



TRANSCRIPT

Senator the Hon Penny Wong

Minister for Climate Change, Energy Efficiency and Water

PW 144/10

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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW – ABC RADIO NATIONAL BREAKFAST WITH FRAN KELLY

SUBJECT: ENHANCED RENEWABLE ENERGY TARGET LEGISLATION, CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION SCHEME DELAY, LEADERSHIP, DRAFT BASIN PLAN

E & O E – PROOF ONLY

JOURNALIST: Minister good morning.

WONG: Good morning Fran. Good to be with you.

JOURNALIST: Problems with the Renewable Energy scheme were obvious last year. Big projects were threatened and big companies were talking out about this point clearly. Why has it taken so long?

WONG: I think people have to remember that this is quite an historic step. You said it was a small step along the way. It is actually quadrupling Australia's renewable energy use so that by 2020, the equivalent of all our current household electricity use would come from wind, and solar and wave and whatever other renewables can get to the market. So that is a great thing.

We had a situation last year where I don't think anyone anticipated just how popular solar PV, solar hot water – how popular all of those small-scale technologies would be. That is a great thing because Australians are putting more solar panels on their roofs. I think we have put 100,000 on our roofs since this Government came to power. So because that part of the market was much bigger than I think most people anticipated, we have had to move to improve the scheme. We sat down with industry, with the large-scale sector – that is the people investing in wind etc – and I am pleased also that I got to sit down again with Macca (Ian Macfarlane) and negotiate a position. Hopefully this time the Opposition will hold to the agreement. I would anticipate that they will.

JOURNALIST: With respect Minister, you were told pretty early on by the Greens and I think the Opposition too and certainly some in industry, that the smaller scale projects were going to warp the system; that this was a badly designed Renewable Energy Target.

WONG: I don't accept that.

JOURNALIST: We ran interviews last year.

WONG: I don't accept that it was badly designed at all. And in fact some of the criticisms which were made last year are not actually the issues which have caused problems later. For example, some people were saying solar hot water was going to be the issue. Clearly, what we have had is a very large increase in solar PV – that is photovoltaic cells – so it depends on your views.

But look, I think the important thing here is this - we sat down with industry. I announced earlier this year, I think it was in February from memory, these changes to the scheme. We have worked through these changes with industry and also with the other parties. We are pleased that we are able to negotiate a position with the Opposition and also some agreements with the Greens.

I think it would be really useful in this now if we were able to move forward and look to seeing many projects around Australia, large-scale projects, because this is a key step to moving to a lower carbon economy.

JOURNALIST: The problem for the Government politically, I mean renewable energy and the notion of it, I think, has widespread community support as witnessed by the take up of this project, this element. But it has become mired in the controversy, in the failure for the Government to get them through. And it has become mired in the collapse of all the energy schemes – not just the ETS, the Home Insulation Program, the Green Loans. And in a way, it's hard for the Government to get its message through that it is doing anything positive. Now the Prime Minister says there is more to come on climate change. What's to come?

WONG: Can I just say first, let's remember what we have done. We are quadrupling the amount of renewable energy in Australia. We have put 100,000 solar panels on roofs. That's about ten times more than John Howard did.

JOURNALIST: In the dying days of your first term though, and that's all.

WONG: Hang on, hang on. We did bring forward a comprehensive emissions trading scheme to the Parliament. We couldn't get it through Fran. The Greens and the Opposition voted it down. In fact, the Opposition – as you remember – changed their leader to avoid honouring an agreement that I had negotiated with them.

Of course in light of all of that, we have to look at what other things can be done. We also remain committed to the CPRS because we know to meet the targets that Tony Abbott has also signed up to we need to do all these things. We need to do renewable energy, energy efficiency and we need a price on carbon.

JOURNALIST: You couldn't get it through, well there may be a new, most likely a new, Senate dominated by the Greens after the election. Will you go to the election doing a deal with the Greens for some sort of carbon price? Will you go to the people saying 'we will introduce a carbon signal here'? If not, where are your credentials on cutting emissions?

WONG: Well our credentials are that we will introduce the CPRS. Can I say on a carbon tax – there has been a lot of talk from the Greens and others about this. First, I would make this point. I don't think there is any additional appetite in the Senate to pass a carbon tax than there was to pass the CPRS. So the Greens by themselves can't deliver – even with the Government – that legislation.

JOURNALIST: ...likely after the next election, which is not far off.

WONG: In this Senate. But second, why did we all agree – including the Greens – that a market mechanism was better than a carbon tax? Because with a market mechanism like the CPRS, you put a hard cap on carbon. With a tax, your environmental outcome is uncertain. That's why everybody went to the last election saying an ETS, a CPRS, a Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, is better than a carbon tax.

JOURNALIST: Minister, do you accept that support for the Government has really soured with the decision to drop or defer the ETS? A new Galaxy poll out today shows support in inner city

Brisbane seats, which should be safe territory for a Rudd government, collapsed over the ETS. How do you get that back?

WONG: Well these are challenging times for us and I understand...

JOURNALIST: What are you going to offer?

WONG: These are challenging times and I understand people's frustrations about the fact that there have been setbacks in the climate change agenda. We are frustrated by that. I presented that legislation to the Senate three times and it was knocked off finally in December by an alliance between Tony Abbott and Bob Brown. That is a very frustrating...

JOURNALIST: That's history and that's politics. What now?

WONG: But it's more than that. Because what it says is the Parliament has not been up to the task. Of course we have to do more. And we have a number of things in place. Prime Minister's Task Group on Energy Efficiency, we obviously want to see what they have to say. And we are passing the Renewable Energy Target.

JOURNALIST: I can't let you go today without putting to you this notion that the Prime Minister's chief of staff went around to canvass support for the Prime Minister's leadership in Cabinet and in caucus. Were you asked whether you supported the Prime Minister?

WONG: Can I say I am not going to comment on what Alister Jordan does or does not do. You would have to ask others that. But I would say this: Kevin Rudd has the 100 per cent support of the Government, of the caucus. Obviously these are challenging times. He has met these sorts of challenges before and I am sure he will come through this. And I have to say, there is a lot more in the media about this than any reality.

JOURNALIST: So you support the Prime Minister?

WONG: Absolutely.

JOURNALIST: And on, you've still got another area of policy, a big area – water. We haven't heard a lot about it in recent times. But we will soon before the election, I'd imagine. We are going to get some kind of finding from the Murray Darling commission. That's likely to be political dynamite for you. Already the National Party and Barnaby Joyce are revving up to criticise what is likely to be a cut for water users.

WONG: Well they are doing more than criticising, Fran. Barnaby has made clear that he wants to kill this reform. Just like he made clear he wanted to kill reform on climate change, he wants to destroy any water reform before it's been rolled out. The Plan that you're talking about is the first time in the nation's history that we will have a scientifically-based cap on how much water we can take out of the Murray Darling. If we don't take less out of those rivers, we are not going to fix them up. And the reality is that Barnaby doesn't want to fix them up.

And there is another split here, Fran, between the Liberal Party and the National Party. Because the Liberal Party have been saying that they want to fix up the Murray Darling, they support purchasing of water, they support a cap. And now we see Barnaby, as Tony Abbott's spokesperson, making clear that he doesn't want to play that game. Unfortunately it appears in the Coalition, on water, the National Party is pulling the strings. That is not a good thing for the Murray Darling.

JOURNALIST: Minister, can I ask you one more time, when are we going to see some major – a major carbon emission cutting policy from the Government? Before the election?

WONG: You will see more on climate change from us Fran. But I just remind you, we spent two years putting forward a major climate change policy, an emissions reductions policy. Unfortunately, we were not able to get it through the Senate.

JOURNALIST: Will Labor win the election?

WONG: We are working very hard to ensure that we do. But ultimately, that is a matter for the Australian people.

JOURNALIST: Senator Wong, thanks so much for joining us.

WONG: Good to speak with you.

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