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Sussan Ley Faces No Wins in Coalition's Net Zero Conflict

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Sussan Ley, the newly elected leader of the Liberal Party and first female Leader of the Opposition, is facing a deepening policy crisis over the Coalition's commitment to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. Internal divisions, with prominent Nationals figures openly challenging the target, threaten both economic credibility and the Coalition's electoral standing.

Since her election in May 2025, Ley has initiated a joint Coalition review under Shadow Energy Minister Dan Tehan to assess the future of climate and energy policy. She has so far

avoided firmly endorsing the 2050 target, instead committing to steering the Coalition towards what she has called a “sensible centre” following its federal election defeat.

Pressure continues to build from within the Nationals. Former deputy leader Michael McCormack has thrown his support behind a private member’s bill introduced by Barnaby Joyce, which seeks to scrap the net zero by 2050 commitment entirely. Joyce argues that the emissions target imposes unreasonable costs on regional communities, particularly in areas reliant on agriculture and fossil fuels. Nationals leader David Littleproud, under increasing internal pressure, has labelled net zero “impossible,” but has criticised Joyce’s move as political grandstanding and called for a united party process to determine climate policy.

The internal dispute has also reopened tensions within the Nationals leadership, with Joyce and McCormack openly criticising Littleproud’s position, fuelling speculation of a leadership challenge. While Littleproud has dismissed this as internal noise, his authority within the party appears under threat.

Economically, the consequences of abandoning net zero are significant. Business leaders have warned that walking away from a long-term climate framework could deter investment and destabilise industries such as energy and mining, which rely on predictable regulatory conditions. Meanwhile, Liberal moderates have warned that the party risks further alienating voters, particularly younger Australians and those in metropolitan electorates, if it is seen as abandoning climate responsibility.

Ley is now caught in a political dilemma. Aligning with the Nationals’ position may appeal to parts of the Coalition’s rural base but risks losing ground in urban seats, where the party suffered significant losses at the last election. Conversely, maintaining support for net zero could provoke further instability within the Coalition ranks.

As Dan Tehan’s policy review continues without a clear outcome, the absence of a unified position on emissions is generating political uncertainty and fuelling public debate. With the Labor government expected to announce a 2035 emissions reduction target soon, the Coalition’s internal divisions may leave it vulnerable to further electoral and economic consequences.