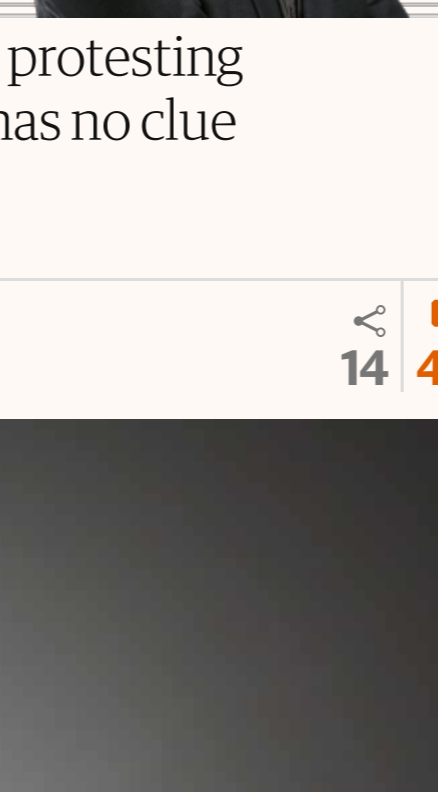


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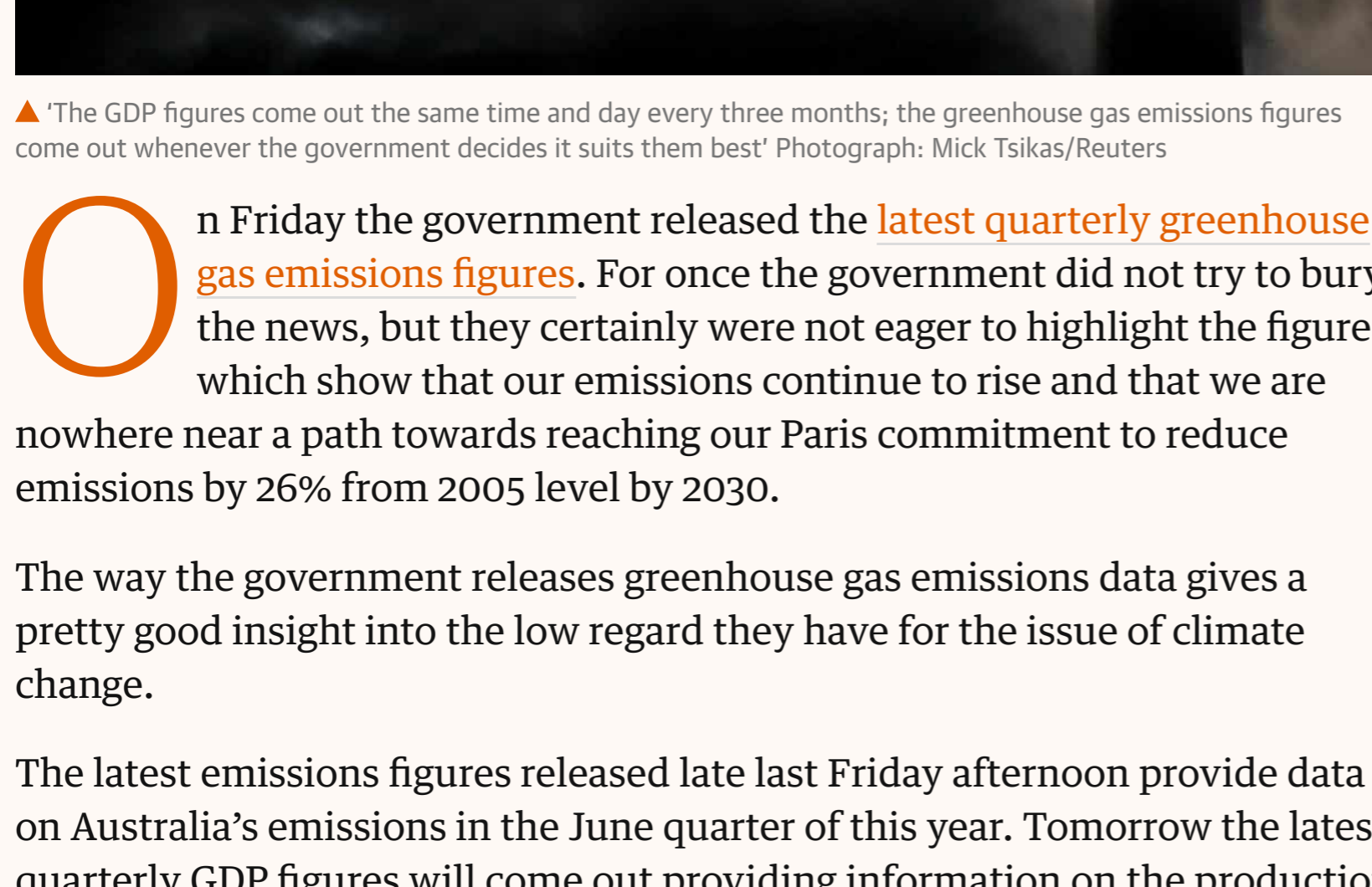
There is no way we will meet our Paris targets, and the Coalition couldn't care less

Greg Jericho



Releasing emission figures on the day students were protesting climate change showed that this government really has no clue

Tue 4 Dec 2018 04:00 AEDT



The GDP figures come out the same time and day every three months; the greenhouse gas emissions figures come out whenever the government decides it suits them best

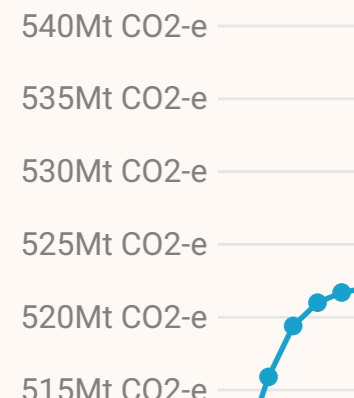
On Friday the government released the latest quarterly greenhouse gas emissions figures. For once the government did not try to bury the news, but they certainly were not eager to highlight the figures which show that our emissions continue to rise and that we are nowhere near a path towards reaching our Paris commitment to reduce emissions by 26% from 2005 level by 2030.

The way the government releases greenhouse gas emissions data gives a pretty good insight into the low regard they have for the issue of climate change.

The latest emissions figures released late last Friday afternoon provide data on Australia's emissions in the June quarter of this year. Tomorrow the latest quarterly GDP figures will come out providing information on the production of our entire economy in the September quarter.

Australia's emissions data would shame the Coalition, if such a thing were possible

Greg Jericho



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The GDP figures come out the same time and day every three months; the greenhouse gas emissions figures come out whenever the government decides it suits them best.

Usually this government tries to bury the figures by releasing them on busy news days or at times when they know most people have switched off (such as just before Christmas). This time round they released the figures on a day when the biggest news item was school students striking for climate change.

Choosing to release figures showing record levels of greenhouse gas emissions on the day students were protesting the government's lack of action on climate change is either a lovely self-troll or a sign this government really has no clue.

And while they at least did not bury the data, we are still waiting on the annual update of the greenhouse gas projections out to 2030, which shows the path towards achieving our Paris commitment.

Given the current prime minister has repeatedly and without evidence stated we will meet the target of reducing our emissions by 26% below 2005 level "in a canter", the latest annual projections - when they eventually are released - could be rather embarrassing. So perhaps they are the figures that this year will only come out just before Christmas.

The figures released on Friday were embarrassing enough. They show that in June, Australia's total greenhouse gas emissions, when excluding "land use, land use change and forestry" (LULUCF), increased to a record level:

Total annual greenhouse gas emissions (excl LULUCF)

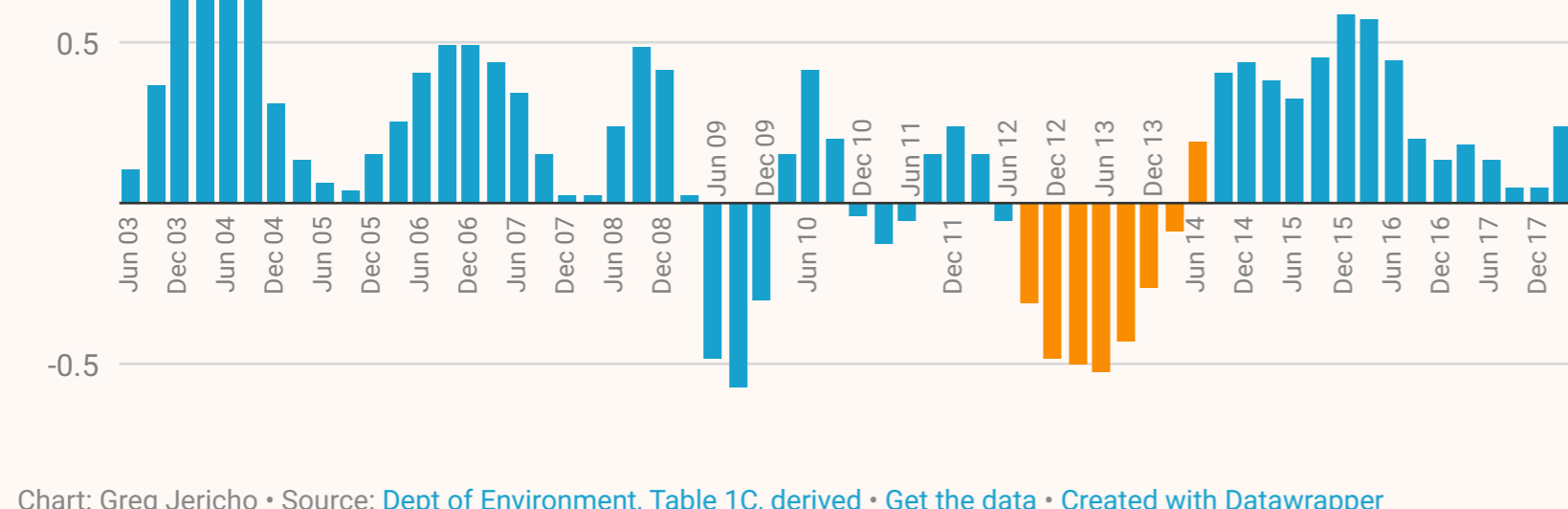


Chart: Greg Jericho • Source: Dept of Environment, Table 1C, derived • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

It was also the biggest quarterly increase of annual emissions in a quarter since 2004:

Growth of annual greenhouse gas emissions

Excludes Land Use, Land Use Change, and Forestry; Orange = period of carbon price

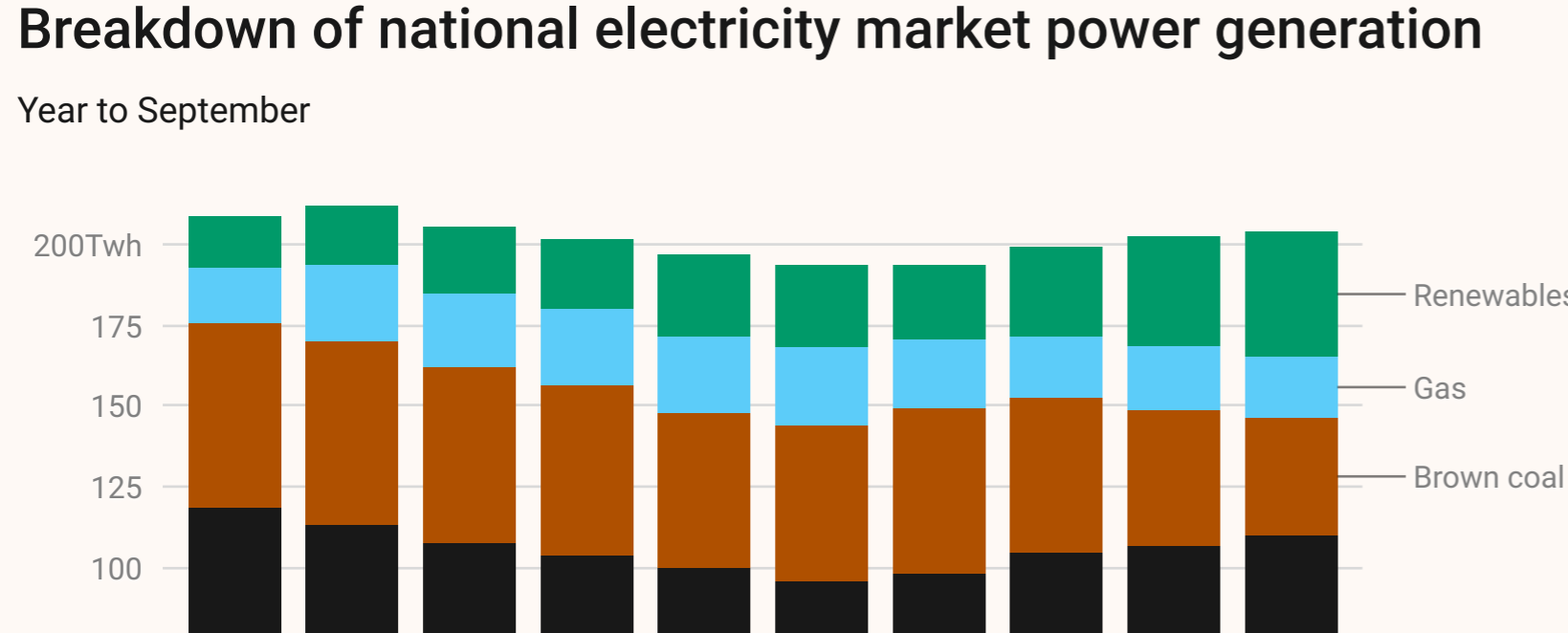


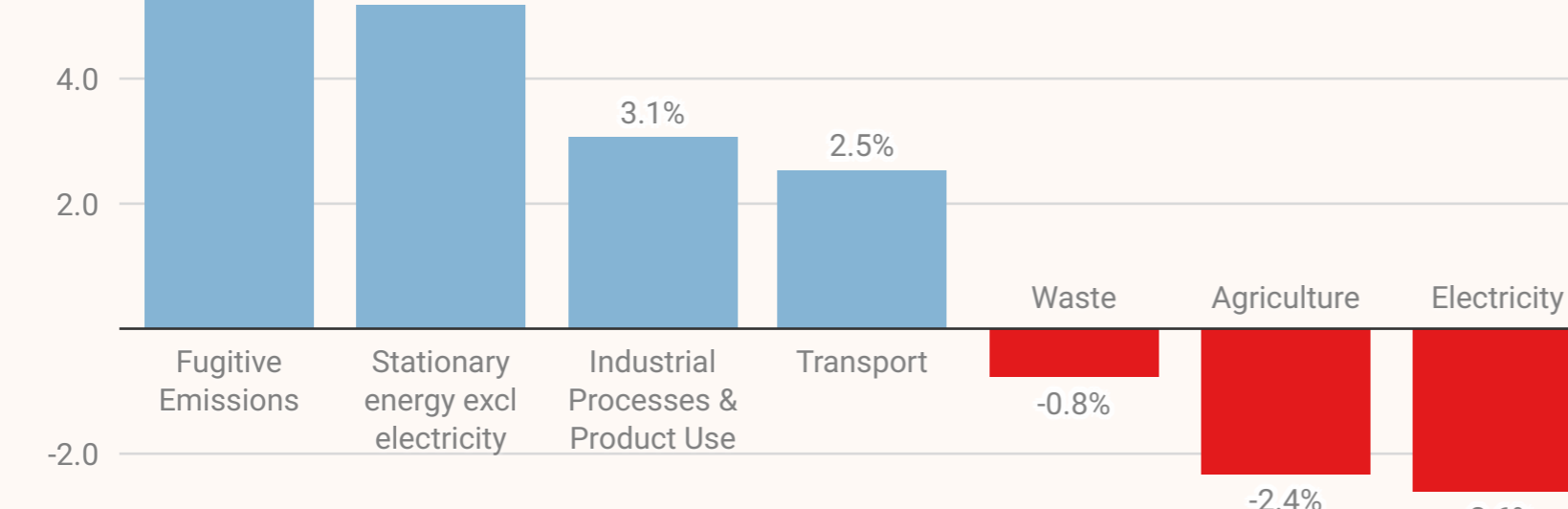
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The breakdown of sectors shows just how big of a task the government has to reduce emissions.

In spite of their utter incompetence in crafting an energy policy, emissions in the electricity sector have declined over the past year (albeit with a slight increase in the June quarter).

This is mostly due to a decrease in the amount of electricity in the national energy market coming from brown coal and an increase in renewables:

Breakdown of national electricity market power generation



Source: Dept of Environment, Fig 9 • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

But while over the past year the annual level of electricity emissions fell 4.9Mt CO2-e, the level of emissions from stationary energy rose by the same amount:

Change in annual emissions by sector since June 2017



Chart: Greg Jericho • Source: Dept of Environment, Table 1C, derived • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

Stationary energy use includes emissions from the direct combustion of fuels predominantly from the manufacturing, mining, residential and commercial sectors. Fugitive emissions occur during the production, processing, transport, storage, transmission and distribution of fossil fuels.

A big reason for the increase in both sectors is the massive increase in LNG production:

Natural gas production

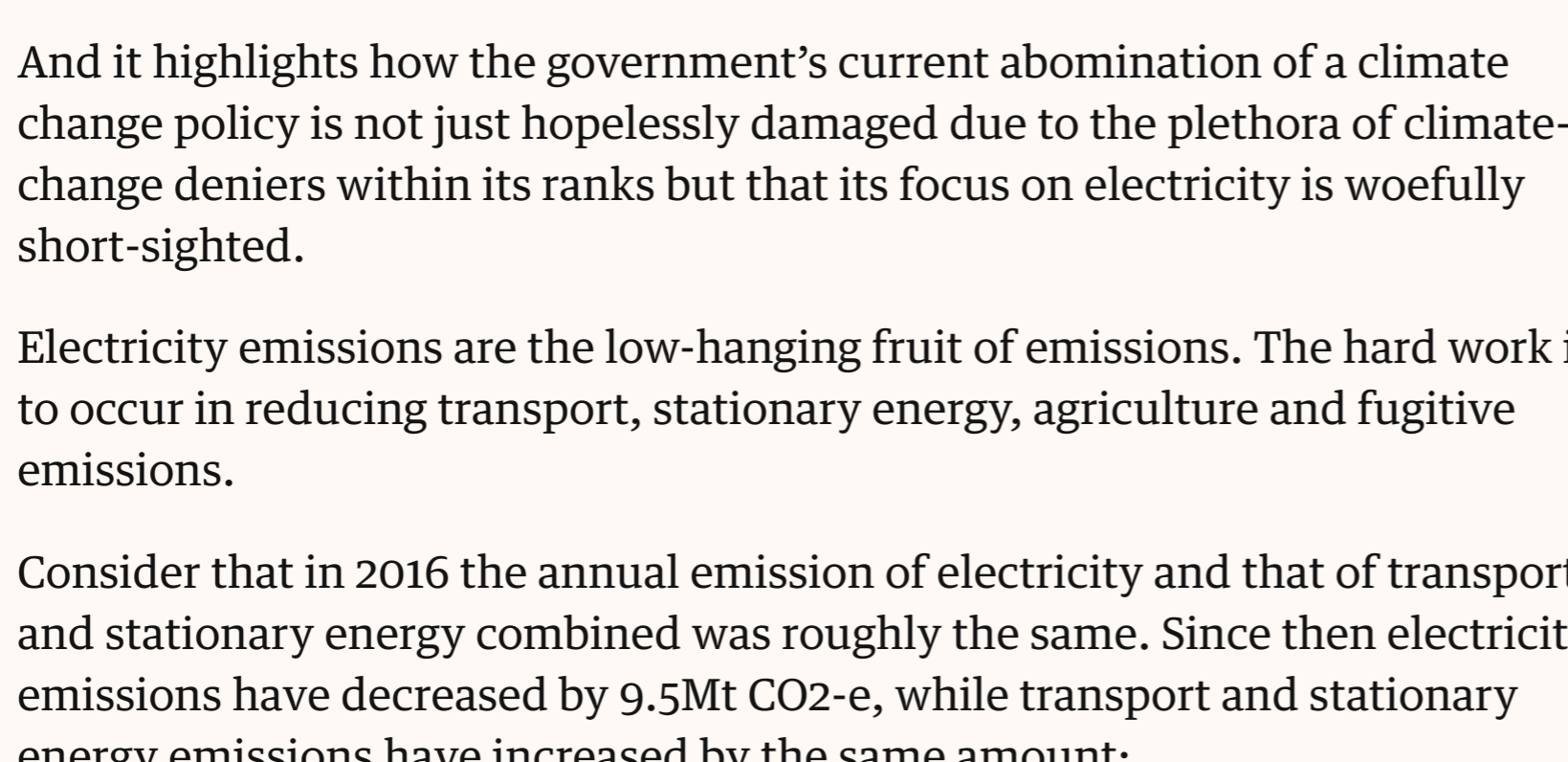


Chart: Greg Jericho • Source: Dept of Environment, Fig 12 • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

There has also been a significant increase in transport emissions due to a shift towards diesel, "reflected in a 7.6 per cent annual growth in diesel consumption for the year to June 2018". The department of environment notes that this was due to "increased diesel passenger vehicle sales and freight activity."

And it highlights how the government's current abomination of a climate change policy is not just hopelessly damaged due to the plethora of climate-change deniers within its ranks but that its focus on electricity is woefully short-sighted.

Electricity emissions are the low-hanging fruit of emissions. The hard work is to occur in reducing transport, stationary energy, agriculture and fugitive emissions.

Consider that in 2016 the annual emission of electricity and that of transport and stationary energy combined was roughly the same. Since then electricity emissions have decreased by 9.5Mt CO2-e, while transport and stationary energy emissions have increased by the same amount:

Annual greenhouse gas emissions



Chart: Greg Jericho • Source: Dept of Environment, Table 1C, derived • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

Worrying only about electricity emissions is like a cricket team thinking you only need to worry about bowling and not worry about batting.

In response to the figures, the minister for the environment, Melissa Price, noted that the emissions were "2.4 per cent below 2000 levels and 11.7 per cent below 2005 levels in the year to June 2018. Our Paris commitment requires Australia to be 26-28 per cent below 2005 levels, and this demonstrates solid progress to meeting that target in 2030."

It is always worth remembering that our Paris target includes "land use, land use change and forestry" in our totals. This was done because in 2005 the level of land clearing was extremely large and so our not clearing as much land now means our emissions have "reduced". That makes the job of meeting our target with respect to 2005 all that much easier:

Australia's annual greenhouse gas emissions

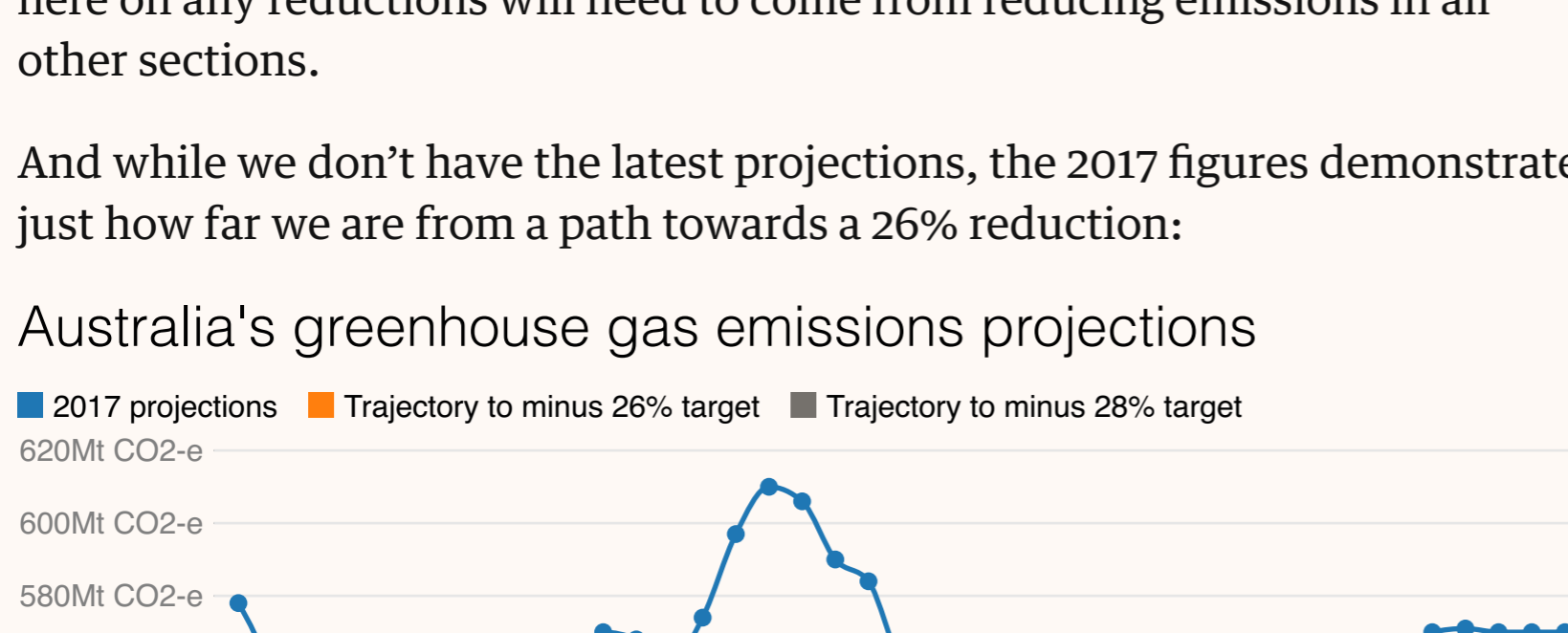


Chart: Greg Jericho • Source: Dept of Environment, Table 1A, derived • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

While our emissions in total might be 11.7% below 2005 levels, when we exclude LULUCF - like most countries do - they have actually risen by 6.5%.

At any rate, the minister's statements "solid progress" towards meeting the target is pure idiocy. All the benefits of the LULUCF measure have been used. From here on any reductions will need to come from reducing emissions in all other sections.

And while we don't have the latest projections, the 2017 figures demonstrate just how far we are from a path towards a 26% reduction:

Australia's greenhouse gas emissions projections

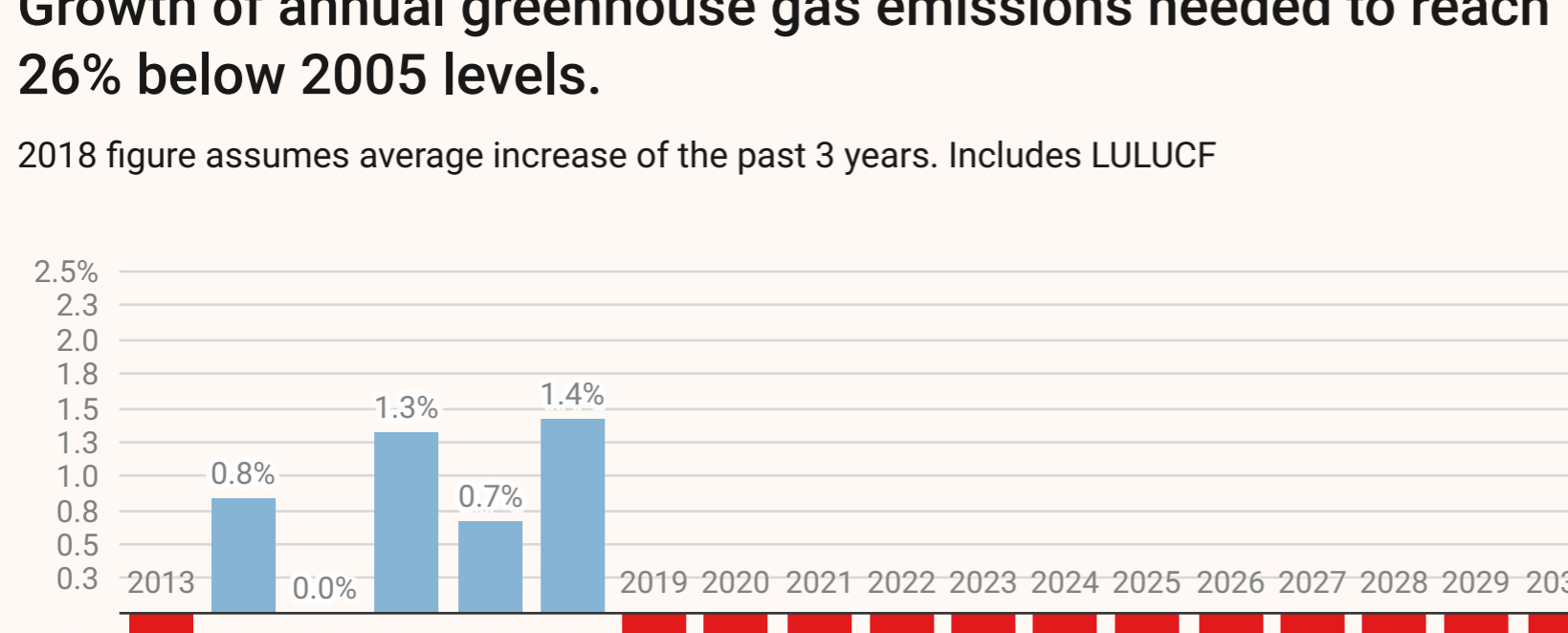


Chart: Greg Jericho • Source: Dept of Environment Fig 4 • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

Indeed, for our emissions to reach the required level of 442Mt CO2-e by 2030, we need to cut emissions each year by an average of 7.9Mt CO2-e over the next 12 years. But since the carbon price ended in 2014 we have instead been increasing emissions by an average of 3.6Mt CO2-e each year.

The change required is incredibly stark:

Growth of annual greenhouse gas emissions needed to reach 26% below 2005 levels.

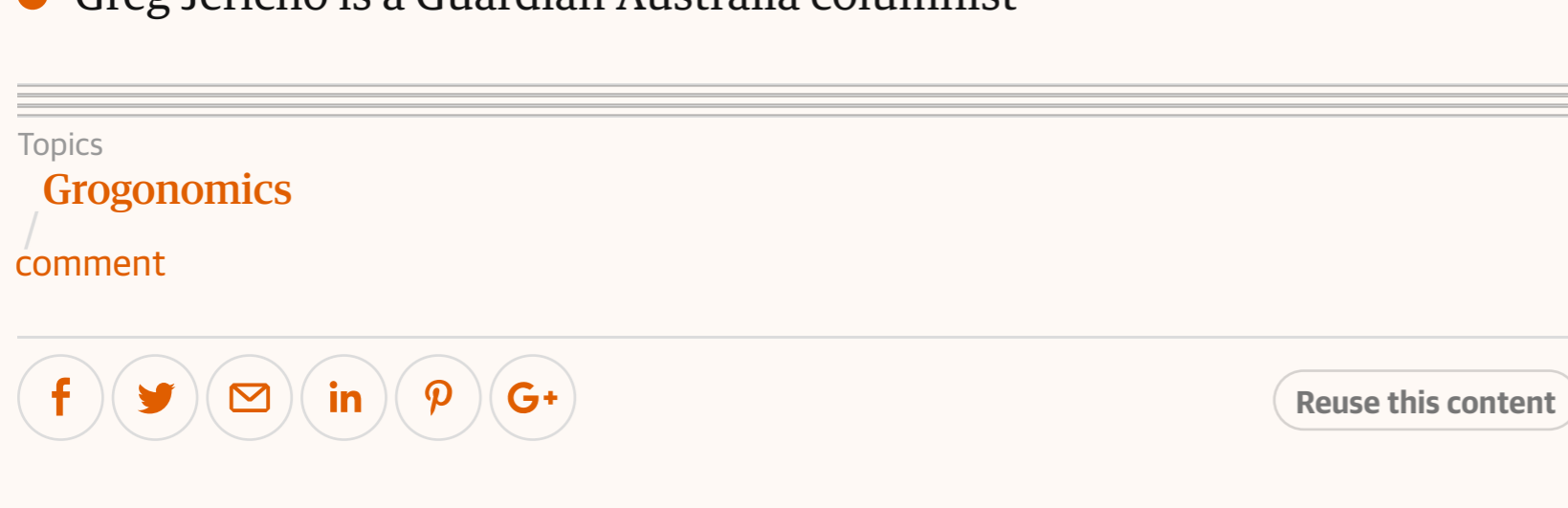
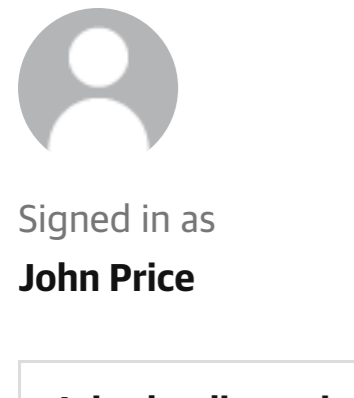


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Portrait of a planet on the verge of climate catastrophe

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There is no reality in which we are on track to meet our (pathetic) Paris targets "in a canter". Nothing in the figures suggest we have made "solid progress".

These latest emissions figures remain an utter condemnation of this government's complete lack of care about climate change and are an indictment on all of those who have served in its ranks - especially its three prime ministers, and three ministers for the environment.

Greg Jericho is a Guardian Australia columnist

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Comments section header with a profile picture, signed in as John Price, and a 'Join the discussion...' input field.

Post your comment

Order by: Newest. Show: 25. Threads: Collapsed.

Comment by Copperfield (4m ago): It's not just that the "Coalition couldn't care less", they will be delighted that emissions are rising because this indicates the success of their policies since the grinning fools gathered around Abbott to cheer for the removal of the price on carbon.

Comment by NooknCranny (6m ago): What the coalition has done will go down in the history books as the criminals that destroyed life on Earth as we inherited it. We are past the tipping point due to their actions and people like their ilk in other countries. The incoming government needs to see that environmental crimes on this scale have harsh prison terms and that those who have been instrumental in environmental destruction through their global warming policies and subsidies are punished.

And the pathetic carbon reduction goals of the incoming government must be ramped up dramatically by tapping into people power to do what we must do with great urgency.

Our broken democracy will need an overhaul so that decades of policy paralysis on an existential issue can never happen again.

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