



THE HON PETER GARRETT AM MP

MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE AND THE ARTS

TRANSCRIPT

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
Q&A SESSION
QUEENSLAND MEDIA CLUB, BRISBANE**

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SUBJECTS: Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme; EPBC Act; Shoalwater Bay; Coal protest; Plastic bags; Clean coal

CONVENOR: Minister, could I ask you if you wouldn't mind to rejoin the stage, the - a few interested members of the media might like to ask some questions. Ladies and gentlemen, as part of the Queensland Media Club process we invite members of the working media to question our guest speakers. We have a number here today. As usual could I ask you when you have a question to please identify yourself and the organisation for whom you work, before presenting your question. Have we got a first questioner? Over on the left.

QUESTION: Minister, Mark Ludlow from *The Australian Financial Review*. I know the Emission Trading Scheme is technically not your area but I noted that you began your speech talking about the Opposition and their inconsistent approach to climate change. Do you think that the Emission Trading Scheme is something that, you know, sounds good in theory but will fall apart in practice? Especially considering the Australian economy, in particular Queensland is so dependent on coal exports.

GARRETT: Look, thank you for that question, Mark. No, I don't. One of the things that I think was clear to us when we were Opposition, was that a business was seeking to see a price come into the market on carbon and that not only here, but in other jurisdictions the establishment of an Emissions Trading Scheme, which we have called the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, was a necessary component to addressing climate change. And that

industry, with that certainty, would not only be able to work well within an ETS but also take in some instances economic advantage from it.

QUESTION: [Indistinct] from *The Australian* newspaper. It was interesting you were talking about the decision you've just made for a development at Mission Beach, and you've got the Traveston Dam decision coming up as well. Are you putting developers on notice that there will be a lot greater scrutiny of projects under this government using federal environmental laws? And also given the population pressures in many sensitive areas, can private property owners expect much more government regulation to protect the environment? You were mentioning, you know, the creek that runs by your backyard, birds that come into your garden. I mean, can people expect a lot more, you know, regulation in this area?

GARRETT: Well I'll take the second part of the question first. I don't expect that there will be much more regulation at all, nor need there be. And in fact, one of the strong commitments that the Rudd Labor Government coming to power, not only was to cooperative federalism, but also seeking to make sure that we do streamline processes which impact upon the economic decisions that the community and business make. And we've done that, in particular with the initiation of a strategic assessment under the EPBC Act in relation to the off-shore LNG resources and proposed onshore common user hub in north-west and Western Australia.

And I was saying to my table earlier that one of the things that we believe is absolutely critical is to provide front end certainty, not only to the proponents but also to the decision makers, so the decision making can be both transparent, provide necessary certainty and also happen within an effective timeframe.

In relation to the early question, the question about Mission Beach and the way in which it relates to endangered species and the like and does this - am I putting developers on notice, again the answer is that the responsibilities that the minister has, or any minister has under the EPBC Act are very clear. And they are to look at proposals in the light of the impact that they have on matters of national environment significance and to that extent what I'm saying is that we will do that diligently, taking into account all the material - relevant material that is in front of us and we will make a decision to that end. I don't see this as anything other than providing greater levels of confidence and certainty in the decision making process.

QUESTION: Dennis Atkins from *The Courier-Mail*, Minister. I noticed in the list of iconic Queensland environmental sites that you mentioned at the end of your speech you didn't mention Shoalwater Bay, which is something that I know you're familiar with from past campaigns that you've taken part in in previous occupations. The Queensland Government has recently announced that it wants to build a coal port at Shoalwater Bay. Do you think

that's a good idea? Do you think that Shoalwater Bay can sustain having a coal port in it?

GARRETT: Look, thank you for the question, Dennis and as with all other questions about existing decisions that are before the environment minister or decisions that may come to him, I don't propose to take a view one way or the other on that proposal. And the reason for that is that it is not appropriate for a minister in this instance to display any form of bias or apprehended bias and I don't intend to.

That particular proposal that you referred to hasn't come for me now for consideration. If it does come for me for consideration I will consider it properly under the relevant legislation, ie the EPBC Act.

QUESTION: Minister, Andrew Trewin from Channel Nine. Greenpeace activists today have graffitied up to anything - up to 20 ships at the coal loading facility at Hay Point in Queensland. The core of this action is an allegation that the Federal Government is approving a massive expansion of coal loading facilities, thus contributing to greenhouse pollution. Your response please.

GARRETT: Sorry, just repeat again which particular demonstration and location that is.

QUESTION: That was at Hay Point in Queensland. It was a Greenpeace action.

GARRETT: Hay Point in Queensland.

QUESTION: Yes, that's right.

GARRETT: That is not a matter which is before me in terms of any development proposals or otherwise. In relation to the overall question about whether or not Australia ought to be continuing to both mine and export coal, the position of the Government was made clear when in Opposition and now in Government. We're committed to continuation of the coal industry and to speedy movement towards carbon coal - carbon capture and storage and clean coal. And it seems to me that that is the most responsible position that a government can take.

QUESTION: Minister, John Copley (*), freelance. We've spoken before about the plastic bag issue and we note that the Chinese Government top down has banned the use of plastic bags - plastic shopping bags from 1 June I think. Do you [INAUDIBLE] Australia?

GARRETT: Well, the situation in relation to plastic bags is that when we went to the - environment ministers meet with the Federal Minister at council meetings, called EPHC meetings. There were various proposals from various states as to what actions the states felt would be desirable to reduce the use of plastic bags.

South Australia proposed a ban. The other states proposed a range of different strategies. What we have said is that we will look at a trial project that's been undertaken in Victoria where there's been a levy or a charge put on plastic bags, I think it's some 10 cents a bag in the trial program, and we will consider that particular - the progress of that particular pilot project at the same time as looking at the national waste strategy in total.

I do think that there is a strong community concern about the amount of waste that we are producing which goes to landfill, and it's not only plastic bags but it goes to things like e-waste as well, so computers, televisions, mobile phones and the like.

And so what I want us to do is to have a national approach to waste generally, particularly emerging e-waste issues. We will consider the question of plastic bags in the light of that pilot project when it comes to us when we meet in November of this year.

QUESTION: Just to follow up, do you know whether the act gives you the power to ban the use of the bags?

GARRETT: Well, I'm not specifically taking a view on whether the act provides that power or not. I don't intend to exercise that. What I am saying is that states ministers and the Federal Minister will meet in November to determine the progress that's been made in that pilot project and also where the issue of plastic bags falls in relation to an overall national approach to waste.

QUESTION: Mark Ludlow from *The Australian Financial Review* again. I just wanted to get your views on clean coal technology. In some ways, a lot of people see clean coal technology as akin to investing in biotechnology in the sense that you spend a lot of time and money and you don't necessarily get a win in it - out of it, at the end of the day. Do you think that clean coal technology - because in Queensland in particular, a lot of faith has been put in how clean coal technology will come - develop something commercially viable at the end of it. Do you think that will be the case?

GARRETT: Well, I very much hope so. I mean, I think that the view that was put by Sir Nicholas Stern and others is the right one. We can't afford not to be providing significant investment into a range of areas which will see us significantly reduce our emissions over the longer term, and clearly, CCS is a part of that.

And if you look at the projected start-ups of coal-fired power stations in other parts of the world, it's very clear that there will be an absolute need for us to have effective clean coal technology in place as soon as that can happen.

Now, I've been briefed by the CRC and by other scientists on this. I've spoken with the industry and business. Clearly, it requires investment; it's an investment that this government has already identified as important. And we just have to see to what extent and at what speed those technologies come through and whether they can work to scale. I very much hope they can.

QUESTION: [Inaudible question]

GARRETT: I can't - yes, start again.

QUESTION: Sorry. A follow-up question on the plastic bags, because it seemed you were trying to avoid the question as to whether the Commonwealth does have the power to either ban plastic bags or put a levy on plastic bags. I understand what you're saying about the states meeting, et cetera, but I'm wondering if we get a typical situation of the states squabbling about it for two years and then everyone going off and doing their own thing. I mean, can the Federal Government just make a decision federally as to what to do here, or...?

GARRETT: Look, it is within the power of the Commonwealth, clearly, if it sought to do so, to make a decision to restrict the importation of plastic bags. But that is not what the policy position is at this point in time, and I don't consider it something which we're going to address in the future. And the reason for that is that we want to strike an agreed position with the states about both the matter of plastic bags and plastic bag use and reducing that use over time and also other waste matters. We want to do that in a consultative way; we want to do that in ongoing discussions with the industry and with community, and we want to do it in the context of the EPHC meetings, and we will address that issue when we meet in November.

QUESTION: If you can't agree within a year, will you then come in on top of them and impose something if they don't agree?

GARRETT: Well, I'd like to give us the opportunity, as state ministers and Federal Minister, to come forward with some propositions which we think will both address the policy needs that have already been identified and were identified by the previous government when the council met in relation to disposal of plastic bags and also waste matters more generally.

QUESTION: One last question from [indistinct].

GARRETT: Yes.

QUESTION: Minister, I was interested in your speech. You've mentioned population pressures as one of the environmental issues that the country needed to face. Why didn't the Federal Government include population as an issue in

its green paper that was released by Minister Wong on climate change? Surely population has a massive impact on climate change.

GARRETT: Well, the matters that were identified in the green paper discussion paper go to the heart of the architecture of the scheme. Matters to do with population have a far broader remit, and as you know, we haven't had a national population policy in this country up to this point in time.

You're certainly facing population pressures here in south-east Queensland, and population can, in certain instances, drive increased emissions. But it needn't. So there's a wider, if you like, framework that I think we need to look at issues like population, and that's to do with the provision of public transport services at state and local level, it's to do with the actual impact that individuals can have on their environment.

I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to meet with Governor Schwarzenegger in Los Angeles recently, and really spend some time with the Governor and his senior officials identifying the measures that they apply to de-couple emissions growth from sustainable economic growth, because if you look at the Californian economy, they're in the process of, in a sense, moving the question of how many emissions and how much emissions you produce away from the question of how the economy is going and actually de-link them.

And that relied on a suite of measures. The Californians have relied on a suite of measures, and whilst the situation is not entirely comparable here, the same thing will apply.

So in relation to the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, there's a discussion under way, a proposal for an architecture and conditions that would apply. But there are a range of other measures in place too. We have a 20 per cent renewable energy target. We have a \$300 million low-interest green home loan scheme, which we'll be introducing from the beginning of next year. This will be an opportunity for many Australians to be able to take low-interest green loans and re-equip and re-fit out their houses in things like energy efficiency devices and more energy efficiency lighting and water tanks and the like.

So again, there's absolutely no reason why, with growing populations, you cannot have reduced greenhouse gas emissions. It's just a case of being committed strongly to that range of measures, and as a government, a range of measures that will see greenhouse gas come down.

And in the instance of the home application policies that we're looking at, also produce some cost benefits for the householder where their energy costs are lower. And it's that wide portfolio of measures that can actually make an impact on the climate change issues.

CONVENOR: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your questions.

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