

Environment

Opposition bid to block carbon tax bills c

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Debate on the government's carbon tax has got off to a spluttering start in the Senate.

A package of 19 bills is being considered by the upper house for the first time, following its approval b

As debate was due to start today, Opposition senate leader Eric Abetz moved to suspend standing or consideration of the bills until after the next election.

The Australian people were entitled to a say because the government had been "grossly misleading" 2010 election, he said.

Labor and the Australian Greens used their numbers to defeat the motion 35-31.

Earlier, debate began on the Steel Transformation Plan Bill 2011 but soon was adjourned.

The government plans to provide \$300 million to help the steel industry adjust to the carbon tax.

Liberal senator Mitch Fifield said the title of the bill sounded "fairly innocuous".

"There is only one reason that you have a steel industry support plan and that is if there is something Parliament.

"And what is going to damage that industry are the other 18 bills which the government are seeking to

"You don't need a compensation plan for an industry if there is no pain to be inflicted in the first place.

Liberal senator Simon Birmingham said deferring the package until after an election would allow a fur

"It would seem they [the government] are afraid the Australian people would disagree with them," he s

It was "a sad and sorry state of affairs" when the government of the day was afraid of testing the will c

The South Australian senator pointed to Qantas as an example of the cost that would be borne by Au

The airline would suffer an \$115 million annual hit to its bottom line when the carbon tax was introduc

Liberal senator Michaelia Cash said Prime Minister Julia Gillard, who declared there would be no cart elected on a lie.

"Those words will haunt the Prime Minister to her political grave," she said.

Manager of government business in the Senate Joe Ludwig said the opposition would no doubt contin energy future.

He dismissed as a stunt, the move by Senator Abetz.

"They [the Coalition] don't want to debate the substantive issue," he said.

Senator Eric Abetz told the chamber the bills should be renamed "the dirty deal package".

He also said Australia could be closely compared to Canada and it was not introducing a carbon tax.

He rejected government arguments the business community wanted certainty on climate change action.

"Businesses would rather the uncertainty of life rather than the certainty of death," he said.

Australian Greens senator Christine Milne said it was a "historic day" because the debate coincided with the start of the summer.

She warned extreme weather events and climate change refugees would be a reality all too soon.

"It's a race against time," she said. "It's too late to stop global warming. The challenge now is to lessen the damage."

Senator Milne thanked the voters of Australia for returning a minority government, which put climate change at the top of the agenda.

Labor senator Matt Thistlethwaite said it was not fair to let "our children inherit a nation with diminished opportunities."

It was not fair to dump the "burden" on future generations.

"We are better than that," he said.

Nationals senate leader Barnaby Joyce predicted the carbon price would be worth nothing within 10 years.

"Because they won't be there," he told Parliament.

"You can bank on that with absolute certainty under a Coalition government."

Senator Joyce also described the trading of carbon permits as "the greatest scam on earth".

"If we had a tax on malaria ... as mad as that is, it would actually cure people of malaria."

"If we had a tax on polio it would actually do something."

"But we have got a tax that does nothing. It just makes you poorer."

Greens leader Bob Brown said he had not heard a speech such as Senator Joyce's during his 15 years in parliament.

"I have never heard such an uninformed diatribe based on false information and calumny," he said.

Labor's Catryna Bilyk said Opposition Leader Tony Abbott was prepared to wind back billions of dollars in energy with his promise to repeal the carbon tax.

"This action will damage Australian's economy and destroy jobs as the rest of the world moves to a clean energy future."

"Even worse, he'll betray the most vulnerable Australians by ripping hundreds of dollars out of their pockets and leaving them with no funded retirees."

The Coalition's direct action scheme would slug families and line the pockets of the big polluters, Senator Joyce said.

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