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MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE AND THE ARTS

TRANSCRIPT

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
DOORSTOP INTERVIEW
EVERTON PARK STATE SCHOOL, BRISBANE**

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SUBJECTS: National Solar Schools Program; Solar Homes and Communities Plan; the *Centaur*; Murray River water buy-backs

GARRETT: The National Solar Schools Program is off to a flying start with incredible numbers of applications showing a great enthusiasm for Australian schools to get solar panels on their roofs, water tanks next to their gardens, lighting energy efficiency – the whole range of things that are really important to dealing with climate change but which in schools, also provide a fantastic education focus for the kinds of technologies that all Australian's can put in their homes as well.

So we've seen such a strong uptake for the National Solar Schools Program. It tells us that we're off to a flying start with Aussie schools going solar and with great enthusiasm from student and also from teachers, to make sure that in the schools we've got these fantastic climate change addressing technologies which kids can actually see in their own schools.

JOURNALIST: So what sort of power savings are we talking, can these panels power the whole school?

GARRETT: Well, if every school in Australia – some 9000 schools or more – took up the solar panels that are available under this program we'd save 25,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. But on any school, no matter how much they save, putting solar panels on the roof, measuring the amount of energy that is collected and getting an understanding of the way in which solar power and renewable energy work is also a fantastic educational tool.

JOURNALIST: So how many schools have applied for this program?

GARRETT: Look, we've seen a real uptake – we're out of the blocks with about 1400 schools already making an application for the National Solar

Schools Program. This shows what a fantastic appetite there is from the school community. It also says for all of us, whether we're in the schools or at home, there are a range of identifiable things which we can do - taking practical action to reduce climate change, saving energy costs and also understanding more about the way in which weather works, the way in which in our country solar energy works.

JOURNALIST: With the solar panels, with the inquiry, they said there were a lot of businesses that were a bit upset saying they were losing business. What is your response to that?

GARRETT: We've produced figures to the Senate inquiry which shows that applications for solar panels are at an all time high. The industry has never seen such a level of activity and it completely vindicates the decision that the Government took in the Budget to means test that rebate. With over 500 applications coming in on average per week, add that to the National Solar Schools Program and the fact that we will have a significant roll-out of solar panels on schools around Australia and also our low-interest green home loans plan and there are many opportunities for renewable industries, including the solar industry, to plan sustainably for the future.

JOURNALIST: So what these businesses are saying isn't the correct picture then?

GARRETT: Well, I think what we've found was that in the initial phases of this campaign that it was the Liberal Party and the Shadow Environment Minister who said that the sky was falling in – who said that the solar industry was going to go to the wall. And yet the figures proved him to be completely wrong. In fact, I have been doing stakeholder meetings with renewable industry experts and businesses, local governments and NGO's around Australia and the message I'm getting from the solar industry is that it is a healthy industry, it is an industry that is confident about our future and it is an industry that recognises that there have been a record number of applications for this rebate. Mr Hunt, the opposition environment minister, was completely wrong. He got the figures wrong. And what is shown by the applications at record numbers coming through for the solar industry is that this Government has done the right thing in policy terms and will continue to make sure that the renewable industry as a whole has an opportunity to play its role in reducing emissions over the long term.

JOURNALIST: With the, you've probably heard about the ship *Centaur*, I know that has come to your desk. Are you looking at supporting a search for it?

GARRETT: Well I do know that Mr Snowden has responsibility as well for this issue. We're considering this very, very closely and I expect to work with Mr Snowden on this issue. He managed the whole question about the *HMAS Sydney* very well. There is such a strong level of interest in these kinds of issues when they happen so we're looking at it very, very closely.

JOURNALIST: So you can't say whether there is going to be Commonwealth funding for the search at all.

GARRETT: Well it is premature to be talking about funding at this point. What I can say is that we will examine all the issues around the *Centaur* very closely and the relevant Minister, in this case Minister Snowden will be actively involved in that.

JOURNALIST: [inaudible] the buy-up of temporary or annual water leases, that this is going to save the Murray. Do you agree with that?

GARRETT: What we can say is that the Government is absolutely focused on making sure that we have a robust approach to dealing with the very critical problems that we face in the Murray. There is a significant commitment for *Water for the Future*. There is already the commitment to purchase back entitlements over time. Some \$50 million has already been expensed on existing entitlements and the Prime Minister and Minister Wong made an additional announcement in only a couple of days ago about this in Adelaide. So we recognise how important it is. If there are other opportunities for purchases which can happen within the framework that the Government has established, which can enable the water to go down the Murray then they will be looked at closely.

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