you for hosting us here.

So, Josh, we're now at the stage with the National Energy Guarantee where we've had it recommended to us by the Energy Security Board – they are the five most experienced people in the electricity and energy business.

So we've got that advice. We're adopting it. We're taking it on to COAG. So the next step now is to present it to the – to persuade COAG to go ahead with it.

How important do you think it is for the other jurisdictions, the states and the territories, to support this?

Just talk to us about the critical importance of getting energy policies right, and delivering the affordability and the reliability that Rob and Peter and Graeme need to secure the jobs here and around Australia.

THE HON. JOSH FRYDENBERG MP, MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY:

Thanks, PM, and thanks to Zed for having us here, and thank you to Viridian Energy.

The Turnbull Government has created 371,500 jobs in the last 12 months. And we're hungry for more.

And as the Prime Minister says, lowering power bills is the key to job creation.

Now Dr Finkel made it very clear that we needed a national approach to emissions reduction and to energy policy. All the states within COAG signed on to that recommendation, now here's their chance – with the National Energy Guarantee, a recommendation by the experts – to live up to that commitment that they have made.

It's a credible, workable, pro-market policy that delivers lower prices and a more reliable system. No subsidies, no taxes, no trading schemes.

What we've heard from the company here, just as we've heard from manufacturers in Australia – the BCA, the Ai Group, ACCI, BlueScope, BHP,

Grocers Association, Irrigators Council – the list goes on – have overwhelmingly endorsed the National Energy Guarantee as the way to take Australia forward, with a comprehensive policy that focuses on reducing prices, creating a more reliable system, and staying true to our international commitments.

PRIME MINISTER:

Great. Thanks very much, Josh. Thank you.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, as you say the most important thing is getting states on board. So have you been in conversation with the state premiers and what are they telling you?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, I've had conversations with several of them. I know Josh has been talking to the energy ministers. But I think the next step is the energy ministers' meeting in November?

MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY:

Late November.

PRIME MINISTER.

Late November, and obviously there is modelling underway now, as you know, so that'll be – that's the next step.

JOURNALIST:

Are they receptive, PM?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, the conversations I've had, they've been very receptive. But there's often, as you know, a mismatch between the private conversations and the public rhetoric. But there it is.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, just on another issue, you're due to meet the-

PRIME MINISTER:

Sorry, hang on, go to you first.

JOURNALIST:

Thank you. You're due to meet the Israeli Prime Minister next week. What will you say to him about the stalled extradition of the Melbourne school principal Malka Leifer on alleged sex offences?

PRIME MINISTER:

What I'll say is that justice demands that she be brought back to Australia to answer the charges.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, why has the government been so apprehensive about joining China's Belt and Road Initiative? Are national security concerns-

PRIME MINISTER:

Can we just focus on energy for a little bit more just before we move on to foreign policy?

JOURNALIST:

This links in with energy – there's \$300,000 being spent every minute on welfare. Would you like to see the welfare bill come down? How can we make that happen?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, what we need to do is ensure that the welfare dollar is spent effectively in a way that – spent on those who need it, spent most effectively. Obviously, particularly with working-age benefits, the object is, wherever possible, to ensure that people are able to return to work.

The best form of welfare, as we all know, is a job and so that's why we have so many programs that are designed to ensure that people are able to return to the workforce because that clearly is the best for them and for their families.

But, you know, Australia, as the AIHW report observed last week, as Zed was reminding us earlier, Australia has by world standards a very targeted welfare system. It's means-tested, as you know and that's one of the reasons why it is more effective than in many other places.

JOURNALIST:

Deloitte says that we could be at a turning point and see wage growth very soon. Is that welcome news for you?

PRIME MINISTER:

I am thrilled to see it, delighted to see it. Look, as the Treasurer has said, there are better days ahead.

We've seen very strong jobs growth – 371,000 in the last year. 85 per cent of them full-time. "Jobs and growth" is not just a slogan – it's an outcome.

What we are now looking to see is growth in wages because they have been, wages growth has been slow by historic standards. So we want to see wages growth and I'm very pleased to see Chris Richardson's forecast that we're

going to see strong wages growth. That's good news.

JOURNALIST:

PM, will the NBN ever deliver a commercial rate of return when it now has to compete against 4G and 5G?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, look, the NBN was a calamitous train wreck of a project when we came into government in 2013. Billions and billions of dollars were wasted by Labor, and there was no way to get them back, okay?

So, as Communications Minister, I had to play the hand of cards I was dealt – as I often used to say, you know, in the words of the Irish barman when asked for directions to Dublin: “If I were you, I wouldn't be starting from here.” No one would have wanted to start from where Labor left us.

So, we have done the best we can getting that project on track.

Now, it is on track in terms of the rollout. They are activating many more households and premises a fortnight than Labor did in six years, but there have been real problems – both with the installation experience and with people not getting the speeds that they believe they're paying for, or that they have paid for.

We are very, very focused on improving on both of those counts.

Of course, as the network expands, you will always get more complaints because if you've got 3 million customers, you'll get more than if you've got 50,000. Plainly. But one complaint is one complaint too many.

So I am determined to ensure that we address those issues, and that people get the speeds they have paid for.

JOURNALIST:

It was supposed to be a commercial enterprise, so can you ever see that money being returned to the taxpayer?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, Chris, I think there's a reasonable question mark over that.

I mean, when it was started under Rudd, you may remember, Kevin Rudd said this was going to be fantastically commercial and that the public would be lining up to invest in it. Well, that's nonsense.

If we had gone down Labor's route of fibre to the premises, it would have taken, say, another eight years to complete and another \$30 billion.

So if you think the commercial criteria are challenging now, imagine what they would be if you loaded another \$30 billion of cost onto it.

Now, it is challenging. At the moment, it is estimated to deliver a return of around 3 per cent, which is not – it is enough to keep it on the government's balance sheet, as a government asset, but it certainly is not a commercial return that the stock market would expect.

JOURNALIST:

It was supposed to be 6 per cent.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, there's no way it would reach that.

Look, it is, again, we were dealt a very, very bad hand of cards by Labor and we are doing the best with it to get it rolled out. But I have to say this is the fastest rollout of any telecom service in the country's history.

JOURNALIST:

One final point on this because it is the issue-du-jour-

PRIME MINISTER:

Sure. The only risk you have is that I will give you more detail than you want.

JOURNALIST:

Too much detail is never enough on this, Prime Minister. Could you tell us, in hindsight, was the project a mistake?

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes.

JOURNALIST:

Has it been a massive waste of money?

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Well, it was a mistake to go about it the way they did – setting up a new government company to do it was a big mistake. If you want to look at a country that did this exercise much better, it's New Zealand, and what they did there was they basically ensured the incumbent telco, the Telstra equivalent, split its network operations away from retail operations and then that network company which is called Chorus became, in effect, the NBN.

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[ENDS]

Investing in children's health

The Turnbull Government will invest \$13 million in a major longitudinal children's health study.

This is a decade-long investment in our children's future. It will improve and possibly save lives.

The ORIGINS Project will be conducted by the Telethon Kids Institute and Joondalup Health Campus. It is an exciting, original and truly far-sighted study, following a cohort of 10,000 from pregnancy, to birth, to five years of age.

There is increasing evidence that events and experiences occurring very early in a child's life can have significant long-term effects on health and well-being.

The ORIGINS project will collect a comprehensive set of data in a way never done before.

It will provide health checks to participating children, identify risk factors and seek to identify ways to prevent or lessen future health problems.

One of Australia's largest philanthropic organisations, the Paul Ramsay

Foundation, will contribute \$13m over ten years, which – through Telethon – the Government will match dollar for dollar over the same period.

ORIGINS is an outstanding example of how private philanthropy and the Federal Government can work together to help Australia's children and ensure they have the healthiest possible start to their lives.

Telethon is all about ensuring a better life for our children now and in the future.

This contribution towards the ORIGINS project comes on top of the annual Commonwealth Government contribution to Telethon, which this year will be \$2 million.