



TRANSCRIPT

Senator the Hon Penny Wong

Minister for Climate Change and Water

PW 31/10

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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW – SKY NEWS AM AGENDA WITH KIERAN GILBERT

SUBJECT: CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION SCHEME

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JOURNALIST: Climate Change Minister Penny Wong, thanks for your time.

WONG: Good to be here.

JOURNALIST: You are going to be meeting with the Greens today. They have put forward a compromise, an interim carbon price for two years. Is that idea compatible with a longer term emissions trading scheme of course which the Government wants to introduce?

WONG: The Greens are correct in wanting a carbon price, so do we. We want a price on pollution, we want to make polluters pay. That is what our scheme does. That is why we are pressing forward with the legislation because you need to put a limit on and a price on pollution if you are going to tackle climate change. We will have the discussion with the Greens. Obviously we need more than just the Greens to vote for the legislation for it to pass the Senate. The Government certainly will be working to secure passage of the legislation.

JOURNALIST: But they don't want as much compensation to the heavy emitters, so are you willing to compromise there?

WONG: We compromised quite significantly last year when we spoke at length over a number of weeks to Mr Macfarlane and Mr Turnbull. The Government has been very determined to get this legislation passed and let's remember...

JOURNALIST: But are you willing to go the other way now and give less compensation?

WONG: Let's remember also this legislation, just less than two short months ago, was supported by the majority of the Liberal Party room. It's an important thing to remember. Just less than two short months ago this was supported by the majority of the Liberal party room. They have now changed their position and tomorrow, if press reports are right, Australians will have the opportunity to judge what their alternative policy is and it's up to Mr Abbott to ensure it is a fully costed policy because Australians should be able to judge.

JOURNALIST: But you compromised on one side with Macfarlane and Turnbull. That is history now. Are you willing to compromise on the other and say OK we will give less compensation to the heavy emitters in order to get the Greens on board?

WONG: I don't think in all the interviews I did with you last year whilst I was negotiating with the Liberal party that I negotiated through the press and I certainly won't be doing that now.

JOURNALIST: But it's a possibility then, you are not ruling it out?

WONG: What I am saying is we will certainly have a discussion with the Greens. We want to secure passage of the legislation. We would require more than just the Greens votes to do that.

JOURNALIST: OK the Prime Minister yesterday and the Government saying that this is going to be one megatax from Tony Abbott. He says you have got great big new tax, it seems to have shifted to an economic debate. Is that what it is now, it's not about global warming as far as you see it, you have moved it onto an economic footing?

WONG: I think both parties, the Government and the Opposition, should be judged on whether this is the economically responsible way to tackle climate change. The Government has got a fully costed policy that makes polluters pay and then assists working families to meet the costs of a price on carbon. So we have a clear position - make polluters pay and to assist working families to handle the costs that may flow through the system, which are about a one off 1.1 per cent increase. We are going to assist families very significantly to help with that. The Opposition promised a fully costed policy, that is what Mr Hunt said some time ago. He said they would have a detailed and fully costed policy. I notice Senator Joyce today on radio saying that there are being costs bandied around inside the Shadow Cabinet, not committing to providing those costings to the nation. Can I say this: if the Opposition fail to put forward a proper costing of their policy, then people in this country will know they are not serious about climate change.

JOURNALIST: But you have said it's going to be a megatax from Tony Abbott, you haven't even seen what he is putting forward yet?

WONG: Because you have to fund it.

JOURNALIST: But you are not even willing to wait and see what he is going to put forward?

WONG: Because everybody in this country knows that there isn't a cost free way to tackle climate change. I don't think there's anybody who believes that magically we can tackle this enormous problem that has been many generations in the making without there being costs. The issue is how you do it most fairly and most efficiently. And if Mr Abbott is going to fund a whole range of policies and thought bubbles that he's been promoting, he's going to have to get the money from somewhere. Now Senator Joyce talked about things that might be cut, well, it's up to the Opposition to be upfront with the Australian people, as the Government has, and tell people what they're going to cut to fund their policies.

JOURNALIST: When recent polls have looked at the issue of climate change, it has shown that it's actually dropped in terms of the level of priority people are giving it. Do you think the level of concern within the Australian population about climate change, about global warming, has fallen in the last year or so?

WONG: Well we've just finished the hottest decade in Australia's history and we know that that's consistent with what our scientists, as well as international scientists, are telling us. And I think Australians do understand this is a very important issue. Of course it's become a highly political issue. We've got Mr Abbott out there saying things he knows are not true, instead of debating the real issue, which is how does this nation best tackle climate change and how do we pay for it?

JOURNALIST: It doesn't seem we're meeting international standards. If you look at Canada yesterday, it set a 17 percent target by 2020 under the Copenhagen Accord. Our minimum target is five per cent.

WONG: I think you'll see that Canada's baseline year is different. We have said we would like to do...

JOURNALIST: So it's not greater than ours?

WONG: We would like to do more. We've said we're willing to do more, and most importantly, we have a plan that enables us to do more. So we have a plan that is fully costed, that can meet either a five to 15 percent reduction off 2000 levels, or a 25 per cent reduction off 2000 levels if the rest of the world follows suit and does what we hope they will do, which is to have the most ambitious targets possible.

JOURNALIST: But the problem is exactly what you said - it is a plan and that's all it is. It's not legislation, and the ETS is not going to get through this time either. So you've only got one option, don't you? It's a double dissolution.

WONG: Let's first have the debate in the Parliament. This is a tough issue, it is a tough reform and if it were easy, it would have been done earlier. It wasn't done for over a decade under John Howard, even though by the end of that he finally came to the same position as the Government. I mean that's the extraordinary thing about this debate. Tony Abbott is taking a position that has him out there on his own. Whether it's John Howard, or the leader of the conservatives in the United Kingdom, or the Prime Minister of New Zealand who's conservative, or a range of other conservative leaders. It's only Tony Abbott who's taking this approach. The majority of advanced economies, or at least 35 of them, have either got an Emissions Trading Scheme in place or are planning to introduce one. Tony Abbott's out there on his own.

JOURNALIST: The United States is yet to sign off on one though: it's having a similar debate there.

WONG: They are, they're having the same sort of debate we're having here, where unfortunately...

JOURNALIST: So he's not on his own. There are a few Republicans in the Abbott camp as well?

WONG: That's true: he's got a few US Republicans. But I'm saying that if you look at a whole range of conservative leaders in advanced economies, very few, well none, are advocating the same sort of position that Tony Abbott is. The reason is, just as Mr Howard determined, this is the most effective way to tackle climate change.

JOURNALIST: Well it's going to be one of the key issues this election year. We look forward to chatting to you many times again throughout 2010. Thanks.

WONG: Good to be with you.

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