



TRANSCRIPT

Senator the Hon Penny Wong

Minister for Climate Change and Water

PW 25/10

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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW- PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA

SUBJECT: SUBMISSION TO COPENHAGEN ACCORD, TONY ABBOTT

E & O E – PROOF ONLY

WONG: Thanks very much for coming. I'm here to announce today what the Government will be doing in relation to its submission to the Copenhagen Accord. The Government will be formally submitting its existing 2020 target range for reducing emissions to the Copenhagen Accord. That is, a five per cent unconditional target with up to 15 per cent and 25 per cent both conditional on the extent of action by others as we've set out in May (this) year. This approach is consistent with the approach that we expect to be taken by other nations. There are other nations which have indicated both conditional targets previously. We anticipate that this is an approach consistent with that which will be taken by other nations.

Can I emphasise again however, that obviously it is in Australia's interests for there to be the most ambitious global agreement possible. And we will continue to work with the parties to the Copenhagen Accord to get the most ambitious agreement possible. And consistent with that target range, we will set a more ambitious target if the conditions that the Government has previously outlined are met.

I want to say again, the need for action on climate change has not diminished. The need for action on climate change remains. And the need for the CPRS remains the same. You cannot respond effectively to climate change unless you put a limit and a price on pollution. That's why we have to have the lowest cost, most efficient way of reducing greenhouse gas pollution. And that is the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme endorsed previously not just by previous Liberal opposition leaders, but by the former Prime Minister John Howard. Happy to take questions.

JOURNALIST: Penny, your release is saying that if matters are not resolved in 2011, the Government will just set a five per cent target to give business certainty, with a commencement in July 2012. So essentially you're giving it two more years...

WONG: We are still retaining, the Government's maintaining a consistent position. That is the start date remains the same. You will recall the first year was a fixed price. Obviously the target range is relevant to the first year in which you have a floating price or trading. And what we have said is in the event that these matters aren't resolved, we will go with scheme caps consistent with our unconditional target.

Let's remember that the key reason that people across the political divide have supported the CPRS is its lower cost and part of that is that you have to give business certainty (inaudible)

JOURNALIST: So if there's no international agreement in 2011, you're going to go with five per cent?

WONG: Correct.

JOURNALIST: Is there any point negotiating with the Greens on their scheme, given you're clear on what you're going to do?

WONG: Well this target range is a consistent position from the Government, as is the need for passage of the CPRS. Now I'm happy to meet with Greens Senators. I understand a meeting has been scheduled for next week. We obviously are keen to talk with them. It is regrettable that the Greens chose to vote with Senator Fielding and the Liberal party to not support the CPRS previously. And if they're willing to reconsider that position, obviously we want to have a discussion with them.

JOURNALIST: Yvo de Boer said he expects that not all countries will make the deadline - I think it's this Sunday - for putting forward the targets. He's also said there may be no legally binding treaty out of the Copenhagen process by the end of this year. Are you optimistic though that this can be sorted out and can be sorted out this year? What are your prospects for the Copenhagen Accord?

WONG: There's no doubt - and I think that Copenhagen confirmed that - that international negotiations are tough. They are difficult negotiations and we have to keep pressing because the world needs, Australia needs, an ambitious global agreement. The Copenhagen Accord is capable of delivering a good environmental outcome but we need to keep working with the nations who are signing up to it to deliver that good environmental outcome.

JOURNALIST: There has been an expectation from some quarters that countries with conditional targets like ours would actually firm up a more specific target. Did Australia come under pressure to do that?

WONG: Obviously we considered very closely the views put to us by various parties. We considered closely what we understood was happening internationally. I note for example that Japan has, in the last 24 hours, announced its target which remains conditional. And the reality is, as the Prime Minister said, Australia's position remains: we will do our fair share. No more, but certainly no less than the rest of the world.

JOURNALIST: Tony Abbott has questioned why India and China would put their economies at risk and push ahead with cuts to greenhouse gases - what's your response to that?

WONG: We know what Mr Abbott thinks about climate change. In his own words, he thinks it's 'absolute crap'. And that's the position he's taking whether it's domestically or internationally. I think given how important climate change is, and how Australia is already and will continue to be impacted, it is regrettable on the international front that Mr Abbott keeps talking down the prospect of action. I will say, we look forward to India and China putting forward what they're prepared to do. I note that what's known as the basic countries - that is Brazil, South Africa, India and China - have put out a statement indicating their support for the Accord and indicating they are proposing to put forward their actions. And we look forward to the detail.

JOURNALIST: Minister, on another issue, why is it so inappropriate for Mr Abbott to reveal the advice given to his daughters. He says he's not preaching to all Australians, that it is advice to his daughters...

WONG: Well look, on these issues really, they are issues that I think best belong in private conversation. I do think it's problematic when politicians seek to impose their views on the community and I think people make these personal decisions and that's where it should stay. I think

people do find it difficult when politicians purport to start to lecture them about what are deeply personal matters.

JOURNALIST: Senator, what do you make of George Brandis' comments on Madonna King today though, saying that Julia Gillard would have a different point of view if she had children about what Tony Abbott said?

WONG: I can just say again what I said. I think Australians have made it very clear what they think is their private business. And I think these are matters which are the private business and the choice of individual Australians. And I think particularly Australian women are quite capable of making that choice themselves.

JOURNALIST: Just back on the ETS, do you believe that the setting of these targets with the five per cent will make it more likely that your CPRS will pass the Senate?

WONG: On the passage of the CPRS through the Senate, let's just remember where we've come from. Less than a couple of months ago, the majority of the Liberal party supported the CPRS. They've now, under Tony Abbott, changed position. And the question really should be why. The need for action on climate change hasn't gone away. The need for an environmentally effective, economically responsible policy hasn't gone away. And the fact that the CPRS is both consistent with what 32 other nations are doing and consistent with what mainstream conservative leaders such as John Howard supported - that hasn't gone away either.

I will say this though. When the CPRS gets to the Senate, or in fact as I understand from Mr Abbott even earlier, Australians will know what Tony Abbott's policy is. And Australians will be able to judge whether his policy is credible. And the Liberal Party will be asked to vote on a scheme that is fully costed, that is effective environmentally and economically responsible. And they'll be judged on the credibility of their position.

JOURNALIST: And you're still committed to an ETS rather than a de facto carbon tax?

WONG: Well look we already have a fixed price in the first year. That was announced on the 4th of May last year. That's not a new position. We remain committed to the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme because it is consistent with what other developed economies are doing. And it has consistently been found to be the most cost-effective way forward.

JOURNALIST: Minister you talk a lot about business certainty. There's no more business certainty here, is there? Because you haven't made a decision on a specific target.

WONG: We have made a decision on a specific target. What we're saying is: in the absence of those conditions, the target is five per cent. And if those conditions are met, then obviously we'll be altering the target consistent with the conditions we previously put out. Obviously it would've been our preference to have had the CPRS through and to provide that business certainty. Regrettably, as a result of Mr Abbott's position, that hasn't been the case.

JOURNALIST: So if the CPRS was through you would have, under the Copenhagen Accord, announced a specific target?

WONG: No I am making the point, you asked about business certainty and I am making the point that business certainty would have been certain had Mr Abbott had done what, less than two months ago, the majority of the Liberal Party supported.

JOURNALIST: Respected academic Bob Birrell last week found that even under your scheme that emissions are going to grow and that you have got little prospect of meeting the 5 per cent target anyway?

WONG: I'd refer you to the very extensive modelling and detail that the Government has put out which confirms the capacity of the CPRS to meet the targets. I think what is more problematic is policies which don't put a limit on pollution, don't put a price on pollution, don't make polluters pay. People pretending that they are actually going to be effective in terms of meeting targets. Let's remember Tony Abbott signed up to the same targets as the Government.

JOURNALIST: Is Bob Birrell wrong?

WONG: Well I haven't seen the detail of his comments I am just referring you to what the Government has put out there which is an enormous amount of detail, an enormous amount of costing, an enormous amount of information on policy which has been demonstrably successful in other countries and is demonstrably the way in which other developed economies are indicating they will go.

JOURNALIST: Can you guarantee that emissions will actually fall?

WONG: I can guarantee that if you don't get a CPRS through, if you don't have a limit and a price on pollution, that Australia's emissions will continue to rise. Absolutely will continue to rise.

JOURNALIST: Can you guarantee they will fall?

WONG: I have already answered that question. We have said the CPRS can deliver the targets which are set out. I am not sure what the detail of the argument is.

JOURNALIST: Would you consider extending the period of the set price?

WONG: The Government has made its position clear. We had a very clear view about a year's fixed price and then a year by which we could move to trading. That's the position of the Government.

JOURNALIST: Just on the greenhouse targets, what should Australians expect from the US this year given the recent developments in the Senate – should we expect they will cut their emissions with an ETS or not?

WONG: Well that's probably a question you should ask President Obama, not me. I would just refer you to what is on the public record. The United States has indicated an unconditional target, which is equivalent to around about four per cent on 1990 levels, and that was an unconditional indication from the President I think in the lead up to Copenhagen.

JOURNALIST: ...the 2012 deadline, because that's when the Kyoto agreement is reached?

WONG: Well obviously that is the end of the Kyoto period. It's also the year, in answer to Phil, it's the year in which the floating prices commences, that is full trading commences.

JOURNALIST: What is the official criteria now for whether you have one target or another – is it what is here or is it the May?

WONG: This builds on, in fact is operationalising the 4th May announcement so it's consistent...

JOURNALIST: So all those numbers still stand from 4th May?

WONG: Correct.

JOURNALIST: Will the legislation, or sorry the bill you are introducing next week, take into account the feedback on the intensive, exposed intensive trade industries, industries which the feedback which doesn't close until tomorrow?

WONG: Two different issues I think. I have indicated previously Dennis, we will be introducing a bill consistent with the changes we agreed with Malcolm Turnbull. That were endorsed by the Liberal Party room less that two months ago. That will be the bill that is introduced. I think you are referring to regulations and consultation on that. That's really detail of regulations, it's consistent with the policy position.

JOURNALIST: Minister you are meeting with the Greens next week. Their position is fairly broadly different to the Labor position and they don't have the balance of power in the Senate. Isn't the CPRS dead in the water?

WONG: I am happy to have a discussion with the Greens as I said in response to an earlier question, but in terms of the CPRS and the Parliament, I again refer to what I said about the Liberal Party. This was endorsed by the Liberal Party less that two months ago. The need for action on climate change hasn't gone away. The need for a CPRS hasn't gone away and at the time this matter is in the Parliament Australians will be able to judge the credibility of Mr Abbott's policy.

JOURNALIST: But how seriously will you consider their plan for a two year cap on carbon?

WONG: Guys I don't think I negotiated through the press last time I certainly won't start now, so I have given you about as much as I will. Anything else? Thanks very much.

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