

**WORKING TITLE: New England Feels the power**

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THE inevitable shift from coal to clean energy is becoming big news in regional electorates and across the country at this election.

Local member and Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce has endorsed the White Rock Wind Farm in Glen Innes, saying, “if we are going to go down the path of renewables, and I believe we should, then we need to get the best benefit for it into the seat of New England”.

But his enthusiasm is hard to read.

On the day of the opening ceremony, he complained, “These are the cards I’m dealt”, and he once asked, “What is this insane lemming-like desire to go to renewables going to do to our economy?”

Polling commissioned by The Australia Institute finds that 72 per cent of respondents in New England support Australia going the full Monty – a transition to 100 per cent renewables.

This would have been unthinkable at the last election in 2013.

Sixty-two per cent oppose the Shenhua coal mine on the Liverpool Plains, and Mr Joyce recently conceded the business case for big new coal mines “no longer stacks up”.

This is a welcome change from Mr Joyce, who has been a loyal defender of coal and forthright critic of clean energy.

Last year was the turning point, when investment in renewables overtook fossil fuels.

According to the Frankfurt School of Business, renewables dominated electricity investment in 2015.

New renewables accounted for more than half (53.6 per cent) of new generation capacity and more than a quarter of a trillion dollars (US\$286 billion) of investment.

But under the policies of the Coalition government, while international investment and jobs in renewables grew – in Australia we went backwards.

The renewable energy turning point is here, so in this election, anything is possible.

All parties and candidates have an opportunity to take the lead, whatever their political stripe.