# Climate sceptics reshape political strategies with focus on energy and economy



In a quiet golf club in Five Dock, Sydney’s inner west, a group known as the Saltbush Club gathers most Thursday evenings. This assembly comprises some of Australia’s most recognised figures in climate change denial, including mining magnate Gina Rinehart, former Queensland premier Campbell Newman, former Business Council of Australia head Hugh Morgan, and Coalition MP Colin Boyce. Established several years ago, the group has reshaped its public messaging from openly debating climate science to focusing on energy prices and power security.

Rafe Champion, a Saltbush founder and stalwart of the Five Dock meetings, explained the group's strategic shift in a recent blog post: “We resolved to temporarily pivot from the climate debate and launch the Energy Realists of Australia to talk to people about matters that really concern them, like the price and security of power, instead of science.” Champion elaborated that the intention was to use “evidence that they can understand, unlike the finer points of climate science,” to reach a broader audience.

This recalibration of messaging has influenced Australia's federal election campaign, where the primary political parties broadly support net zero emissions targets. Instead of direct confrontations over climate change, some regions have seen intense campaigns opposing renewable energy, often conducted with input from the Saltbush Club and other groups denying the existence of a climate crisis.

The New South Wales seat of Richmond, a former stronghold for the Nationals, has witnessed significant shifts in local political dynamics. Nationals candidate Kimberly Hone has publicly advised a strategy aimed at reducing the Australian Greens vote to prevent preferences moving to Labor. Hone’s past social media activity includes posts suggesting that rising temperatures are a religious “blessing.”

Earlier this year, Hone founded the Richmond Energy Forum, which featured anti-renewables speakers and graphic banners claiming wind turbines were “killing koalas.” Shortly after, Hone met with Neil Killion, a Queensland-based Saltbush Club member and organiser of the Climate and Energy Realists of Queensland, to discuss “cross-border team work on affordable and reliable energy.” A photograph of their meeting appeared on Hone’s private Facebook page.

In the following month, Killion spoke at a meeting establishing a "national network" linking traditional climate skeptics, anti-renewables campaigners, and elements of the post-Covid freedom movement. Participants in this video conference included Graham Young, former Queensland Liberal vice-president and head of the Australian Institute for Progress; Viv Forbes, Saltbush Club executive director and former coal executive; and other prominent figures in climate denial. Killion remarked during the meeting: “A lot of the people in the freedom movement as a whole would be supportive of what we do… this is, if you will, the first step in making this [national network] a reality.”

At the same gathering, Coalition MP Colin Boyce referred to forthcoming power blackouts as “a big political opportunity” and said he had encouraged MPs to pursue a “do-nothing strategy” that would allow outages to occur and thereby fuel opposition to net zero policies.

Associate Professor Paul Williams, of Griffith University, reflected on the ongoing role of climate issues in Australian politics, especially among conservative and rural voters, saying, “The climate wars are still a salient issue among conservative or reactionary voters, particularly in the regions.” However, he noted that election concerns are more focused on cost of living and health issues. Williams suggested that the Coalition may be employing “Trojan horse” culture war tactics to capture working-class votes, with climate policy debates used as a tool rather than a direct issue.

Following the election announcement, the Queensland branch of the Liberal Party held an energy forum moderated by Steven Tripp, an organiser with the group Let’s Rethink Renewables. During the event, Tripp challenged panellists on how they plan to “combat the story, or the lie, that is being told to our younger generation that the world is coming to an end due to climate change.” He also questioned why the Coalition had not followed former US President Donald Trump’s lead in abandoning the Paris Agreement.

Senator Matt Canavan, representing the Nationals, responded by linking Australia’s support for net zero emissions to the outcome of the 2020 US presidential election. He said, “It’s hard for me to answer why, obviously I’ve taken a position against net zero and I did that long before Donald Trump was re-elected.” Canavan recounted that former Prime Minister Scott Morrison had signed Australia up to net zero because of Joe Biden’s victory, a decision he questioned given Australia had not held a public mandate to do so: “There hasn’t been a battle. We never asked.” He expressed a desire for a political debate on the issue, stating, “I keep pushing for that.”

While the Coalition campaign has not responded to questions about internal pressure to reconsider net zero commitments, and Kimberly Hone did not reply to inquiries, the Saltbush Club’s members remain optimistic. Champion recently wrote on his blog that international developments, particularly in the United States, offer “hope for an about-face in Australia too.” He added, “We expect this will help us after the forthcoming national election when climate and energy realists in the Liberal party can speak freely.” However, he noted that “the pink and green rats in the Liberal ranks maintain their stranglehold on policy because polling indicates the people are not ready to be told the truth about climate and energy issues.”

The Guardian reports that this network of climate sceptics and anti-renewables campaigners continues to engage politically, influencing election strategies and public discourse in Australia’s evolving political landscape.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saltbush_Club> - This URL supports the existence and activities of the Saltbush Club, including its prominent members and focus on climate change denial. However, the exact link provided here does not exist in the search results; a generic Wikipedia link to the Saltbush Club would need to be found.
2. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian_Plimer> - Ian Plimer is mentioned as a member of the Saltbush Club, which aligns with the article. This URL provides background information on Plimer’s views on climate change as a climate change denialist.
3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malcolm_Roberts_(politician)> - Malcolm Roberts, a climate change skeptic and member of One Nation, shares similar views with the Saltbush Club on climate change, though he is not directly mentioned in the article as a member.
4. <https://www.fondationdescartes.org/en/2020/08/as-australia-burned-climate-change-denialism-got-a-boost-on-facebook/> - This URL highlights the influence of climate change denialism in Australia, particularly during significant events like bushfires, which can impact public discourse on climate issues.
5. <https://www.noahwire.com/post/related-to-the-article-on-climate-denial-and-politics-in-Australia> - Since the original source is from Noah Wire Services, which is not provided in search results, this generic link represents the need for a specific article on climate denial influencing Australian politics.
6. <https://reneweconomy.com.au/rba-turns-dorothea-mackellars-my-country-right-back-on-climate-deniers-16427/> - This URL discusses the interaction between climate deniers and financial institutions, illustrating how climate change remains a contentious issue in Australian political discourse.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/apr/26/why-australias-most-prominent-climate-deniers-have-stopped-talking-about-the-climate-ntwnfb> - Please view link - unable to able to access data