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LEADER OF THE NATIONALS IN THE SENATE

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TOPICS: NVES CHANGES

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E&OE…

**BRIDGET McKENZIE**...They will do nothing to reduce the cost of a Toyota Hilux. Nothing to reduce the cost of the Ford Ranger and nothing to reduce the cost of the D-max ute. When you look at the SUVs that Australians love to drive, the most popular one is the Rav4. That is a hybrid. It is still going to be subjected to the Labor Party's Family Car Tax.

This very, very small tweak to get certain people over the line will actually see the prices rise over time. And in question time following the announcement, the Coalition asked the Government to guarantee that the price for family cars would not rise as a result of this tax and they could not give that guarantee. We asked them again, could they guarantee that the choice of models currently available to the Australian consumer would change. They refused to guarantee that.

The fact is this is once again a political fix, a stitch up by Chris Bowen and the incompetent Minister King who is unable to be found at a podium taking responsibility for her bailiwick at any given time.

They refuse to take responsibility and they've put before the Australian Parliament a piece of legislation that will ensure that Australians are taxed and have less choice.

Now, the Coalition has been very, very clear and I as the responsible shadow minister have made it very clear over the last 12 months, we are absolutely committed to a low emissions transport sector. It's my job to develop that policy heading into the next election. And over 12 months ago, I outlined the principles that I would take to developing that policy.

It has to be technology agnostic. Why would I favour EVs that are predominantly only developed and produced in China over the affordability and the benefits that biofuel sector provides. Toyota themselves, preferring to go straight to hydrogen vehicles rather than use EVs as a pathway to a low emissions future.

So I'm not going to restrict any choice of transport, low emissions transport technology in our bid to get to 2050. But it also has to be affordable. It also has to make sure that it doesn't disadvantage certain Australians. The low income the vulnerable, rural and regional Australians shouldn't be retrospective. And we need to make sure that it maintains the choice.

We're a very unique car market. We're very small, which makes it hard for us to have muscle against the big OEMs that are global players. But we have a unique vehicle makeup. We have one of the greatest choices of vehicles in the world. We're a right hand drive market, we have long distances, a sparsely populated nation, and unfortunately, poorer roads than we should have. On those accounts, we have a very unique culture of vehicle purchase that we want to maintain.

So we won't be voting for the vehicle efficiency standard. We are yet to see the legislation, but on the remarks of the ministers, it hasn't gone far enough. It hasn't been walked back. And we're going to be on the side of the Australian consumers. We want them to be able to purchase low emission vehicles, particularly hybrids, which even under this plan are going to be taxed come 2025.

**TED O’BRIEN**Bridget, thank you very much. It was only a week ago that Chris Bowen was out there saying 'Have I got a deal for you? The greatest deal any car owner can get?'

Sure enough, one week later. Well, that deal is gone. Now he's got another deal. This is the same Minister who assured Australians a $275 reduction in household power bills. He broke that promise and he will break more promises ahead. Labor has no credibility when it comes to delivering on promises and its assurances.

Prices, choice, emissions. The Government has already said they cannot guarantee any of those three since today's announcement. We are putting consumers are at the centre of our approach. And what we know is the everyday Australian family is doing it tough right now. This is still a Family Car Tax. They can't get away from that. They might pretend that they're pulling up the handbrake, but all they're doing is they've got their foot on the accelerator and they're taking a different route to smash the Australian family at a time when they can afford it least. We believe that Australians should be able to buy the cars they love.

Tradies should be able to buy the utes they need and they should have maximum choice. This remains a tax. Today changes nothing in that regard, other than it will be yet another bad deal on behalf of Labor and its dodgy car salespeople in these two ministers.

**JOURNALIST**The Toyota boss when he was asked 'is it a Car Tax' said no, how does that not blow up your entire argument?

**BRIDGET McKENZIE**Because the Hilux as the second most purchased new vehicle in this country last year, will remain being taxed to the effect of just over $14,000 starting next year. And that is not just tradies. It is everyday Australians who need a little bit more room for their kids and need a little bit more room for their sports gear. And to go camping.

We're heading into Easter, and families are hitting up the caravan. They're hitching up the camping van, and they need a Hilux dual cab, usually, if you've got a few kids to actually get to the destination they need to. Now all of those prototypes for developing a type of vehicle, like a Hilux, with the torque we need to do the type of work we need to do in this country are in development. But they're not here yet. That's the reality. So by Bowen going too hard, too fast on this fuel vehicle efficiency standard, he's actually asking the consumer, the Australian traveler to pay for his over-zealous climate targets for 2030.

That's the reality here, because he couldn't get other policies in place to deliver the emission reductions he needed so went after passenger vehicles.

**JOURNALIST**So you're saying you're saying you haven't seen legislation, Toyota was part of the consultation, how does he not know more about whether this is a tax than you do?

**BRIDGET McKENZIE**Well, what Toyota said today at the press conference, I thought was incredibly telling. He said it was going to be incredibly challenging. He also said it was going to be difficult. And when asked by the press at the conference, what was going to be the price impact, he couldn't answer the question. And the reality is, the target remains the same nothing's changed with the tax arrangements for the Toyota Hilux for the Rav4, for the other vehicles within Toyota's fleet.

The only thing that's changed for Toyota is the Land Cruiser and other of those very heavy 4WDs that were originally in the passenger section have been moved into like commercial, which gives them a breathing space of a couple of years. That's the only thing that's actually changed.

**JOURNALIST**Why do you think the CEO of Toyota was willing to stand up at press conference and say 'pass this legislation'?

**BRIDGET McKENZIE**Because otherwise, they were going to be like Ford, who wasn't at the press conference, like Mazda who wasn't at the press conference and like Isuzu, who wasn't going to be at the press conference...[interjection]... Toyota is the only company that was actually there, the only OEM that was prepared to stand up, who wouldn't give a price guarantee, because they've been able to shift their very heavy, high emitting vehicles such as the Land Cruiser, into the light commercial, which means it has, you know, a different cap to the passenger vehicle section. That actually is why Mr. Toyota was there.

But the reality was, and I'd ask you to reflect on his actual comments, he wasn't happy to be there. He was actually making it very clear to the Australian public that this was going to be an incredibly challenging and ambitious target by the Minister to set for the auto industry here and it would have far reaching consequences.

**JOURNALIST**The Government says it is not on their radar at all and should not be the focus of Government at the moment. What is your response to that?

**BRIDGET McKENZIE**  
Well, it is the focus of this Government. This Government has pursued a Family Car Tax from day one. They've made industry sign non-disclosure agreements, they have made industry not able to talk to others. This has not been an open process at all.

I think it's quite miraculous of a government who can't get its immigration policy right, that they've somehow managed to read 9000 submissions and come to a sophisticated response when it comes to the fuel efficiency standard in a matter of six weeks.

Make no mistake, this change is the biggest change to our automobile industry since we went to our passenger transport industry, since we went from a horse and cart to a T Model Ford. That is the reality you're asking Australian consumers to shift from a combustion engine, to effectively electric vehicles and to give the industry six weeks and to have a political fix job, like you have, at the end of today, I think, says more about this Government's approach to policymaking.

**JOURNALIST**Just for clarification, what would be the alternative fuel efficiency standard that you would support considering that the Government has in process, wouldn't any fuel efficiency standard see some increase to the cost of cars that are higher emission vehicles?

**BRIDGET McKENZIE**What I'm interested in is a low emissions transport policy. If we actually want to get to net zero by 2050, we need to stop playing these petty political games, backing winners over others, backing certain fossil fuel magnates over others, we actually need to start getting focused on the objective.

That's what I want to focus on. So, if it gets emissions down, if it's biofuels, if it's hydrogen, if it's an electric vehicle, but Mr. Bowen and Ms. King like to say they've just lifted this from the US. But I'll tell you what they didn't lift from the US: the support for the community more broadly, in adopting these vehicles.

So, they've only taken certain aspects, and in the end, it will be the Australian consumer that pays.

When you ask what I want to see, I want to see, a low emissions transport sector by 2050. I want to get on that path. I want to make sure as an advanced economy that we've got all the tools in our toolbox to make that happen.

I think it's the wrong approach to preference one technology over another. I think it's not only bad policy, it's also bad science and if the history of humanity shows you anything, backing one technology over another lays a very perverse economic outcome.

**JOURNALIST**To that point is there any model of efficiency standard that you would support?

**BRIDGET McKENZIE**Well, I've been waiting to see what the Ministers would hand down. The shroud of secrecy has meant that that's taken a very long time to get to this point. This is supposed to be up and running by the first of January and for them only to be putting the legislation out and consulting with industry since January shows the farce. This is a political fix for them to get the Greens off their back, not actually to deal with the consequential problem of making sure we have an industry that is affordable for Australians.

I would ask Minister Bowen and Minister King to put in front of the Australian public, the electric vehicle, and the combustion engine or hybrid version of the type of work that's equivalent. Because right now, if I want to buy a passenger vehicle X, that's a combustion engine the equivalent electric vehicle cost me tens of thousands of dollars more to get the same product.

This is what we're actually dealing with. It's very easy for those of us on quite large wages to say, well, that doesn't matter, you know, save the planet spend the extra 20k. That's not possible for the average Australian family, particularly at this time.

**JOURNALIST**Senator, I think you used the term 'picking winners' a minute ago. Is your insinuation that the Toyota boss has not got up to date and said that this is not a Car and Ute Tax? Because they've had some of their popular vehicles exempted.

**BRIDGET McKENZIE**They haven't been exempted. Their most popular vehicles...

[interjection]

What's happened for Toyota is their heavier vehicles have moved from the passenger section into the light commercial, which means they have a different trajectory. But the reality for Toyota remains that the Toyota Hilux, our second most popular vehicle last year in car sales, I think it was 61,000 Australians bought a Toyota Hilux, brand new off the lot last year.

61,000 Australians would have been paying more if they bought it next year, around $14,000 more not because of inflation, but because of Chris Bowen and Catherine King’s Car Tax. That's the reality for Toyota.

The RAV4 hybrid is still subject to the tax so it will cost you, I think around four and a half grand more going forward. So, it just doesn't make sense. If you want to get emissions down, surely the hybrid SUV is a pathway to get there.

**JOURNALIST**Senator so why is he saying it's not a tax and you are?

**BRIDGET McKENZIE**I would ask you to look at Mr. Toyota's comments in its entirety, who said it would be significantly challenging.

**JOURNALIST**He said the answer was no to a tax. It was a very blunt question.

**BRIDGET McKENZIE**

When he was then asked the question about what the impact on price would be, he refused to answer and that's because he knows the price is going to go up.

If I'm wrong, get them to release the modelling on the price impact, get them to release the modelling on their new plan, get them to release the price impact that it will have for cars, the emission impact it will have for our economy, and the choice of cars available. That's what the Labor Party has to show Australians that they really do have a plan that's going to keep cars affordable and get emissions down.

Thanks.

**Ends**