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Former Nationals Leaders Joyce and McCormack Challenge Littleproud on Net Zero Policy

July 23, 2025

– Categories: Politics & Government



Former Nationals leaders Barnaby Joyce and Michael McCormack have publicly criticized the current leader David Littleproud, urging the party to abandon the 2050 net zero emissions target. They argue the target harms regional Australia's economy. This article examines their campaign,

internal party tensions, and concerns over the Labor government's climate policies, which they say worsen economic struggles.

On July 23, 2025, Joyce and McCormack, both former deputy prime ministers, united to support Joyce's private member's bill aimed at repealing Australia's net zero legislation, according to The Australian. Joyce described the net zero commitment as "treacherous" to national security and claimed it contributes to rising power bills while major emitters like China and India face fewer restrictions. McCormack expressed support for the bill, noting that while he backed net zero in 2021 to avoid trade barriers, the international situation has since changed. Both criticized Littleproud's leadership, particularly his handling of a brief Coalition split in May, which McCormack described as chaotic. Littleproud has indicated he is open to reconsidering the net zero target, pending a review led by Senator Matt Canavan, a known advocate for fossil fuels.

This push has the potential to deepen divisions within the Liberal-National Coalition. Liberal leader Sussan Ley has defended a balanced emissions approach designed to appeal to urban voters. Nationals Senator Ross Cadell acknowledged the concerns of regional communities, highlighting opposition to wind farms and solar projects on farmland and calling for improved community acceptance of renewable energy initiatives.

The opposition, including Shadow Energy Minister Dan Tehan, supports exploring nuclear power as a reliable alternative to renewables. They have criticized the Labor government's \$20 billion investment in renewable energy as reckless. Under Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Labor's climate policies, which include accelerated renewable projects,

are viewed by critics as prioritizing ideology over affordability. Regional communities are seen as bearing the brunt of rising power costs, which have increased by approximately 9 percent annually.

Joyce and McCormack's challenge reflects broader tensions over the future of Australia's energy and climate policies. Littleproud's leadership is under scrutiny as the Nationals navigate these divisive issues ahead of the 2028 federal election.