

Reading *Between the lines* this week:

1. Putting the cart before the horse
2. The return of the dog whistle
3. Political donations

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1. Putting the cart before the horse

Much has been made of the potential for climate-change policies to create green jobs. But it is inconceivable that you could make a significant investment in renewable energy and not create a lot of jobs. The question is, would they be green jobs? What, in fact, is a green job? And should we really care?

If the jobs of people who build wind turbines are defined as green, what does that mean for those who manufacture the steel and aluminium from which the turbines are made? Are some mining and manufacturing jobs green and some brown?

Surely, people who clean up the environment can be defined as having green jobs? But if that is so, BP's oil spill will have been responsible for a massive increase in green-job creation in the US.

The only way out of this definitional pea-and-thimble trick is to keep your eye on the thing that really matters—the environmental outcome. If we introduce good environmental policies they will inevitably create new jobs, but we should always evaluate the policy primarily in terms of what it delivers for the environment. Imagine if there are two ways to build wind turbines, a cheap way using cranes and concrete mixers and an expensive way using lots of people with lots of ladders and lots of shovels. The latter would create more green jobs but the former would be a more efficient way to tackle climate change.

One of the least understood ironies of the Rudd Government's CPRS was that while its supporters enthused about the number of green jobs it would create, the reality was that most green-job creation would actually have been exported. This is because the scheme allowed polluters to import an unlimited number of offset permits, which granted polluters the option to simply keep on polluting while meeting their targets by importing the permits from developing countries. This meant that there was little need to invest in renewable energy or energy efficiency here in Australia.

Indeed, in our latest report, *Green jobs: what are they and do we need them?* [<https://www.tai.org.au/index.php?q=node%2F19&pubid=766&act=display>], we estimate that the importing of offset permits under the CPRS would have cost the creation of 114,000 jobs in the construction and maintenance of renewable energy.

Tackling climate change will create lots of jobs, but creating lots of 'green jobs', whatever they are, won't necessarily mean that we tackle climate change. Those interested in addressing climate change should focus on what policies will do to reduce emissions rather than become distracted with spurious claims about jobs. It's not rocket science—we simply need to keep our eye on the emissions pea and ignore those who want to show us their new thimbles.

2. The return of the dog whistle?

In the lead-up to the 2007 federal election, The Australia Institute published *Under the Radar: Dog-Whistle Politics in Australia* [<https://www.tai.org.au/index.php?q=node/19&pubid=427&act=display>]. In that paper, we documented the contortions of language that politicians engage in to send different messages to different groups of voters.

A dog whistle, a coded or implicit message that when taken literally appears to be conveying something else entirely, is a peculiar form of political communication in that it should be plausibly deniable: the dog-whistler can say that their comments were harmless, and that other people (for example the media) are reading too much into them.

The master of this dark art was former prime minister, John Howard. When Pauline Hanson first came to prominence in 1996, Howard refused to publicly distance himself from her views for many weeks. When he finally commented on Ms Hanson's views, this is what he said:

One of the great changes that have come over Australia in the last six months is that people do feel free to speak a little more freely and a little more openly about what they feel. In a sense the pall of censorship on certain issues has been lifted.

In 2001, Mr Howard made the following statement on the issue of asylum seekers:

I don't find any racism in the Australian public. I find constant references to racism in articles and news commentary and in the utterances of my critics on the policy. I don't find, as I move around the community, people expressing racist sentiments about the illegal immigrants at all. It is not a racially based policy. We would apply the same approach irrespective of where the people were coming from.

In response to Prime Minister Gillard's comments this week on asylum seekers, many commentators have remarked on the return of the dog whistle to federal politics. Here are her comments; you can judge whether the Prime Minister said one thing but meant another.

I think on a debate like asylum seekers people should feel free to say what they feel. And for people to say they're anxious about border security doesn't make them intolerant. It certainly doesn't make them a racist. It means that they're expressing a genuine view that they're anxious about border security. By the same token, people who express concern about children being in detention, that doesn't mean they're soft on border protection. It just means they're expressing a real, human concern. So I'd like to sweep away any sense that people should close down any debate, including this debate, through a sense of self-censorship or political correctness. People should say what they feel. And my view is many people in the community feel anxious when they see asylum seeker boats. And obviously, we as a Government want to manage our borders.

3. Political donations

One of Australia's richest miners, Clive Palmer, has been a major donor to the Coalition parties in the last few years. During the four-year period from mid-2005 through mid-2009, Mr Palmer and the companies he is related to have given almost \$1.8 million to the Coalition. His contributions to Labor, a more modest \$65,000 over the same period, have gone only to the Western Australian division of the party.

Mr Palmer has been very outspoken in his opposition to the proposed mining tax, and continues to fight it even after the biggest mining companies have agreed to settle their dispute with the government. So he must be relieved to hear that Opposition Leader Tony Abbott remains resolute in his determination to block this tax.

Of course, Mr Palmer's donations are all completely legal under the present system. But should they be?

Some western democracies such as Canada have introduced major reforms dramatically limiting the amount individuals can donate to political parties each year and banning donations from corporations. These reforms limit the perception that some people can 'buy' access to politicians. Such changes are urgently required in Australia. In a healthy democracy, all policy decisions must be made in the interests of the nation, not in the financial interests of political parties.

Recent publications

- C Eren, R Denniss and D Richardson, *Green jobs: what are they are do we need them?* 7 July 2010. Available at: <https://www.tai.org.au/index.php?q=node%2F19&pubid=766&act=display>

Recent media

- 'The poison fed to our babies', *The Daily Telegraph*, 4 July 2010. Available at: <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/sunday-telegraph/the-poison-fed-to-our-babies/story-e6frewt0-1225887506944>
- 'Green jobs just muddy the climate-change waters', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 July 2010. Available at: <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/green-jobs-just-muddy-the-climatechange-waters-20100706-zyv8.html>

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