

Putting the hard word on impenetrable pollie prose

RICK FENELEY
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Most of this column has been carefully scripted and therefore should be read as the gospel truth. Other parts, however, were written in the heat of combat, so they should be taken with a solitary saliferous granule, as Kevin Rudd might say in a carefully scripted moment.

Firstly, a couple of ideas for the policy vacuum and moral desert that is Australia. Why don't we follow the shining example of Texas, which is putting the gospel truth back in its school curriculum to revive patriotic ideology, faith in free enterprise and a belief that God has chosen America as a beacon to the world?

Australia, too, could be a beacon, or an EPIRB with a dodgy solar battery. We only need to demonstrate resolve. For instance, following a spate of robberies in which the bandits used burqas as a disguise, we should not settle for the half-measures of Belgium, France or Fred Nile, who introduced his bill to ban the Muslim veil this week. You're going soft, Fred. What about hoodies (ipso facto the camouflage of gangsta rappers), nuns' habits (which, prima facie, conceal explosives) and hooded snow jackets and goggles (if people have nothing to hide, they shouldn't ski in a blizzard).

Declaration: the preceding few paragraphs were written in the heat of an oppressive copy deadline and, upon reflection, with the benefit of hindsight, at the end of the day (well, not really, because that would be way past my deadline), these ideas are absolute crap. Chastened, Then Again will adopt a truth-in-bullshit policy, inspired by the st-st-straight-shootin', fair-dinkum, fork-tongued, scatter-gun, hand-on-the-heart, blip-from-the-lip fibster Tony Abbott. It's so refreshing to find a politician who'll tell it like it is, even when it isn't; who'll give it to us with both barrels, even when one of them is aimed at his foot; who comes with his own consumer warning: "May tell whoppers when overheated."

As Abbott says we can believe his carefully scripted lines, he won't mind jotting those down next time. A statutory declaration would do. We might ask Julia Gillard for a stat dec, too. Asked if she was likely to become PM before the election, she said: "There's more chance of me becoming the full forward for the Dogs."

Centrebet doesn't think so. It is not running a book on Gillard's prospects with the Western Bulldogs, but it is taking bets on her replacing Rudd. She slipped this week from \$4.45 to \$4.60. Blame the digital mischief maker who grafted her head to a hairy-legged Dogs player.

Gillard may firm among punters at the Sydney Writers' Festival this afternoon when Neil James, of the Plain English Foundation, chairs a session, Programmatic Specificity We Can Believe In, about crimes against the language. If we believe, it's only because Rudd was so carefully scripted last year when he warned us not to expect much climate change action - "in terms of detailed programmatic specificity" - from the Major Economies Forum.

James will be even-handed and remind his audience of Abbott at his unscripted best. When in government, Abbott told parliament: "It's very clear, I think, from the totality of the opposition's question and the totality of the prime minister's answer, exactly what the context of the answer was." Yep, clear as as mud.

How can Abbott hope to compete with the lovingly crafted prose of Rudd? The PM, addressing the Brookings Institution in Washington, explained our relationship with China. "Therefore," he said, and therefore is a word pregnant with the promise of clarity, "there is, in my argument, on the face of it, a natural complementarity between these two philosophical approaches and a complementarity that could be developed further in the direction of some form of conceptual synthesis."

Rudd meant every word. Gospel truth.

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