

# Abbott Government's broken promises: so many, so soon

By Alan Austin

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**TONY ABBOTT'S RESPONSE WHEN ASKED BY A JOURNALIST WHY HE BROKE A PROMISE:**

**"BUT SOMETIMES, FOR VERY IMPORTANT REASONS, FOR VERY GOOD REASONS, YOU HAVE TO MAKE DEPARTURES FROM PRINCIPLE."**

Source: Tony Abbott Doorstop Interview - March, 2010

(Image via phonytonyabbott.com)

**The incoming Abbott government campaigned on "restoring trust" and "no surprises", yet in power abandoned an astonishing number of pre-election promises extremely quickly. [Alan Austin](#) starts the count.**

MOST GOVERNMENTS fail to keep some commitments. Soon after their elections to office in 2007 and 2008 respectively, Australia's PM Kevin Rudd and US President Barack Obama were confronted with the global financial crisis. Many pledges had to be set aside.

In 2010, Australia's PM Julia Gillard and her British counterpart David Cameron found themselves leading minority governments in hung parliaments. Both were obliged to shelve key undertakings.

The Abbott Government, however, has no excuse for the multiplicity of post-election u-turns, broken

promises and hypocrisies. The list is rapidly becoming longer than for any Western government in memory.

They include:

## First week with the Yolngu

At the Garma Festival in Arnhem Land in August, Tony Abbott gave a [clear, specific promise](#) to

*"... spend my first week as prime minister – should that happen – on your [Yolngu] country."*

This was greeted by warm applause by the people present and positive comment in the national media. If people voted for Abbott as a result of this praiseworthy commitment, then they were duded.

It was a deliverable undertaking. Much of Abbott's time after the election was spent in the Blue Mountains. He was not the only volunteer firefighter available. But he was the only prime minister to have promised to visit the Yolngu.

## Stop the boats

The ubiquitous [promise](#) before the election was to "stop the boats". Not reduce the frequency, or divert them to Darwin.

On 26 October, Abbott [declared](#) triumphantly he had done so.

Yesterday, however, [according to](#) Minister Scott Morrison,

*“... the key metric in assessing the performance of Operation Sovereign Borders is how many people are arriving illegally in Australia by boat.”*

He added:

*“Once again I am pleased to report continued progress on this front.”*

## National broadband network



Coalition

NBN [policy](#) was to abandon Labor's fibre to the premises technology in favour of fibre to the node with upgraded copper wires.

The week before the election, spokesperson Malcolm Turnbull [claimed](#) Labor's fibre to the premises technology had been “*largely superseded*” by the Coalition's preferred model.

The Coalition has now reversed its position with Minister Turnbull [declaring](#) the Coalition was “*thoroughly open-minded*” about the technology to be used.

*“Technology is not an ideological issue.”*

## Relations with the region

In Opposition, Abbott frequently insulted allies, including Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Malaysia, in the course of his savage attacks on Labor.

After the election he embarked on his grovelling “*international sorry tour*”, [described](#) by observers as him

*'... bending over backwards in his first days, mending regional fences and explaining to neighbouring leaders that his aggressive and uncompromising language used in opposition might have been better left unsaid.'*

## Foreign minister's first trip abroad

Straight after the election, new Foreign Minister Julie Bishop [said](#):

*“I would hope to make my first visits to our neighbours in the region — New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia and Singapore.”*

Bishop's first destination? New York in September, then to Indonesia, New Zealand and Singapore in October. Now this week to Sri Lanka.

She hasn't visited Papua New Guinea – which was [shabbily treated](#) by the last Coalition foreign minister – and probably never will.

## UN Security Council

Australia's hard-won seat on the United Nations peak council was consistently opposed by the Coalition in Opposition. “Our PM should not be swanning around New York talking to Africans [about the UN bid],” Mr Abbott [said](#) when then PM Gillard was lobbying hard for the honour last year.

Now Australia has secured the distinction, foreign minister Julie Bishop is rewriting history, [saying](#) in September:

*“The Coalition always supported Australia's role in the UN, we certainly supported Australia being on the Security Council.”*

## Returning the budget to surplus

Treasurer Joe Hockey [was explicit](#) in Opposition:

*“Based on the numbers presented last Tuesday night we will achieve a surplus in our first year in office and we will achieve a surplus for every year of our first term.”*

After the election, in October, this was [revised](#) to “We will get back to surplus at least as quickly as the former government claimed that it would get back to surplus.”

That, according to Treasury and the Department of Finance’s pre-election forecast, would have been in [2016-17](#).

Now, however, the wait could be [ten years](#).

## Reducing debt

Perhaps the most stunning backflip concerns debt, on which the Coalition in opposition was ferocious.

Shadow Treasurer Hockey insisted for years:

*“We will get the Budget back under control, cut waste and start reducing debt.”*

Again and again with no room for [doubt](#):

*“We will stabilise and repay the \$340 billion of Labor debt.”*

Yet the new Treasurer almost immediately [borrowed](#) another \$2.6 billion through issuing more Treasury Bonds and Notes. He then increased both the budget deficit and the debt by handing \$8.8 billion to the Reserve Bank.

According to Reserve Bank deputy governor, Philip Lowe, this was not asked for and [not needed](#). According to Treasury, it was not [advisable](#). And according to Michael Pascoe, this was a [political decision](#) designed to make the Treasurer look good later.

## Justifying the debt ceiling

When Labor sought to raise the debt ceiling by \$50 billion last year, Abbott [fumed](#):

*“The Government should be forced to specifically justify this. Our money, our future is too important to be mortgaged like this without the Government giving us the strongest possible arguments for it because every dollar that they borrow has got to be repaid.”*

Pretty clear. And quite valid. The previous Government did justify the increase by releasing to the public the [MYEFO](#), the [FBO](#) and the [PEEFO](#). (Was there a BIFFO also?)

Yet now the Abbott Government is demanding the Labor Opposition rubber stamp its bizarre demand for a dramatic expansion of the debt ceiling from \$300 billion to \$500 billion.

Shadow treasurer Chris Bowen [says](#):

*“He’s asking Australians to blindly tick off a \$200 billion increase in the nation’s credit card limit without showing them why.”*

## Reporting the budget position

Hockey [promised](#) last May at the National Press Club:

*“To ensure honesty and transparency the Coalition will initiate further reforms in the reporting of Australia’s fiscal position.”*

That was then.

Now, Hockey is [refusing to release](#) the latest MYEFO until after Parliament has closed for the year.

## Toowoomba Range bypass plan

For several years, the Coalition has [committed](#) to fund this major Queensland road project, estimated

to cost around \$1,700 million.

On the eve of the election, it was [revealed](#) in Coalition documents that the actual funding level would be \$130 million.

## Freedom of information

Many pre-election [promises](#) were made to

*“...restore accountability and improve transparency measures to be more accountable to you.”*

Since the election, an [administrative order](#) made on 18 September makes FOI applications more difficult, more expensive to process and less likely to be granted.

Documents routinely made public under the Labor Governments, such as departmental briefings, are now being [withheld](#).

## Respect Tony Abbott's mandate

Since the election, Abbott has [insisted](#) that the election result requires the Opposition to support his carbon tax repeal legislation:

*“It is at the heart of the Government's mandate. The people got to vote on the carbon tax at the election and in the days to come this Parliament will get to vote on the carbon tax and I trust that ‘Electricity’ Bill Shorten will ... appreciate that the people's verdict must be respected.”*

The stunning hypocrisy here is that this was precisely the issue on which Abbott [rolled](#) former Liberal leader Malcolm Turnbull in 2009. Turnbull wanted to respect the clear mandate of then PM Kevin Rudd to implement a carbon trading scheme. Abbott wanted to oppose that mandate — and has opposed it ever since.

Now – suddenly – a mandate “*must be respected*”.

Well, that's thirteen. More than one a week.

How do we make sense of these?

The answer, in most cases, appears to be that it was strategic for the Coalition in tandem with the toxic anti-Labor media to lie and cheat its way into government by feeding – and then feeding off – voter fear, ignorance and greed.

Now, with the support of that same media, they are hoping voters won't notice the hypocrisies. Or won't care.

Perhaps they won't. We shall see.

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