



THE HON PETER GARRETT AM MP

MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE AND THE ARTS

TRANSCRIPT

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
DOORSTOP INTERVIEW
NATIONAL SOLAR SCHOOLS LAUNCH
NEWTOWN PUBLIC SCHOOL, SYDNEY**

22 JULY 2008

SUBJECTS: National Solar Schools Program; Solar Homes and Communities Plan; Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme; Wayne Goodwin benefit concert.

GARRETT: At the beginning of term three, every Australian school will have the opportunity to significantly increase its solar capacity by becoming a solar school; by putting energy efficiency devices, water tanks and solar panels on their rooves. This is one of the most significant investments in renewable energy for school systems that we've ever seen and represents a significant contribution by the Rudd Labor Government to enabling schools to become solar schools and to get themselves on the path to sustainability.

It also means that we will see continuing support for the solar industry. It means that local businesses will have the opportunity to provide water efficiency and energy efficiency devices for schools. It means that schools themselves can become something like small power plants where they are generating electrical energy on the weekends and even in states where schemes apply, selling it back to the grid.

So it is nearly a half a billion dollar commitment to solar schools and it will provide very high levels of support for renewable industries generally and a great opportunity for schools kids to have first-hand experience of how renewable energy works.

JOURNALIST: And just to check as well, schools could apply from the first of July [inaudible]?

GARRETT: That's right, schools can apply from the first of July and as term three starts we want to let schools know, right around Australia, that they now

have the opportunity to take in unprecedented access to \$50,000, per school, for solar power, solar panels, water tanks, rain water efficiency devices, even wind, even hydro. All those measures which will assist schools in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, provide a fantastic opportunity for our renewable industry and great hands-on learning experiences for the kids in those schools as well.

JOURNALIST: It is interesting that you mention industry because obviously there has been some talk since the Government changed the threshold for households to access the solar power rebate. Can you tell us yet, what impact that has had on the industry?

GARRETT: Well, we're looking at those figures and we're in discussion with the industry but we believe there is a steady path for the solar industry and that the rebates will be going to those who can least afford the upfront costs of solar panels and that demand is strong.

What I also would say is that we have brought \$50 million of investment into solar panel rebates. I mean, two years ago, under the Howard Government we had about \$6 million. Under the Rudd Government, we've got some \$50 million there going through this year. And with this National Solar Schools Plan we're providing an additional investment of nearly half a billion dollars of which, up to a half will most likely go on solar as well.

So, we've never seen such a profound and significant contribution to solar from any government as we have from this one. And what I expect, is that as this National Solar Schools Program starts to pick up steam, we will see schools making choices to put solar panels on their rooves and we will see a growth path for the solar industry that heads out over the next six or seven years as a consequence of today's announcement.

JOURNALIST: So can you tell us any more though about your discussions with industry? I mean you did say that you would be monitoring the effect that the change to the threshold would have. Can you tell us anything yet about how it is going and what you have found out?

GARRETT: Well, what I've said to industry is that...

JOURNALIST: What have they said to you though [inaudible]

GARRETT: Well, let me tell you what I have said to them first. What I have said to industry is that this Government has provided more support for solar than any Government ever has and that if they look at the totality of the schemes that are in place or underway, there are substantial opportunities for this industry to maintain a sustainable growth path.

Industry have said to us that they are aware of that, that they recognise that the Government has significant programs in place. And I have got to say that when you consider an investment to the level of nearly half a billion dollars of which up to a half of that is most likely to be applied to solar technologies and

solar panels, there is every opportunity for this industry to build itself a sustainable growth path over the coming years.

JOURNALIST: I do understand that, I am just curious about what they have been saying to you about the impact on their actual businesses and sales.

GARRETT: Well look, in the early stages of this debate, some portions of the industry were making the claim that they were affected by the decision that the Government made to have a particular means test for solar panels. But we have not seen those comments significantly increase since that time.

And what we will find over time, when we've had a chance to analyse the figures that have started to come through, I am confident, is that there is a sustainable path for this industry and that the Government's support for this industry, including the \$50 million of support that we have for the solar panels program, means that the industry has every means at its disposal to continue on a sustainable growth path.

JOURNALIST: On Sunday, Andrew Bolt claimed that he 'outed' several members of the Government for being climate change sceptics. Since then, or even before then, have you had to have any chats with colleagues to try to convince them out of a particular climate change position?

GARRETT: The cabinet was completely of one that the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme was a necessary and absolutely essential part of our portfolio of measures to deal with dangerous climate change. We said that we would bring in an emissions trading scheme, now named a Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, and we're doing that. That was the policy of this Government when we were in opposition and it is what we're putting in place now.

We recognise that this is a significant and serious challenge and we're actually addressing it. We're not confused like the Liberal Party is about the merits of the scheme, one way or the other. We're not confused about timing. We've been very clear with the Australian public about how critical and important these measures are, and how necessary it is for us to actually bring these things through and that is what we're doing.

JOURNALIST: So you haven't had to have any chats in the back halls of Canberra to try and change the minds of any of your colleagues?

GARRETT: What I can say is that this Government is absolutely, profoundly committed to addressing dangerous climate change. This is the most serious economic and environment issue we face. There is no way around that. And as a consequence of that, our determination to ensure that we have a scheme in place that will enable the market to produce a price for carbon and so see the initiatives taken by industry to reduce emissions. And also, making sure that Australians get every opportunity to adjust to those costs and to have opportunities to produce energy more efficiently, more cheaply and more greenly over time.

JOURNALIST: Were you aware yesterday of the Nielson poll in Fairfax newspapers saying that while many Australians supported an emissions trading scheme they didn't understand how it would work? What do you think can be done to try to address that and really increase the level of awareness and understanding of the Australian people about emissions trading?

GARRETT: Look, there is no doubt that emissions trading and some of the details are complex. The principle though is straightforward, and that is if we act early, if we act now, and if we put a price on pollution, then over time we will see greenhouse gas emissions come down and we will see the economy adjust to reducing emissions.

Now, there will be an advertising campaign for the public to provide them with more information, in a bipartisan sense, and I have to say, that if the Liberal Party didn't continue to cloud the waters and actually came on board, then we would have a concerted effort by politicians at the national level, to explain what is certainly complex but very, very necessary information for an Australian public who are thirsty and very ready to start taking steps and measures to start reducing greenhouse gas pollution.

JOURNALIST: We understand that the other members of Midnight Oil are going to be performing at a benefit for Wayne Goodwin at the Basement. Are you going to be performing at that?

GARRETT: I knew that the other guys were going to be jumping up on stage to do something for Wayne and I think it is fantastic that muso's are getting together to provide him with some help. Unfortunately, I am not going to be able to go along on that night so I will be listening from a distance.