



TRANSCRIPT

Senator the Hon Penny Wong

Minister for Climate Change and Water

PW 195/09

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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH MARTIN CORBEN, ABC SYDNEY 702 MORNINGS

SUBJECT: CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION SCHEME, NUCLEAR ENERGY

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JOURNALIST: Senator Penny Wong is the Federal Minister for Climate Change and Water, she is on the line. Good morning to you.

WONG: Good morning.

JOURNALIST: This week the Opposition Leader Malcolm Turnbull has indicated that he wants to amend the ETS legislation rather than blocking it. Has that given you hope of getting it passed?

WONG: Well that's really a question ultimately that Mr Turnbull has the answer to because it is he who has the majority of votes in the Senate and, as your introduction outlined, it's also Mr Turnbull who currently leads a party which has a multiplicity of positions on the legislation. We are willing to talk to the Opposition, but the Liberals really need to talk to each other first.

JOURNALIST: Is it for the Opposition to come up with the points of negotiation or are you willing to talk about just about any aspect of the ETS?

WONG: I think if we have a negotiation then the Liberal party is going to have to tell us what they want in order to pass the Bill. And at the moment if the Government were to start negotiating with them, I am not sure who we would talk to. Would we talk about Mr Tuckey's position or Mr Robb's position, or Mr Hockey's position, or Barnaby Joyce's position? They don't have a position at the moment and that means that the Liberal party isn't in a position to negotiate with us. And Mr Turnbull has got 21 days to something about that, because in 21 days he is going to have to decide which way his Senators will vote.

JOURNALIST: Yes, with that ongoing internal conflicts there's nothing you can influence from a direct point of view, but I am just wondering whether that makes you worried that that internal conflict within the Coalition party room will mean that it won't support legislation in any form, because we know that the National Party is stoically against it.

WONG: Well so far, unfortunately Mr Turnbull's position has been driven by the internal politics of his party room. And it's not so much a question of what I am worried about, I think Australians would expect more from the alternative prime minister. They would expect the alternative government to come up with their position on a piece of legislation that is so significant and so important for the country's future. Instead what we have is a position of division. The Liberal party is in disarray on this issue and Mr Turnbull really needs to do something about it and he has got 21 days to do that.

JOURNALIST: Now does it indicate that the Coalition isn't prepared to take this issue to the electorate at a double dissolution?

WONG: Look I can't speak for what is going through the Liberal party's minds on this issue because there are so many different positions seem to be coming out. I can say what we believe and that is Australians want action on climate change. They made that clear at the last election. We went to the last election with a commitment to the sort of scheme we are putting into the Parliament. I'd add in fact that the Liberal Party went to the election promising also to introduce an emissions trading scheme. Unfortunately their politics in opposition appears to be division where those who don't believe in climate change and who oppose any action continue to have far more sway in their party room than I think Australians would like.

JOURNALIST: Let me come back to some of the points of negotiation. Are there any that you can nominate that are negotiable at this stage, or have you heard from the Opposition in a formal or maybe even an informal sense of what points of negotiation there are?

WONG: The Opposition has not put forward one single amendment to the Government, not a single amendment to the Government. And that is what I am saying: we are willing to talk, but the Liberal party need to talk to each other first. If Mr Turnbull is serious about dealing with this matter responsibly and constructively, he is going to have to go into his party room, resolve these differences and come out with a position. Then he'll be able to talk to us.

JOURNALIST: We know from the ongoing debate that some of the things that seem to be a core in their acceptance of your plans is along the lines of timelines and targets. Are those some of the things that you would find negotiable?

WONG: Well I don't know where you're getting your information from but I have seen a range of views put by different shadow ministers. I've seen Mr Turnbull change his position depending on which interview he's done. I've seen Mr Robb and Mr Hockey and Senator Joyce and Senator Boswell all put different views on a whole range of issues including some of the ones you've just put to me. Again I make this point: not a single amendment, not a single constructive position or suggestion has been put by Mr Turnbull or his shadow ministers. If the Liberal party wants to talk about this, they are going to have to get a position. They have to tell the Australian people and the Government what it is they say needs to happen for them to pass the Bill. So far they are ducking this issue and I think Mr Turnbull as I said needs to sort this out, he's got three weeks to do it.

JOURNALIST: OK well we'll leave him to his three week ... then if we can. Now the other point that's come up in recent days, Rio Tinto mentioning that we need to look at nuclear energy as a possibility to supply our energy needs. I noticed that you've come out in opposition to that, saying that we need to focus on sustainable energy issues. Can you explain more why you take that position?

WONG: Well I think Australians have made it pretty clear their views on nuclear power domestically. And when you're trying to shift your energy sector over the next 10 or 20 years as Australia is, to try and build a lower carbon energy sector you have to make some choices now. Our view is that the two areas we need to focus on are first, to try and reduce our emissions from coal fire power and second, to invest in renewables. I mean Australia is blessed with an enormous range of renewable energy sources. And we as a government believe that what is much more preferable is to make the investments we need into the renewable energy sector to grow that sector, to improve our technology, our innovation, in those sectors, rather than focusing on nuclear power.

JOURNALIST: We've seen a change, if you like, in the general understanding of what Labor party policy would be on, certainly, uranium mining. I've just wondering if there's any point in time where we might see a change in the swing back to nuclear energy given that there seems to be a, well an ongoing push, certainly it's an ongoing discussion point of the consideration of nuclear energy.

WONG: Well we've made our position clear, we're opposed to nuclear power domestically. If there's any movement it seems to be on the other side. Mr Turnbull, Mr Robb his shadow minister has been talking about these sorts of possibilities. We've ruled out domestic nuclear power in Australia, I think the question really is whether the Opposition will do that.

JOURNALIST: Minister we might just wrap on the timeline issues. You said Malcolm Turnbull has three weeks to make up his mind in terms of whether they are going to challenge or pass, how they're going to deal with the emissions trading scheme. From that point on when will we see the introduction of legislation and indeed passing of laws that will bring it into force?

WONG: Well that is what we are seeking to do. I mean the Bill has legislatively passed the Lower House. The legislation will be in the Senate. The vote in the Senate is scheduled for the end of the first sitting week in August which is in 21 days. And so Mr Turnbull and all Senators will have a choice on that day whether they vote to start to reduce Australia's carbon pollution or whether they vote to allow it to continue to rise.

JOURNALIST: Minister thanks for talking to us.

WONG: Good to speak with you.

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