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It's just a matter of trust

On Saturday night the government of Australia changed when incumbent prime minister Kevin Rudd conceded defeat and incoming prime minister Tony Abbott claimed victory. The legal formalities will follow.

Broadcast on national television, there was a peaceful transition of power by the consent of both sides. In the morning the public service heads were reporting to a new master.

Rudd's speech went 22 minutes. Abbott's half that time.

Rudd spoke principally to the supporters of the Labor Party. Abbott spoke principally to the nation.

Rudd spoke with the purpose of spinning a favourable judgment on his place in history. Abbott knows his place in history is still to be written.

Abbott reiterated his program — abolish the carbon tax, stop the boats — the message that he has delivered for three



years in the most disciplined performance by any opposition leader since the introduction of electronic media.

Few opposition leaders get a second chance at leading their party to an election. Fewer still are successful.

Abbott was elected to the leadership of the Liberal Party by one vote. He will be elected prime minister by nearly 30 seats. He has shown remarkable tenacity and endurance.

He was the outstanding performer in the campaign. He deserves every ounce of his success. Abbott was also supported by a very strong team.

His message on the boats was credible because he had a

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credible, tough spokesman in Scott Morrison, who was all over the issue and tireless in arguing the opposition policy.

Abbott was extremely well served by his deputy, Julie Bishop, who did a lot of the heavy lifting in the House of Representatives which allowed Abbott to reposition himself with a gentler image.

And Labor's promised demolition of the Coalition cost-

ings never came about because Joe Hockey and his team were on top of the figures and won the economic debate hands down.

At his campaign launch, Rudd boasted his team was “person for person, man for man, woman for woman light years ahead of anything that sits opposite”. It was hard to see who he was referring to.

His treasurer Chris Bowen

was always threatening to blow up Hockey and his costings until he blew up himself by falsely claiming that the Treasury and Finance departments had found an error in the opposition policy.

They hadn't and they put out a statement to say so.

Bowen then retired from the national campaign to concentrate on saving his own seat. In cricketing terms his innings would be described as “retired hurt”.

Labor's spokeswoman Penny Wong was damaged goods after promising with Wayne Swan they would balance the Budget this year.

Bob Carr was off at the G20 in Moscow, Bill Shorten looked like he was saving himself for the next election and Anthony Albanese was left as the one remaining spruiker for Rudd. Albanese is an endearing kind of rascal — quite entertaining as long as you take him in small doses.

In the end the Labor campaign was all about Kevin. And the concession speech on Saturday night was all about Kevin — if only because Kevin got to deliver it.

The essence of it was that Kevin had saved Labor in Queensland, that a loss of 15 seats was a pretty good result

and it showed what a clever decision it was to bring him back as leader. The only question we were left to ponder was how silly it was to get rid of him in the first place. Rudd wants Labor to embrace him as its saviour rather than its saboteur.

Labor's campaign was never about policy. It was all about Abbott's supposedly secret hit list — a list which never existed. As the campaign wore on this became more evident.

Abbott began formulating his policy as putting the Budget “on track for a believable surplus” by the end of his first term. It was designed to give him licence to continue running budget deficits over the next three years. It meant he didn't need to cut any expenditure. Labor had to attack him for a policy he didn't have because they agreed with the policy he did have.

With his agenda well publicised Abbott now has the mandate and the obligation to deliver. The Senate will be rocky but I am confident that,

one way or another, the mining and the carbon tax will go.

It will be trickier to stop the boats. Stopping people from boarding boats in Indonesia in search of a better life consists of convincing them that the effort will not be successful.

The trouble is they know it has been successful for many relatives and countrymen. We cannot risk a humanitarian disaster but when smugglers test the resolve of the new government, Abbott will need to win.

This is what Prime Minister Abbott meant on Saturday night when he talked of forming a government that is competent, that is trustworthy. What a difference that will be.