

Radio interview with Merrick Watts – Triple M Sydney

MERRICK WATTS:

As you would know Sydney, I talk a lot about the frustrations of average Australians struggling to pay their energy bills. It's a delicate balance to increase energy production, lower energy prices and still meet emissions reduction targets. As my Dad used to say: "Cheap, fast, good. You can only have two of the three. You can have cheap and fast but it won't be good. You can have good and fast but it won't be cheap". It seems like an impossible task and ultimately the man who has to find the solution for this is the Prime Minister and he joins me on the line now. Prime Minister, welcome and thank you for being on the show.

PRIME MINISTER:

Hey Merrick, it's great to be with you.

Well, you know what we've got with National Energy Guarantee is a plan that will deliver energy that is affordable, that is cheaper than it otherwise would be, we'll see wholesale prices coming down, it's going to be reliable to keep the lights on and, of course, it will enable us to meet our Paris emission reduction cuts.

So – affordability, reliability, responsibility – that's the trifecta and we've got a great plan to deliver that.

MERRICK WATTS:

It is. Look, it is definitely a juggling act, Prime Minister. Has this been one of the biggest challenges in your leadership so far?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well it is one of the biggest challenges for every government everywhere in the world. And Audrey Zibelman, the Chief Executive of the Australian Energy Market Operator who came to Australia from New York, in fact, where she'd been doing the same sort of role – she made the point that everyone's struggling with this because our energy system is in transition. We're going from big centralised, generally coal fired generators to much more of a distributed system, a lot more intermittent renewables like wind and solar, a lot more people generating power themselves with you know, solar panels in their rooves and now batteries.

It is much more complex, Merrick, and so you need to have a different approach and you've got to have one that has a level playing field, that's based on engineering and economics.

As I always, get the politics and the ideology out of it. It's been a

disaster to the energy system.

This is a game-changer. This policy is backed by the smartest minds in the industry. I didn't write – it's come to us from the Energy Security Board.

I'm just saying. Look, politicians, you know, write a lot of policies – we went to the smartest people to get their advice. The Energy Security Board – these five people are the smartest brains in the industry. They're the regulators, the operators. They understand it. And they've come back and said this is the way you can meet that triple bottom-line.

MERRICK WATTS:

How do you feel, Prime Minister, about people like myself who are considering about going off the grid entirely? Who have become so frustrated by being leveraged by major power companies and it's almost extortionist. We feel as though we've had enough and we are considering going off the grid as it were. How do you feel about Australians doing that? Do you think it should be encouraged or do you think we just need to be patient?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, Merrick, I think that you will see more people becoming more and more independent. I mean, you've got the combination of, solar energy is getting cheaper and cheaper, solar panels are becoming more efficient, batteries are getting cheaper. And so you will find people in effect providing most of their own electricity themselves behind the meter.

Now of course, the sun doesn't always shine. This is the thing. And how big is your battery? Can you really afford to be off the grid? So that's going to be the challenge.

I think we need to also recognise that not everyone can afford to have solar panels on their roof. So you've got to have an energy system that is affordable.

It's got to be affordable for every household – whether they've got lots of solar panels and they're well-off or whether they're really battling to pay the bills.

So, I'm focused on delivering the best outcome for Australian families – affordable energy. That's what we need.

And this is a big part of it but you know, look what we've done with retail bills. There are hundreds of your listeners who will have got a better deal from their energy retailer because of the initiative we took – that's Josh Frydenberg and I, the Energy Minister and I – we took with the retailers, they went out, told people who weren't on the right plan that they should change.

We've got the *Energy Made Easy* website. I encourage people to have a look at that. See if you're on the right plan. Ask your retailer for a better deal. You might save \$3-400 a year.

And then, of course, you know what we've done with the gas prices. We've brought the wholesale gas price down again because we made sure there was enough supply in the east coast market.

So there is a lot of things that effect your energy bill. You've got one big number in big black ink on your energy bill – there is a lot of things that go into it and we're focusing on every avenue we can, Merrick, to ensure that people have more affordable electricity and energy and, of course, that it's reliable and we don't have the problems they have in South Australia with blackouts constantly.

MERRICK WATTS:

Moving into a very high usage period of the year as well, with summer a lot of people having air-conditioning on. And I know there's been some discussion within your government about offering incentives for people to maybe reduce the amount of power that they're using and I think one of the suggestions, Prime Minister, if I'm not mistaken was actually movie tickets. Can I ask you this – when was the last opportunity you had to go out and enjoy yourself at the movies?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well it was a long time ago.

[Laughter]

MERRICK WATTS:

It's been a long time between Choc Tops hasn't it!

PRIME MINISTER:

You know, the last move I recall going to actually was the last of *The Hobbit* movies with Daisy. So-

MERRICK WATTS:

Oh you are kidding me!?

PRIME MINISTER:

Yeah, yeah, it's a while ago isn't it. Yeah, a couple of years ago.

MERRICK WATTS:

Oh my God. You wouldn't have me in politics.

PRIME MINISTER:

I do, you know, watch, like everyone I watch a lot of-

MERRICK WATTS:

You like the Netflix and chill?

[Laughter]

PRIME MINISTER:

Yeah – Netflix and chill – that’s right, whatever that means.

[Laughter]

MERRICK WATTS:

Yes! Yes!

PRIME MINISTER:

No, but I do, I’m a *Game of Thrones* fan and really the amount of video that streamed on the internet has completely, it’s completely transformed the way people watch television, the way people watch video entertainment and it’s very liberating in fact.

MERRICK WATTS:

And just finally Prime Minister, whilst I’ve got you here, I’m sure that you may have heard of a man called Lawrence Mooney who does an incredible impersonation of you. There is literally tens of thousands of people listening right now, Prime Minister, who believe that I’m speaking to Lawrence Mooney.

[Laughter]

PRIME MINISTER:

Is that right?

MERRICK WATTS:

Yes.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well I hope I’m doing a reasonable Lawrence Mooney impersonation.

[Laughter]

MERRICK WATTS:

I was almost going to ask you to give me your best Lawrence Mooney impersonation but I think you’ve done a fairly good job.

Prime Minister, thank you very much for taking time today to speak to me and to speak to my listeners to explain what the government is attempting to do to lower energy costs in this country because it’s just for a lot of Australians, being the biggest energy producer certainly in our region if not

the world, it seems really difficult that we're paying such exorbitant power bills at the moment. So I do appreciate your time.

PRIME MINISTER:

That's great Merrick. We're on the case. And can I tell you – there's been failures of policy for years but that's come to an end. Engineering and economics delivering affordable and reliable power for all Australians. That's my commitment.

MERRICK WATTS:

That's a good catch phrase too Prime Minister – I like that a lot!

PRIME MINISTER:

Okay.

MERRICK WATTS:

Take care. Have a good day.

PRIME MINISTER:

Alright Merrick, thanks a lot.

[ENDS]