



# THE HON PETER GARRETT AM MP

MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE AND THE ARTS

## TRANSCRIPT

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT  
INTERVIEW ABC LATELINE  
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**SUBJECTS: Whaling; plastic bags; Emissions Trading Scheme; Burrup Peninsula; the Kimberley.**

SALES: Tomorrow is World Environment Day.

Environmentalists have had some wins during the Rudd Government's first six months in office, most notably Australia's ratification of the Kyoto protocol.

But there have also been some disappointments, including the failure of the Government to start a phased ban on plastic bags and its environmental approval for the dredging of Melbourne's Port Phillip Bay.

To discuss those issues and more, I was joined earlier from Canberra by the Environment Minister, Peter Garrett.

Peter Garrett, the Prime Minister heads to Japan in a few days an obviously whale willing be a subject for discussion. Does the Australian Government intend to take legal action against Japan over whaling?

GARRETT: Leigh, we will make decision about options such as legal action in the course of the continuing diplomatic engagement with Japan on the whaling issue. The International Whaling Commission meets in June in Santiago in Chile and I'll be leading the Australian delegation there. We have put a substantial proposal for consideration for the commission for reform. We want to talk about conserving whales, not killing them in the name of science.

SALES: You've had the evidence from the Oceanic Viking for a while. The Government has got advice from the Department of Foreign Affairs as to whether it should take legal action. When will you make a decision on that?

GARRETT: It will be made at such a time as the Cabinet and the Government decides that it is something which we need to move forward on. At this point in time, we think that diplomatic engagement which is constructive and direct

is the most critical thing that we can do. A number of senior ministers have been to Japan and to Tokyo and now the Prime Minister visits as well and by putting up this proposal for consideration for the IWC, we want to take an approach which is considered and frankly which starts to break the log jam that we've seen in this particular discussion that's taken place at the IWC in the past.

SALES: Labor has promised to appoint a whaling envoy, when are you planning to do that? Is it still happening?

GARRETT: Again, in the course of this engagement with Japan, the diplomatic engagement and also in the upcoming International Whaling Commission, we will continue to resolutely push the strong commitment that we have to end the killing of whales...

SALES: So you're not appointing an envoy?

GARRETT: ... and frankly reform the way the world recognises and deals with this conflict and we will consider...

SALES: I am sorry to interrupt and press this point. The question is are you or are you not appointing a whaling envoy as you have promised in the past?

GARRETT: If I can just finish, in the course of the engagement, in due course, we will announce the appointment of an envoy.

SALES: And what is taking so long with that?

GARRETT: The thing that's been so critical in this engagement is to begin with we said we would put surveillance and monitoring operations into the ocean with the Oceanic Viking. we did that. We said we would collect material with the possibility of legal action. We've done that. We said we would increase greatly the diplomatic engagement with Japan, and that's been added to by the visits by government Ministers. We've done that. We said that we would bring forward the first substantial proposal for reform for the International Whaling Commission, which is when all the world's nations who have a stake and an interest in this issue get together to discuss these matters in June in Chile and we've done that. And we said that we will appoint an envoy in due course to assist in all of those measures and we will do that.

SALES: Wouldn't it be a good idea to have that envoy ready to go to the meeting with you in Chile?

GARRETT: I think we will have a significant delegation in Chile and as Environment Minister be there to lead that delegation. I am absolutely confident, having spoken to ministers when I was at the OECD Environment Ministers meeting in Paris recently, that the kind of leadership and engagement that we need to have at Chile can be conducted by the Minister.

SALES: Let's talk about plastic bags. Are you continuing to negotiate with the

states to phase out plastic bags?

GARRETT: What we're doing is having a high level working group with industry and Government to look at those measures that we think can greatly lessen the use of plastic bags and increase the use of the renewable green bags. We're also going to bring forward a series of close examinations of waste policy generally, including plastic bag for the next time Environment Ministers meet. As you may recall, when we met to look at this issue of plastic bags, there were a number of options on the table, the states couldn't agree on those options. We're committed to a phase out but we recognise that the timeline has been extended and we want to see the pilot program that the Victorian Government and industry in Victoria are putting in place to look at charges and I understand that there will be a possibility of some pilot programs that have 10 cent charge at the checkout, 25 per cent charge at the checkout, we want to look at how that travels, see how successful that is and we will consider that and also what the working group determines when we next meet later in the year.

SALES: So that means the possibility of a levy is still alive?

GARRETT: What we've said is, we've never said there would be a Commonwealth levy. The Commonwealth has made it clear that it won't impose a levy on plastic bag, single use plastic bags. What we have said is we want to see a phase-out. It has to be agreed by the States. Clearly we need to work closely with industry in order to do. That those two measures I've just outlined to you provide us with the information when Environment Ministers from the states and myself meet later in the year to consider the next steps of action.

SALES: The Federal Government's currently work on its carbon tax emissions trading scheme. Where do you stand on the issue of carbon tax on petrol?

GARRETT: Well, Leigh, what we've said consistently and I think the Deputy Prime Minister was on your program this week as well is that emissions trading scheme, not a carbon tax, needs to have the widest coverage possible in order to make sure that we can reduce emissions at least cost. There's a thorough process that's under way and it's a careful and deliberative process. I want to stress that because we have the Garnaut review process, the Treasury modelling, the Wilkins review internally and we have a green paper that is coming forward which will give Australians the opportunity to feedback into that process before the final architecture of that scheme is delivered.

SALES: OK, but what is your position as the Environment Minister on a carbon tax on petrol? Are you in favour of it?

GARRETT: A carbon tax on petrol has never been a position of this Government, nor any other that I'm aware of, nor mine.

SALES: But as an Environment Minister surely, though, you would support that given that petrol is a key pollutant and you want people to use as little of it

as possible.

GARRETT: You know what I support? A fair dinkum and thorough and deeply considered approach into the introduction of an emissions trading scheme which will have prices in the system to reduce emissions and enable us to meet greenhouse gas reduction targets but at the lowest possible cost to the economy.

SALES: Your Government though is between a rock and a hard place because you need people to cut their fuel consumption if you want to make an impact on climate change in the environment but as politics politicians it's not palatable to you to make people pay more for petrol.

GARRETT: I think we've got to have a mature debate about this. I found the antics from the Opposition on climate change really less than satisfactory for all of us in the last couple of weeks. This is the most significant economic, environmental and political challenge that we face in this country. Now, it has to be faced by this Government and as it's being faced by governments of either political persuasion all and the world.

SALES: That's true and that's why I put this point to you, about market forces and that fact that you need market forces to change people's behaviour but at the same time you're trying to shield people from market forces because those very same market forces are going to drive them to the ballot box to vote against you if they feel the effects of them.

GARRETT: What we've said about introducing an emissions trading scheme is that we want to talk with all the stakeholders, we want to have the widest possible coverage so we get the maximum reduction and emotion at the lowest cost to the economy and this's to the benefit of consumers and voters.

SALES: I want to ask you about the development of Burrup peninsula in Western Australia which houses valuable Aboriginal rock art. What did you think of the outcome there last year which allowed the art to be moved so the development could take place?

GARRETT: Leigh, I've said in the past that if we went back 10 or 15 years there wouldn't have been development of that kind in that way on the Burrup because the rock art that's there is of enormous value and it's important culturally and it's important for heritage reasons. I think it's a real tragedy that we've seen that kind of development that long ago happen in that kind of way.

SALES: Is there anything that you can do about it now?

GARRETT: There's a significant national heritage listing over the Burrup, some 90 per cent of the Burrup is covered by that listing and a significant portion of that rock art is covered by that listing as well.

SALES: Does that mean you can guarantee there will be no further development of the Burrup?

GARRETT: It's not a case of guaranteeing there will be no further development. The Burrup is an industrial site and there exists already significant developments on this site and some of them have the potential to add to their capacities at some stage. One of the things about the history of the development application process in the past is that it's tended to be ad hoc, it hasn't properly or fully recognised the other range of values at stake and on the Burrup it was this significant heritage of Aboriginal rock art. When I see what's happening with the basin and the offshore liquefied gas reserves I've made the decision for the first time under the act, with the Commonwealth and Western Australia, to actually have a joint strategic assessment of proposals for development that might come through in the first instance where the location of a common user hub might meet to process that gas so we don't see the same kind of things happen as happened in Burrup historically and the legacy which is still with us today.

SALES: So given that, can you guarantee that the Kimberley will be protected even though at the moment it is not currently nationally heritage listed?

GARRETT: What I can guarantee is that we will look very closely, not only at the development proposals that come through under the act, but also we will work absolutely as hard as we can to get a heritage assessment and a natural values assessment in place which will enable us as politicians to understand the true values the Kimberley. It's a place of enormous environmental value. It's important culturally to the people of that region and it's a place where you don't get many opportunities to make a decision of that kind. We're mindful of the responsibilities. We do want to see processing of that resource as do communities in that area because they want the economic benefits that flow but we want to make sure the environment and the cultural values of this incredible part of Australia are preserved at the same time. We have got to find that very difficult balance, but with this process, I think we're going to be in a much better position to do that.

SALES: A final question. You've now had about six months in the job which has given you plenty of opportunity to learn the realities of power and the need to compromise and work in a team to get things done. At what point does that become too much for a person who led the Australian conservation movement, and has to look environmentalists in the eye on every decision?

GARRETT: I've learnt that compromise can be powerful. I look at the \$2.25 billion Caring for Our Country package that we brought through and I can say that this is one of the most significant programs to deal with protecting our natural environment, our biodiversity, helping Indigenous people to participate on their own country in land management and skills building. I welcome the fact that I'm participating in the Cabinet debate about an emissions trading scheme to deal with climate change. These are the serious and substantial things that government who have a reform agenda need to do and want to do and I'm really pleased that I have the opportunity to be a part of that.

SALES: Environment Minister, Peter Garrett, thank you for joining Lateline

tonight.

GARRETT: Thank you.