



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE:  
TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS**

**Government Advertising, Carbon Pricing**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 9 February 2012**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** McKenzie, Sen Bridget

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**Senator McKENZIE** (Victoria) (15:23): I rise to take note of answers given by Senator Wong to questions asked by Senators Brandis and Birmingham. The clean energy future package is a grubby and expensive exercise of Labor spin. It is the carbon tax that is going to make things worse for Australian workers, but the government is so bound by its agreement with the Greens and Independents to retain power that it had to pull off the carbon tax at any cost. The shouting that Senator Singh referred to as coming from Senator Mason could be more accurately described as outrage on behalf of the Australian people, Australian workers and taxpayers as a result of this government's economic management.

Workers will pay with their jobs, especially workers in the regional areas. To add insult to injury, those same workers have paid through their taxes the \$20 million it has taken to fund the advertising campaign mentioned in the report we have been speaking about. It is a double whack, from the front and the back. They were duded by a government that cannot use the resources of the media to get its message out. Its good news on carbon tax ended up being no news for the Australian media. A case of no news is good news, maybe. So aware of its own incompetence of getting the good news out, it designed a \$12 million advertising campaign, which was increased by another \$8 million. That is \$20 million. Senator Cash mentioned a lot of projects and programs that that \$20 million could have been better spent on. Is it a reflection on the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, Mr Combet, that he is unable to sell the government's message, which he could not get across to the media at no cost to the Australian taxpayer apart from his time, to tell us the benefits of the carbon tax? Minister Combet issued numerous media releases in July extolling the details of the price on carbon, but that obviously was not considered enough. In fact, ministers were out and about all around the countryside spruiking. Any media conference that Minister Combet calls is usually very well attended, so it is not as if he was talking to walls. Why did the media not cotton onto the great news of the carbon tax and sell it to the Australian people?

The Gillard government, which normally prides itself on its ability to spin a good story, used the excuse it had limited time to convince the Australian people of the benefits of the carbon tax—limited time on a policy initiative that was in committee for months to

decide on. It ran a tender process for a \$2.7 million contract for 36 hours and then wanted quotes updated in just 90 minutes. We wonder whether Minister Combet consulted with the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Conroy, on the tender process. Glossy brochures and ads do not make good policy and there was a fraction too much fiction for the Auditor-General, Ian McPhee, who raised concerns in his report about key claims of the campaign that he was not able to find. I quote:

... a clear line of sight between 52 statements presented as fact in the campaign and the sources cited in the matrix to support those statements.

One instance may be considered careless, two reckless, but 52 indicates an endemic level of incompetence that washes through everything this government touches. Senator Wong decided to bring WorkChoices into her answer, but there are so many instances of where this toxic tax will cause distress to Australian workers, including regional workers. In fact, it will be the regions that are affected the most.

Today in my home state of Victoria there are reports that Alcoa is to review the future of its Port Henry aluminium smelter at Geelong. The Prime Minister may think it is disgusting for Mr Abbott to scaremonger about jobs, but it was the Managing Director of Alcoa, Alan Cransberg, who confirmed that the carbon tax would increase pressure on his company. He is quoted on page 1 of the Australian as saying:

Post July 1 we have obviously got another challenge to overcome and we're very keen on doing that.

The government may say the high dollar and low metal prices are affecting the company's decision processes, but as Victoria's largest consumer of electricity the Alcoa smelter is obviously going to be under increasing pressure come 1 July and is going to be looking at 600 jobs—that is, 600 regional Australians who will be affected by this government.

The first point of a good financial manager is that you have to comply with financial regulations and the ANAO report found seven breaches of the government's own Financial Management Act. The second point is that you ensure you get bang for your buck. Being strategic and prudent about the spend,

using accurate data, is something this government  
needs to start doing. (*Time expired*)