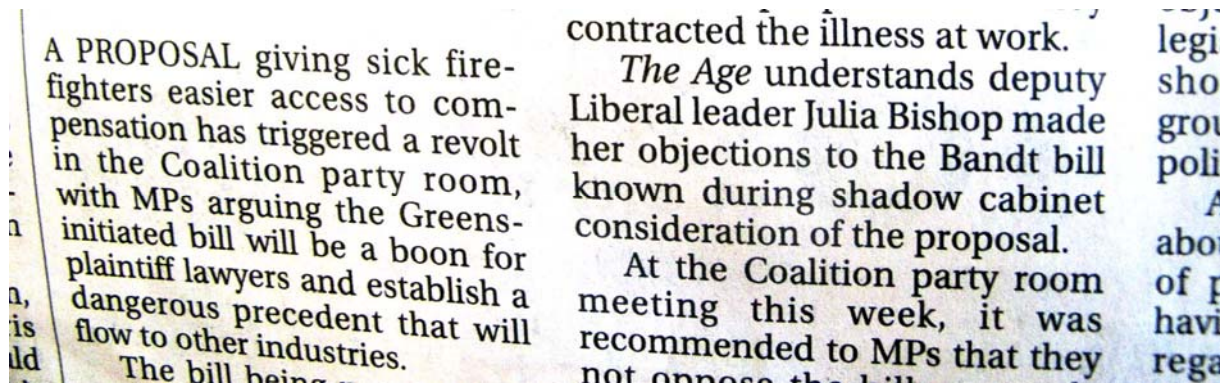


## From the Kitchen

7 March 2016



We are living fearful lives. Our politicians are keeping us that way and the media are assisting them eagerly. Although we live in the ‘information age’, we are not given ready access to the information we need to make informed choices or to intelligently debate the issues that affect our lives.

We almost all have access to the internet. However, there are caveats associated with information you will find there. What is the source? What are the vested interests (if any), the prejudices (everyone has them), and the political allegiances (if any) of the author? What information is the author relying on? Is that source reliable? Who is paying the author?

To be sure of the validity of the information, you need to research. If you want to use the information for debate or lobbying, can you find copies of the official government documents, or documents from reliable research organisations, ones that have no axe to grind? Is the source to the left or right of politics?

The most important debates we can have are about the environment (including climate change), geographical dislocation of people, human health, species survival, and food and water security. The arguments used by politicians and (largely) indiscriminately repeated by the media, can rarely be taken seriously; they are usually full of misinterpretation, jargon, double-speak and misdirection. The misdirection is used in the same way as it is employed by magicians – we look where they want us to, while they do something else where we *not* looking.

On all the important topics I have listed, we are being bamboozled and frightened by the apparitions and ghosts and chimeras. Money, corporations, financial markets and the economy are all creations of human ingenuity. Unfortunately, instead of reminding us that we can un-create or change them to suit our wider societal needs, we are falsely told that these are “real” things and we need to “obey” them, and “not upset them”. We are frightened into not upsetting them – the chimeras or the politicians.

The *real* things we should be concerned about are the air we breathe, the food we eat and the water we drink. Next on the list would be the ecosystems that support life – not just ours, but *all* life. We may consider it ‘greenie’ or ‘warm and fuzzy’ to be talking about protecting wild places for their own sakes, but it is a fundamental necessity for survival.

There are people who talk of the possibility of terraforming other planets in the future, such as Mars, so that humans may live there. What we are on a path of achieving right now is ‘Lunaforming’ our own planet so that nothing can live here.

As far back as I can remember, there have been frightening scenarios spouted by politicians and the media. Under Prime Minister Menzies it was the “yellow peril” that would slide down the map from Australia’s north. In the ’60s and ’70s it was fear of all-out nuclear war.

Are people still ready to be frightened and, if so, how much of this has to do with trust of the media? A Gallup poll in the USA in September 2015 found that only 40% of Americans say they trust the media.<sup>1</sup> It showed trust was higher amongst Democrats than Republicans, which makes me wonder about the hyperbole and nonsense in the American media at election time. In Australia the figures on trust of the media is similar, according to an October 2015 Reuters report.<sup>2</sup>

The question then becomes more complex. Much of what is reported in the media of what politicians say seems to be aimed at frightening the consumers of those media. But if 60% of the consumers of those media don’t entirely trust them, what effect does all this ‘frightening’ news have on how people organise their lives and on how they vote?

While we need to make urgent choices about the survival of life on the planet – it has been urgent for a long time – very few people who *should* be leading are doing anything other than pandering to the fossil fuel industry by frightening us with how it would wreck the economy and ruin our way of life if we put government support into developing technologies (especially in the production of energy) that will not have adverse effects. The development of these technologies and their implementation are largely coming from individuals, small businesses and local communities, who have decided to stop heeding the threatening language and are just getting on with it.

Perhaps that is the way for the (immediate) future – close our ears and eyes to the nonsense coming from our politicians and just get on with what we know to be right, showing others that it can be done and demonstrating the benefits of it, including the economic ones.

I know that I am sceptical about much of what is reported in the popular print media and on commercial television. I am less so about news on the ABC, the Australian public broadcaster, and I devour a lot of analysis of events and of political pontifications from smaller-circulation publications for which I pay a subscription. What I have to monitor carefully in my responses to what is put out through the media is not fear, but righteous anger.

1. [www.rt.com](http://www.rt.com)
2. [www.digitalnewsreport.org](http://www.digitalnewsreport.org)