



# THE HON PETER GARRETT AM MP

MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE AND THE ARTS

## TRANSCRIPT

**E&OE  
TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW  
SKY AGENDA WITH KIERAN GILBERT**

**30 JULY 2008**

**SUBJECTS: Liberal's position on CPRS; nuclear energy; uranium exports**

**GILLON:** Back at home the Coalition is about to endorse a new climate change policy at its joint party room meeting today. Earlier, Sky's Chief Political Reporter, Kieran Gilbert, spoke with Environment Minister, Peter Garrett. He started by asking how the Coalition's policy could impact the Government's rate of success of getting its plans through the Senate.

**GARRETT:** Kieran, what position are we talking about? Mr Nelson has had more positions over the last week and a half than anybody could recall. It is impossible to keep up with the Opposition as they flip flop, go backwards and forwards, on this really critical question of what a Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme ought to be like and whether they'll support it or not. And I find it absolutely staggering that the Opposition Leader has gone into a meeting with his senior colleagues and walked out again saying something completely different to what he was saying 48 hours or 56 hours ago. The Opposition Leader's credibility is literally at stake here because his position on this issue has had so many changes, I doubt whether anyone can follow it.

**GILBERT:** But the reality is, from his comments after that Shadow Cabinet meeting, is that they're actually not that far away from your policy now in terms of supporting an emissions trading scheme – a gradual introduction in terms of the target set. So, in terms of getting it through the upper house things are looking a bit better than they could have.

**GARRETT:** Look, if it is the case that Dr Nelson has come back to where the Government's position is or is close to it, then why doesn't he support our position? I mean, really, what is the ground that the Opposition Leader is staking out for himself? Is he going with the hard right of his party – climate change sceptics, people like Senator Minchin who don't think we should be

doing anything at all, or is he going with what I think is the position more like Mr Turnbull and Mr Hunt, who at least I'll say they recognise that this is an issue that has to be addressed? He is a conflicted Leader of his party, that is absolutely clear, because his policy positions are so conflicted. And if in fact he's now come back to a position that is close to the Government, he should take the national interest seriously, recognise that business needs certainty, that the Australian public wants decisive action on climate change, that there is the opportunity to deal himself and his party into a sensible discussion about this issue, and support the Rudd Labor Government's position.

**GILBERT:** So, looking at this process that has gone on in the Opposition – they have made themselves the target inexplicably – but, when really the focus should be on you and your colleagues as you try and implement such a big reform. But in terms of the machinations on that side, Malcolm Turnbull has been the winner out of this - your neighbour in Sydney and the likely future leader of the Liberal Party, so really his stocks have been strengthened through this whole debacle for them.

**GARRETT:** Well look, it has been a debacle but let's wait and see what comes out of their meetings this morning because we've still got a backbench which is completely divided. Liberals and Nationals, very different views. Some don't want nuclear reactors in their backyard and will never accept it. What was it 'over my dead body' said Russell Broadbent. 'Oh, there is not enough room in my electorate,' you know, that was Mr Andrew's. I mean and others can't wait to get stuck into nuclear. So really, it is part of the overall conflicted position that the Liberal-National party coalition has on the issues of energy, on nukes and on the question of whether and how robust we should be on reducing carbon pollution.

**GILBERT:** But Malcolm Turnbull's credentials would have been strengthened out of it. He has been a strong advocate for action on this front. He was the environment minister of course, your predecessor when the Howard Government committed itself to an ETS.

**GARRETT:** Well Kieran, I'll let the political analysis be done by people like yourself. What I can say is that as a member of the Government, is that the Opposition are not performing their oppositional role with any diligence or any capacity and that is absolutely the case because of the confusion and coming and going on this issue in a way which we haven't seen - and yet today, on the very day when they have got to meet and decide critically on what their response to Dr Nelson is going to be, they will have yesterday's op-ed by the Deputy Opposition Leader saying it's time for us to have a rational debate about nuclear energy again, and yet at the same time Dr Nelson is on the record as completely ruling out nuclear energy.

Now, you've now got the Opposition Leader, he's flip flopped fifty-five times or more on the question of Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme and whether he'll support it or not and dates and so on and so forth. Now he's got his deputy saying well let's actually, let's revisit nukes.

**GILBERT:** Ok, well let's look at the comment that she made. The issue of nuclear power has to be debated rationally if Australia is serious about making deep cuts to its greenhouse emissions. Andrew Robb says it should be on the table for discussion. What's wrong with that? Having it on the table for discussion and a rational debate about it?

**GARRETT:** Well, that is not Dr Nelson's view, so you need to know consistently whether the Liberal-National party coalition want to bring nuclear energy back into this place or not. It sounds like the Deputy Leader and Mr Robb do. But if I hear Dr Nelson correctly, he doesn't. So you've got a complete division between the senior members of this party on this question.

But more importantly, what are they really saying? It is not about a debate. I mean the fact of the matter is that Dr Nelson it seems has gone back to the position that was held by Mr Howard when we went to the election and it looks like Ms Bishop wants to go back to the position that was Mr Howard pre-election as well, and that's 25 nuclear reactors, that is waste dumps dotted around Australia, that's a great capitalisation process when what we really should be doing is investing in clean and green energy sources – the solar, the geothermal. In fact I noticed Ms Bishop's remarks and she effectively rules out solar and geothermal altogether. Now that is what the Australian people want. They want to see a comprehensive approach on climate change which makes sure that we make full use of our renewable resources and Australia is really lucky because we have them and yet now we have the Deputy Leader of the Opposition flying the nuclear flag again.

**GILBERT:** But in terms of the nuclear issue more broadly, Andrew Robb the Shadow Foreign spokesman, the Shadow Foreign Affairs spokesman, has been advocating a change in policy from the Government and thinking, and arguing that you should at least think about exporting uranium to India. Now, why is the Government so adamant that it won't particularly when Stephen Smith has said that India has a strong record on non-proliferation. Won't exporting uranium actually achieve quite a bit in terms of India's own effort to bring down Co2 emissions?

**GARRETT:** Well look, the position of the Government has been clear on wanting to make sure that exports of uranium happen through a proper regime, proper safe guards and with countries involved in those multi-lateral agreements that bind them to making sure they're use of the material is safe.

The real question here isn't about whether or not we should be debating Mr Robb's position, it's why has the Liberal Party got so many positions. I mean, I feel sorry for the electorate trying to figure out what is going on here because we came into the position of the responsibility of exercising Government saying we would do something about climate change and we've laid out a decisive and clear plan for that and we've also said we want to involve stakeholders, industry and the community in discussing that. There is a process, it is deliberative and it's sober.

On the other side of the ledger, you've got this mob, firstly with a leader whose had a range of important decisions on this matter and seems to have been rolled at least from what we've seen recently and we'll know more about that when he gets out his party room, but at the same time his other senior colleagues (a) contradicting him on issues like nukes, and not making clear what the Liberal Party's contribution is going to be to having a reasonable and sensible debate about the most important issue we face – dealing with dangerous climate change.

**GILBERT:** But Andrew Robb makes the point that if Australia exported uranium to India, as the United States incidentally has agreed to do, it would have a much a bigger impact on global greenhouse emission reductions than any domestic policy that Australia could implement. Do you disagree with that and why isn't the Government at least looking at the possibility of exporting uranium to India?

**GARRETT:** Look the Liberal's always like to run policy lines that have got to do with what's happening in other countries. Their responsibility is to deliver policy solutions which actually provide greenhouse gas reductions here in Australia...

**GILBERT:** But when you're talking about one of the bog emitters like India – one of the, the third biggest emitter – why wouldn't you have that debate if you can actually influence it?

**GARRETT:** Well look, India is going to continue to produce a lot of energy through coal. We should have a proper debate about clean coal technologies. But we've got policies about those things.

Here are these people where the national interest in having a responsible approach to dealing with dangerous climate change is self-evident to all Australians - whether it is farmers who are dealing with effects of drought, the exacerbation of high temperature that come with global warming, whether it is our tourist industry, whether it is those industries that have a clear interest in seeing whether they can compete both here and overseas and reduce emissions at the same time.

I had the opportunity of visiting Arnold Schwarzenegger a couple of weeks ago in California. He is a Republican. He is the Governor of that State and they have actually de-coupled their emissions reductions from their economic growth. They are the kinds of debates that we should be having. That is the sort of discussion that we should be having but when you have got different positions happening within one Opposition you can't have a sensible and profound debate about these matters.

**GILBERT:** Ok, just finally before I let you go, can I get your thoughts on the broader landscape on this issue of carbon trading and so on as we move into the negotiations of Copenhagen and the post Kyoto process. You've been heavily involved in the international whaling and negotiations, you've been a keen observer for many years on environmental matter. How optimistic are

you that there will be any sort of legitimate agreement towards carbon reductions beyond Copenhagen of next year?

**GARRETT:** Look, it is a good question Kieran and it is a difficult one to answer. I think cautiously optimistic that we can make progress, that the roadmap can be picked up on. But at the same time, I think there is something equally important happening and that is you're seeing other countries start to take those necessary steps to begin to reduce their emissions, to lay out their plans for doing that – plans which are employment generating, which maintain sustainable economic growth but reduce emissions at the same time. All of us, wherever we live in the world need to move to a low carbon economy. I think that is a sense that all nations will have, from Copenhagen onwards. For Australia to be able to take a leadership role there, we need to show not only that we're convicted in order to reduce emissions but we've got the policies in place to do it. And that is what this Government has.

**GILBERT:** Peter Garrett, appreciate your time.

**GARRETT:** Thanks Kieran

**ENDS**