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'It is the cliches, so many per page, that really hurt'

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AUTHORITIES THREATEN TO WIND UP BUSINESSMAN'S NICKEL ARM OVER UNPAID CARBON TAX

Palmer pursued over \$36m bill

EXCLUSIVE

DAVID CROWE
POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

CLIVE Palmer's prized asset is under threat of being closed down by federal authorities seeking to recover looming debts of \$36 million.

Government agencies are moving to force the company, Queensland Nickel, into insolvency if it cannot pay a carbon tax bill that will triple over the year ahead as penalties apply.

The agencies are canvassing an alternative plan to sue for the cash in a court case that would not only capture the nickel refinery but associated entities and directors, including Mr Palmer.

The Palmer United Party



Clive Palmer

leader is campaigning for this Saturday's re-run of the West Australian Senate election where his party is trying to win a seat to secure a balance of power position.

He wants not only to scrap the carbon tax but have it retrospectively abolished and has flooded

ALP chases voters to try to hold on in election re-run

SID MAHER
NATIONAL AFFAIRS EDITOR

LABOR volunteers are calling tens of thousands of disgruntled West Australian electors to urge them to vote in Saturday's Senate election re-run.

the airwaves with an advertising blitz.

Documents obtained by *The Australian* under Freedom of Information laws show the regulator's determination to ensure that nobody liable for the tax can gain an unfair advantage by de-

The party fears a low turnout could condemn Bill Shorten to returning just one senator out of the six available. The Coalition is also battling a "high level of disengagement" as it attempts to repeat its September result of electing three senators.

Coalition sources argue the Liberals' support is holding but concede Clive Palmer's big-spending advertising campaign will determine the fate of Linda

Reynolds, the third Liberal on the ticket. An Australian Electoral Commission spokesman said the result of the vote would not be known until four weeks after Saturday's election. The AEC will count first preferences in all ordinary votes when polls close at 6pm, which could represent about 80 per cent of the ballots. But below-the-line votes will not be tallied on the night and

declaration votes such as postal votes can be received up to two weeks after polling day.

Tony Abbott and Mr Shorten campaigned in Perth yesterday, with the Prime Minister announcing he had secured a "truly national" National Disability Insurance Scheme by winning the agreement of WA Premier Colin Barnett for three trial sites.

FULL REPORT P2

Mr Palmer, the federal MP for the Queensland seat of Fairfax, refused to pay a \$6.2m carbon tax bill due last June and has launched a High Court action to declare it unconstitutional.

The debt is mounting under penalty provisions and will esca-

late further even if the Abbott government succeeds in repealing the carbon tax with Mr Palmer's support in parliament.

The next penalties on Mr Palmer and his company are being described as a "double whammy" because they deny

him carbon permits that would offset two-thirds of next year's bill. *The Australian* has confirmed the debt will reach \$35.8m at the end of this financial year, based on the regulator's policy documents, briefings from experts and advice from lawyers.

While 370 companies paid the carbon tax when it fell due, Queensland Nickel is now the only company refusing to pay. Two others, Penrice Soda and Wollongong Coal, missed their payments but are negotiating payment in an effort to avoid court action.

The Clean Energy Regulator's board including chairwoman Chloe Munro has signed off on a policy that requires all debtors

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Labor's BER reforms 'a case study of failure'

STEFANIE BALOGH

THE \$16.2 billion Building the Education Revolution scheme, one of the signature policies of the Rudd and Gillard years, has been condemned as an international case study of legislative and bureaucratic failure.

A paper by three Australian academics published in the *International Journal of Public Administration* says the Labor-era stimulus program of building multi-purpose school halls, science labs and libraries highlights the pitfalls governments need to avoid when rolling out large-scale public expenditure programs.

It finds the BER did not "adequately capture" value for money and produced "fiscal lag" because its objectives to pump prime the economy with expansionary stimulus happened too late and was at odds with the Reserve Bank's restrictive monetary policy.

More than five years after the height of the global financial crisis, *The Australian* can reveal there are still eight public and private school projects to be completed in NSW and one non-government project in Victoria.

"It is argued that the BER program represents a 'case study' of how governments should not pursue large-scale public expenditure programs," the paper, "Building the Education Revolution: Another Case of Australian Government Failure?" states.

Lead author Chris Lewis told *The Australian* that a better designed program would have reduced waste and produced better value for money.

"The faults within the system

were illustrated by the government rushing the program. As we conclude, there is no longer the expertise in the public service any more. It's bureaucrats rather than people with technical expertise and that's a big problem," Mr Lewis, who now contributes to *On Line Opinion*, said.

Education Minister Christopher Pyne said "taxpayers have every right to be angry with the former Labor government over the way it let their money be wasted on over-priced school buildings, and their failure to quickly act to prevent waste from occurring".

In 2011, the third and final task-force report into the BER highlighted concerns about value for money and found 1.1bn was wasted in delivering public school buildings to NSW and Victoria, when compared with Catholic counterparts. Victorian and NSW government schools had 72 per cent of complaints despite delivering 37 per cent of the program.

Craig Mayne, a BER whistleblower, said yesterday the findings of the research paper were "no great surprise" and "blind Freddy could have seen at the time that it was always going to be a monumental cock up".

Mr Mayne said he found it frustrating that he and others had "spent a lot of time pro bono trying to save the government from this stupidity but to no avail".

The paper, which was published last week by the Philadelphia-based journal, states that its analysis "indicates that the BER program can be classified as an example of government failure particularly in terms of 'legislative' and 'bureaucratic' failure".

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Singapore kids streets ahead on maths



Ellenbrook Independent Primary School teacher Stacey-Anne Barile with Year 3 students in Perth yesterday

WILL RUSSELL

EXCLUSIVE

JUSTINE FERRARI
NATIONAL EDUCATION
CORRESPONDENT

KEY maths concepts such as multiplication, division and simplifying fractions are taught to students in Singapore at least one year earlier than in Australia, with Singapore schools spending

more time on solving non-routine problems.

In their first year of school, Singapore students are taught multiplication and division, including multiplying numbers within 40 and dividing numbers within 20. The concept of multiplication is not introduced in the Australian curriculum until Year 2, the third year of school.

Simplifying fractions to their lowest common denominator is

taught to Singapore students in Year 3 and to Australian students in Year 4, while in Year 4 Singapore students are multiplying fractions that Australian students are not tackling until the end of primary school.

A report comparing the Singapore and Australian curriculums, commissioned by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, found Singapore schools spent about twice as

much time on basic operations and geometry in the first few years of school and had a greater focus on problem solving.

The report says there is considerable overlap of the two courses, but a "significant difference in the intensity of coverage and breadth of cognitive demand". Singapore spends more time in the early years mastering basic operations and geometric concepts, while Australia intro-

duces more topics earlier such as probability, technology and "general capabilities and processes".

The difference was brought home starkly to primary school principal Neil MacNeill when facing the concerns of a Singaporean family whose daughter started at Ellenbrook Independent Primary School in Perth.

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EDITORIAL P11

Church pays compo from interest on grants

EXCLUSIVE

DAN BOX
JUSTINE FERRARI

CHILD sex abuse victims are being compensated out of interest the Catholic Church earns from investing the billions of dollars it receives in government grants for schools.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child

Sexual Abuse has received evidence from a church whistleblower suggesting at least one Catholic diocese ultimately profits from interest received on state and commonwealth government education grants.

The Australian has also confirmed that the practice, under which the grants are compulsorily invested in accounts held within each diocese's "internal treasury" or development fund, also takes place elsewhere across NSW, Victoria and Queensland.

Each diocese's development fund acts like a bank, repaying an agreed rate of interest on the education funds they hold to the schools. They also pool this money with other assets invested with commercial banks at a higher rate of interest, often generating multi-million-dollar, tax-free surpluses each year.

Part of this money is, in turn, transferred to special funds under the direct control of each bishop and at least one regional diocese is understood to have transferred

more than \$1 million in this way last year. In some dioceses, these discretionary funds are then used to pay for the lawyers and compensation payments involved in abuse cases brought against the church. Details of the church's finances are rarely made public and the existence of this money trail has been criticised, including by those who have received compensation payments for such

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MORE REPORTS P6

Knights' rising star a quadriplegic

BRENT READ
STUART HONEYSETT

CURRENT and former NRL players flooded social media with messages of support last night amid reports injured Newcastle back rower Alex McKinnon had been diagnosed with quadriplegia.

Exactly a week after the 22-year-old suffered a horrific neck injury in a game against the Melbourne Storm, the Nine Net-



McKinnon

work reported that McKinnon was suffering from extensive paralysis in all four limbs.

McKinnon remains in the Alfred Hospital in Melbourne but Newcastle officials remain optimistic he will be able to fly back to Sydney later this week, where his rehabilitation will continue.

Teammates were due to fly to Melbourne yesterday to spend time with their injured colleague. Coach Wayne Bennett instead made the trek south to spend time with a player he regards as a son.

FULL REPORT P32

Japan ordered to end whaling

JACQUELIN MAGNAY
THE HAGUE

JAPAN was last night forced to immediately end its slaughter of thousands of whales in the Antarctic after the top UN court backed Australia's claim the killing was unlawful.

The 16 judges of the Court of International Justice in The Hague, in a landmark case, endorsed Australia's claim that the Japanese whaling program, described as scientific research, was unlawful.

Australia accused Japan in the court of simply "cloaking commercial whaling in a lab coat of science" and insisted Japan had violated Article 8 of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling.

In a majority verdict of 12 to four the court agreed, saying the "special permits granted by Japan are not for purposes of scientific research".

New Zealand backed Australia's stance and supported the case midway through the legal battle.

ICJ chief judge Peter Tomka last night banned Japan from killing whales and ordered the country to refrain from issuing further permits. "The court unanimously finds that it has jurisdiction," Mr Tomka said.

"By 12 to four the court finds that special permits granted by Japan in connection with (the permit scheme) JARPA II do not fall within Article 8 for the International Convention of Whaling."

He added that the taking of fin, humpback and Antarctic minke whales did not fall under the convention's obligations.

Japan had argued that it needed to kill the whales for ongoing research to enable future sustainable whale farming.

Despite the decision, hailed as a lifesaver for future whale stocks, Sea Shepherd director Jeff Hansen said the organisation was preparing to head to the Southern Ocean "regardless" of the ICJ's verdict last night.

The win for Australia comes just a week before Tony Abbott is due to meet with his Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe on April 7 in a push to fast-track the negotiation of the free trade agreement that has been on the table since 2007.

Japan has killed more than 10,000 whales in the Antarctic since 1986, when the International Whaling Convention banned the hunting of whales for commercial gain.

Despite being a signatory to the convention, Japan used a loophole in the legislation that allows it to kill and then sell the whale meat and byproducts under the guise of "scientific research".

Australia took the case to The Hague in 2010 following a 2007 pre-election promise by Kevin Rudd. Each year, Japan set itself a kill target of 850 minke, 50 humpback and 50 fin whales for its research, but the actual numbers killed fell to just over 100 last year because of the aggressive sabotage campaign by the Sea Shepherd flotilla.

The ICJ found last night that

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