



TRANSCRIPT

Senator the Hon Penny Wong

Minister for Climate Change and Water

PW 03/10

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TRANSCRIPT OF DOORSTOP INTERVIEW - ADELAIDE ZOO

SUBJECT: GIANT PANDAS, CARBON POLLUTION REDUCTION SCHEME, WHALING, WILD RIVERS ACT, NSW FLOODWATERS, ASYLUM SEEKERS

E & O E – PROOF ONLY

WONG: A great day for Adelaide, a great day for South Australia, a great day for Australia. The only giant pandas in the Southern Hemisphere out of their air-conditioned units into the open enclosure and walking around is a really fantastic sight to see. And I hope lots of Australians, a lot of people from Adelaide, a lot of people from South Australia, come and look with their families at these wonderful creatures. And of course, they remind us of the impact that human beings are having on our environment. Pandas and many other animals are having their habitat encroached upon, their habitat lessened by virtue of human activity including climate change.

And on climate change let's remember in 21 days Tony Abbott has said he will have a fully costed climate change policy. He has said a number of times that by the time Parliament returns he will have his climate change policy to deliver the targets he says he is going to support too. He has got 21 days to do that.

In the next 21 days what we should see is Tony Abbott guaranteeing what the Government is guaranteeing. He should guarantee that Australian pensioners and Australian seniors are not going to be the ones footing the bill for climate change policy. The Government has got a clear policy – a fully costed policy. That is providing assistance, providing compensation to pensioners and to seniors. Tony Abbott should guarantee the same and if he doesn't do this, it will just confirm yet again that he can't be trusted on climate change.

JOURNALIST: What's your response to the article in the newspaper this morning, in the Advertiser, about scientists in Europe saying we're headed for a twenty to thirty year global freeze. Quite a bit of a counterpoint to recent events in Copenhagen?

WONG: There's always a range of things in the media about the science, but let's look at where the weight of the science is. The weight of the science of the best scientists around the world is that climate change is real. In many places in the world it will mean high temperatures. In some places it will mean very different temperature patterns and very different storm patterns. We know for example that some parts of the world such as northern Australia are likely to experience more extreme weather, more extreme storms, more flooding. We know that the southern part of Australia is likely to experience much less rainfall. We already know Australia's own scientists at the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology – two very respected Australian scientific organisations – have linked the current drought in southern Australia to climate change.

What more evidence do we need? Unlike the Government, Tony Abbott is the one who needs convincing that climate change is real. We understand that it is real. We understand that it's an enormous challenge for this nation and we're getting on with the job.

JOURNALIST: On the whaling issue, Tony Abbott is saying that if Australia gets involved in the debate, that the relationship between Japan and Australia would be put at risk. Is he right?

WONG: Well, what is Tony Abbott saying? Yesterday Tony Abbott said that he didn't support; he didn't think we should be taking legal action. Today he has now come on radio saying that the Government should take legal action. So he's against it yesterday, for it today. This is a man who engages in policy by thought bubble. He flips from one position to another. Another enormous backflip today. As the alternative prime minister, someone putting himself forward as an alternative leader, he needs to be a little more consistent and a little more careful.

JOURNALIST: So when will the Government tackle this whaling issue?

WONG: Well we are tackling it. We are tackling it. It is regrettable that what has occurred recently is occurring but let's remember the Government has put forward a whole range of diplomatic efforts. Minister Garrett has put forward proposals to reform the International Whaling Commission. We have appointed a special envoy to work on this issue. We are exhausting all diplomatic avenues and we are open still if diplomatic avenues are not able to be successful, we are open still to the option of legal action. It is regrettable that the Japanese Government continues to engage in whaling. We have made that clear that that is not something with which we agree. But the Government is acting. Unlike Tony Abbott, we have a clear view about the way forward.

JOURNALIST: And Tony Abbott said this morning that he is going to put forward a Private Member's Bill when Parliament sits next against the Queensland legislation for the Wild Rivers...

WONG: I have seen those reports and I'll wait until I see Mr Abbott's policy before I comment in detail. What I will say is this: we in the Government are committed to closing the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. And we are committed to concrete steps and concrete outcomes. And we have put in place a range of programs around school retention, around housing, around literacy – all of which are aimed at closing that gap. It is a tough job, but the Government is committed to working to close the gap with indigenous Australians.

JOURNALIST: But doesn't closing the gap involve reversing these moves which put the stop on economic activity in those areas?

WONG: Well look as I said, I will wait until I see what Mr Abbott is putting forward before I comment on that issue.

JOURNALIST: What's your take on the floodwaters in New South Wales being released – some of it – being released into South Australia?

WONG: Well as I said yesterday, obviously we'd look to the New South Wales Government to exercise the discretion it has reasonably. We do understand that there have been pressures across the system but in circumstances where there is water available, we would be looking to NSW to exercise its discretion to release water for urgently needed environmental sites downstream.

JOURNALIST: So should the Commonwealth have emergency powers?

WONG: Well what the Commonwealth has done is to take over planning across the Basin and that is what our authority is working on – the Murray Darling Basin Authority – the independent authority that the States and the Commonwealth established. And for the first time when that plan is finished, we will have a basin plan based on science and most importantly, we will have the Commonwealth being able to limit how much water can be taken out.

But until that is all up and running, in the meantime, we have to do what we are doing. Investing in infrastructure to return water to the River so we can be more efficient and purchasing water. And yesterday I opened more tenders in the Southern Basin. More tenders which enable farmers to sell us water entitlements so we can reduce what we take out from the river and put money back into regional communities.

JOURNALIST: Julia Gillard is going to meet to discuss the issue tomorrow. Have you made any personal representations to her to make a case for South Australia to get that water?

WONG: I'm not sure if you're talking about the Basin Officials Committee; that is an official level meeting. And the Commonwealth has said – I have said as Minister – that if South Australia comes forward with specific proposals, we are willing to facilitate the discussion and we would certainly be looking to New South Wales to exercise its discretion fairly – recognising the needs of the downstream states.

JOURNALIST: Is it your advice that these floodwaters could even reach South Australia? Is it physically possible?

WONG: I think it is early – too early – to tell how much we'll get to Menindee, how much will be stored and therefore how much will come downstream. But we obviously if there is water available would hope that NSW would exercise its discretion fairly.

JOURNALIST: Coming off the back of the Copenhagen Summit, the Government's due to put in its target to the UN. Are you going to put a range or are you going to put forward a specific target?

WONG: What we've said is that the nations who are parties to the Copenhagen Accord, which includes for the first time in the world's history the major emitters. So this is the first climate change agreement which includes China, India, the United States as well as the European Union and other nations. So that's a big step forward. We now have to work with those nations to implement that Accord. Those discussions are continuing. How people put forward their targets, the process for that is something we are working with other nations.

JOURNALIST: So will Australia put a range or a specific target?

WONG: Those are matters we are currently working through with other parties to the Copenhagen Accord. There are a range of parties that also have range targets, there are a number of parties which also have targets in terms of ranges. Those are matters we are working through with those parties.

JOURNALIST: Does Australia have the option of putting forward a range rather than a specific target?

WONG: Well as I said the Copenhagen Accord simply indicates that parties will put forward their commitments. We are working through with other nations how those commitments will be operationalised.

JOURNALIST: This morning we found out that four asylum seekers were denied Australian visas. Did that sort of vindicate our acceptance of the asylum seekers for security purposes?

WONG: Well what it indicates is that the system the Government has in place is a system that is robust. As I understand it, there have been four asylum seekers who have not achieved the security

clearance required to settle or come to Australia. And so they will be dealt with in terms of being maintained in detention until those issues are resolved.

JOURNALIST: Those people are now in limbo, aren't they? Where will they go?

WONG: I think on detail on that, I'll probably leave that to the Immigration Minister or the spokesperson to deal with. But obviously a small number have been found not to have achieved the appropriate security clearance. They will be detained, as I have been advised, in their current facilities until the issues can be dealt with.

JOURNALIST: Do you know if this will have any impact on security clearances in the future? I mean, we will be less accepting?

WONG: I don't have any advice on that. What I have very clear advice on is that these security protocols are in place. They ensure that we do have proper security checks on people coming into Australia and clearly they have been operationalised on this occasion.

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