



TRANSCRIPT

Senator the Hon Penny Wong

Minister for Climate Change and Water

PW 30/10

1 February 2010

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW – ABC RADIO NATIONAL BREAKFAST WITH FRAN KELLY

SUBJECT: CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION SCHEME

E & O E – PROOF ONLY

JOURNALIST: The Senate has already rejected the ETS Bills twice. Why are you trying again - is there something we don't know?

WONG: Well let's remember this is a piece of legislation that a couple of months ago the majority of the Liberal Party supported. Just less than two short months ago this was endorsed by the Liberal party room. We are going to give them the opportunity to vote for the legislation that Malcolm Turnbull and Ian Macfarlane negotiated with the Government. And we are going to give them the opportunity to do the right thing and be responsible by Australia's future. What we are seeing is a lot of campaigning from Mr Abbott, negative campaigning using facts he knows not to be true. It's time for him to be responsible and credible on this issue.

JOURNALIST: Nevertheless in the two short months since then the politics on this issue has changed dramatically. To get this bill through you would need to change it significantly, are you willing to negotiated again major modifications to your ETS?

WONG: Well Fran we negotiated very substantial modifications. I spent, as you might recall...

JOURNALIST: They are not going to get up, we already know that...

WONG: ... over a number of weeks with Mr Macfarlane and Mr Turnbull on behalf of the Liberal party and they were endorsed by the Liberal party. Of course the Government is willing to negotiate to secure passage of this important legislation. This shouldn't be about politics; this should be about what is right for the nation. This is a key challenge for the future. It's already happening, it will worsen. We know what climate change means for our economy, for our environment and its time that Mr Abbott started to be responsible instead of peddling things he knows not to be true.

JOURNALIST: Well if this is about action, the Greens for instance say that they don't think your ETS is salvageable but they suggest you do something like an interim carbon tax, set a price on carbon. Is that an attractive short option that you would consider? I know you are meeting with the Greens today?

WONG: Yes Fran I will meet with the Greens representatives and discuss their approach with them. But let's remember we would have action if the Greens had chosen not to sit with people like Senator Fielding and the Liberal Party as it had then been taken over by Tony Abbott.

JOURNALIST: They chose it because they don't think your bill is good enough

WONG: I am simply making the point it's a little illogical to say we need action but then vote

against it. Nevertheless we do want to have a discussion with the Greens. Obviously they themselves can't carry the legislation - we need seven votes. The Government will be discussing this with an eye to passage of the legislation. We hope that the Greens will take a constructive approach.

JOURNALIST: What percentage chance do you put on the bill getting up?

WONG: I think you know me well enough Fran; I am not much of a gambler. But I tell you this by the time we bring this into the Parliament, Mr Abbott's own spokesperson Mr Hunt has promised that there will be a fully costed policy. And that is what is necessary because Australians are entitled on this issue, that is so important, to see what the alternative Government is putting forward. And I notice today Senator Joyce, the finance spokesperson for the Opposition, indicating some worrying signs backing away from putting forward a fully costed policy. I think Australians would expect, if this is such an important issue for Mr Abbott, they would expect that he would be upfront with them about what his policy will cost and what he is going to cut to fund it.

JOURNALIST: OK we will come to the Opposition policy in a moment. I accept you are not a gambling kind of person but you would have to say the odds aren't good of getting this through. Is a double dissolution now inevitable? Is the Government determined to push this through even if this means or takes a double dissolution election?

WONG: Well the Government has been consistent about its approach to climate change. This...

JOURNALIST: So that's a yes?

WONG: This has been our policy for the entirety of the time Kevin Rudd has been leader- both before the election, in the election and since the election. It is the Opposition which has shifted on this issue, as Mr Abbott was described by his colleague he has been a bit of a weathervane on the issue of climate change. On the issue of the election that is a matter for the Prime Minister and he has made his views clear on that, that he believes that Australians do expect governments to serve their full term.

JOURNALIST: Even if that means not getting a climate change bill through?

WONG: Let's get through this debate. Ultimately the issue is whether or not the Liberal party will be putting forward a credible alternative policy. If they don't, then I think Australians will know that they're really not serious on this issue, they just don't get it.

JOURNALIST: You'll get the Opposition's policy tomorrow. We know it's going to be direct action policy - initiatives like tree planting, soil carbon capture. Will you look at adopting what the Opposition is suggesting? Are they good ideas?

WONG: First, we adopted a lot of what the then Opposition put to us, in terms of putting additional mechanisms, additional opportunities for particularly farmers and other land holders to participate in being part of the solution of climate change. So opportunities to get credits for planting trees. We're also investing additional money into other agricultural options. But what I would say is this: there isn't a cost free way to fight climate change and Mr Abbott's approach is one that is not being followed in any other advanced economy. He's on his own on this issue. In fact, he's on his own in terms of conservative leaders - even conservative Prime Ministers, like Prime Minister Key in New Zealand or David Cameron, the conservative Opposition Leader in the UK. He's not taking this approach. Mr Abbott is on his own and he shouldn't pretend that his policy won't cost anything.

JOURNALIST: But you shouldn't pretend that the rest of the world is taking your policy approach either. I mean the US seems to have gone cold doesn't it?

WONG: Come on Fran. We've got 35 other nations who either have an Emissions Trading Scheme in place or the government has announced an intention to put one in place. Japan, New Zealand, the European Union, and, yes, the President of the United States and his Administration is pressing for a Bill through the Senate. Now obviously, they are encountering some of the same resistance we're encountering from those who hold quite extreme views on this issue and don't want to take action. It is a very backward looking position that is being taken by Mr Abbott and the Liberals. Because we know climate change is going to affect us so significantly, we have to start action. We have the opportunity in this Parliament to do that and if he is a responsible leader he ought not walk away from that.

JOURNALIST: It's ten minutes to 8 on breakfast. Our guest this morning is Climate Change Minister Penny Wong. And talking about extreme views, the National Party has done some polling in this field which reportedly shows that 75 percent of voters in this country prefer direct action to an Emissions Trading Scheme. Has the tide turned politically on this issue?

WONG: I think Australians are still very concerned about the issue of climate change. We know from the Bureau of Meteorology's recent announcements that we've just finished the hottest decade in our history. It's a pretty significant statistic, isn't it, that - the hottest decade in Australia's history. Obviously this has become an increasingly politicised issue because Mr Abbott has now adopted his fifth position on the Emissions Trading Scheme, on the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, and is peddling a whole range of facts he knows not to be true. We understand this is a tough fight, but it is absolutely the right thing to do by the nation.

JOURNALIST: And just very briefly, is the fight tougher for you because of the very publicised mistakes and exaggerations by the IPCC?

WONG: Well obviously those issues are not helpful but the main recommendations, the weight of the science is absolutely clear. Both in the IPCC report which has been extensively reviewed, and equally importantly in Australia's own institutions - the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology - they've told us, as they told John Howard for many years, that climate change is occurring and have warned of the risks to Australia now and in the future. We know what it would mean for the Murray Darling Basin, we know what it would mean for the Great Barrier Reef, we know what both of those things would mean for our economy and our environment. We do have to act on climate change, and the science on this is very clear - we need action.

JOURNALIST: Alright, Penny Wong thank you very much for joining us on Breakfast.

WONG: Good to speak with you Fran.

ENDS