



THE HON PETER GARRETT AM MP

MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE AND THE ARTS

TRANSCRIPT

E&OE TRANSCRIPT INTERVIEW ABC NORTHERN TASMANIA DRIVE PROGRAM WITH HILARY BURDEN

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SUBJECTS: National Solar Schools Program; Green Loans; Solar Homes and Communities Plan; Gunns

HILARY BURDEN: Time to catch up with federal Environment Minister, Peter Garrett, who says schools are going solar. And he's today reminding Australia's 9000 plus schools of the National Solar Schools program, grants of up to \$50,000 are now available for the installation of solar power systems and water saving measures.
The minister joins me now. Good to talk to you again.

PETER GARRETT: Hi, Hilary. How are you?

HILARY BURDEN: Very well, thank you. How's the school uptake progressing?

PETER GARRETT: I think Australian schools will be really enthusiastic to get into this program, Hilary. The thing about it that really distinguishes it, is that it provides real opportunity for schools to get solar panels, solar hot water systems, wind power, even mini-hydro systems into their schools as well as a range of water tanks, water energy efficiency measures and others.

And it provides a real opportunity for kids in the school to get hands on learning about renewable energy. It provides a great community example, and of course, it'll support for solar industry and renewable industry in the long term as well.

HILARY BURDEN: Hmm. What are the most popular options schools are deciding on so far?

PETER GARRETT: Look, it's early days. The applications opened on July 1, and today's the first day of term up here in New South Wales. I'm not sure about Tassie, but I suspect that solar panels will be popular.

HILARY BURDEN: Yep.

PETER GARRETT: And I think particularly in northern Australia, in those areas where we've seen pretty dry conditions, where schools haven't got water tanks in place now, they'll definitely be going for water tanks as well.

HILARY BURDEN: And if they want to find out more about the program, it's simply go to your website, I guess.

PETER GARRETT: That's right. They can go to the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts website or they can go to my website and follow the prompts and they'll get all the information there.

HILARY BURDEN: Mmm. What can we do for homeowners to participate in the same or similar projects?

PETER GARRETT: Look, one of the things the Government announced in the run up to the election, and we'll start to bring it forward early next year, is low interest home loans - green loans, we call them - for householders. That's a low interest loan scheme which gives people up to \$10,000 for the same kinds of things.

It - go to a one stop shop, get an audit, an environmental audit of your place, and particularly for people who are living in older homes or smaller houses, the opportunity to do things like, put in insulation, additional insulation in the ceiling, perhaps awnings up on the western side of the windows and doors. You know, the sort of, pretty basic things that cost a little bit but can make a big difference in terms of your energy bills and also reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

HILARY BURDEN: And if you do the research on those green loans, that's what you're - that's the root through to getting better deals.

PETER GARRETT: Well, that's right. And what we think is that there's tremendous opportunities for householders to effectively improve the value of their home, to reduce their energy bills and expenses by doing simple

things. And the obvious ones are solar hot water systems, particularly in the north - not so much in Tassie, where you don't get quite as much sunshine - but most of Australia, solar hot water's definitely an option for people.

And additionally, things like insulation, looking at eaves and curtains and western awnings. Looking at things like changing the efficiency of your lighting systems. Energy efficiency lighting can make a really big, big contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. And of course, the lights last longer as well.

HILARY BURDEN: Did you find yourself less - with less invitations to dinner parties after the Federal Government decision to remove the rebate?

PETER GARRETT: Not at all.

HILARY BURDEN: [Laughs]

PETER GARRETT: And in fact, one of the things that I've said to people including to the solar industry is that if you look at the totality of the Government's programs, including this big National Solar Schools program today, there is a sustainable path for the solar industry there, which will continue into the long term.

And frankly, we had to decide whether or not we wanted to provide the opportunity for a very generous rebate - and it's a really generous rebate of \$8000 - to go to those families and Australians who we think it need - need it most. And that's people under - earning under \$100,000. And we don't believe that it will cripple the solar industry at all. And in fact, we're monitoring very closely those figures and staying in touch with the industry as we go through.

HILARY BURDEN: Mmm. Now Peter Garrett, while we have you - thanks very much for your time this afternoon - Gunns recently suggested in a statement to the Stock Exchange that they've lodged their management plans for approval of the pulp mill. How is this proceeding?

PETER GARRETT: Well, four modules have been approved, Hilary. And again, as I've said, I think when I've spoken on your program and on other programs, with all of the modules that come through from Gunns, I will act

strictly in accordance with the EPBC Act, as I'm required to do.

I'll consider closely, impact on matters of national environment significance, and I'll carry out that role in accordance with my powers under the Act and in accordance with the conditions that have already been applied for the existing processes under the original proposal that Minister Turnbull approved before we came into government.

HILARY BURDEN: So four modules have been approved. How many in total, just remind us?

PETER GARRETT: Well, I think we've got - actually, that's a really good question. I've probably got that information in front of me and I should know it off the top of my head, but I think we've got at least another 10 modules. I think it's something like - yeah, 15 or 16 modules. So there's at least another 10 to come.

HILARY BURDEN: So h... what's outstanding from the company?

PETER GARRETT: Well, there's a range of - it's just the further issues in relation to continuing the actual development proposal itself.

Those modules haven't come through to me yet, and so until they come through to me, I'm not going to speculate about them one way or the other, other than to say that as I have in the past, I will exercise my responsibilities diligently under the act with specific reference to matters of national environment significance, I'll give them careful scrutiny. And to that extent I won't be rushed in doing that and I won't be rushed into making decisions on that matter. And I'll point out that we have more conditions placed on this development than any other development assessed under the EPBC Act, but at the same time we will be specifically careful and clear as we assess those modules as they come forward.

HILARY BURDEN: I just to clarify that. So the four modules have been submitted and approved and if there's something like a total of 16, are you saying you're yet to receive those extra submissions?

PETER GARRETT: The modules haven't come through to me formally from the department yet. No additional modules have reached me yet.

HILARY BURDEN: Right. And from the company you're still waiting to receive some outstanding submissions?

PETER GARRETT: Well no, what happens is that the company brings the modules forward, they bring them to the department, there are discussions between the department about the modules, about what's contained in them. Once those discussions are concluded then the modules come forward to me for approval.

HILARY BURDEN: What's the hold-up?

PETER GARRETT: Look, my understanding is that there are a number of elements in the modules which might mean that there are additional conditions that need to be considered or conditions that need to be varied. If that were the case, then I would have to consider that if it came through to me from the department. At this point in time, those modules haven't reached me.

HILARY BURDEN: Right. So whilst they're saying to the Stock Exchange they've lodged their management plans for approval of the pulp mill, that's not strictly what you're saying, or seeming to say now.

PETER GARRETT: Well, the situation from my point of view is a very simple one, and it's this; there is a set of modules that I've already approved and there are a number that I've yet to approved. I understand that there's a number of those modules that are currently with the department and I expect to consider them when they come from the department and my office, as I did with those original four modules.

Once they were finalised in their final form between the department and the proponent, in this case Gunns, then they come to me and as I assessed the four modules up to now, I'll assess these modules in the same way. In other words, I will look specifically at the conditions that exist under the existing agreement between the Commonwealth and Gunns, consider whether there'll be any impact on matters of national environment significance and take it from there.

HILARY BURDEN: And just finally thank you Peter Garrett, I understand the final date for receiving submissions and plans and for approval is something like early October. Is that correct?

PETER GARRETT: Look, the timeline is about that, yes. It's 4 October 2008, that's when I need to finalise and approve all the modules under the Environment Impact Management Plan.

HILARY BURDEN: Can you see this all being done by October 4?

PETER GARRETT: Well look, that depends on where the consideration of the modules is between my department, in consideration of their discussion with Gunns. If there's going to be an extension of time that is sought, then I'll consider it when it's been made, but up to this point in time no extension of time application has been made to me. So I am acting on the basis that the environmental management plan modules have got to be done by 4 October.

HILARY BURDEN: Thank you very much for your time.

PETER GARRETT: Thanks, Hilary.

HILARY BURDEN: Federal Environment Minister, Peter Garrett at 27 minutes to five this Tuesday afternoon.