



MEDIA RELEASE

Senator the Hon Penny Wong

Minister for Climate Change and Water

PW 21/08

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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH JON FAINE, 774 ABC MELBOURNE

SUBJECT: WATER, MANAGEMENT OF THE MURRAY DARLING BASIN; RUDD GOVERNMENT ON TRACK TO MEET KYOTO TARGETS.

E & O E – PROOF ONLY

FAINE: Now when you're talking infrastructure, it doesn't get bigger than John Howard's 10 billion dollar national water plan which is still unresolved after his impasse with the State Labor Government. So does it make a difference when it is the Federal Labor Government now negotiating with the State Labor Governments and may they be able to strike a deal? Minister for Climate Change and Water Penny Wong is here in Melbourne today to see whether or not this can be resurrected. Senator Wong, good morning.

WONG: Good morning John, how are you?

FAINE: Optimistic or pessimistic?

WONG: I think cautiously optimistic. Look, we want to work co-operatively with all the states, including Victoria, because we do understand that the Federal Government can't solve the Murray Darling by itself. So I am very happy to be meeting today with Minister Holding again and we hopefully can build on the very productive meeting we had a few weeks ago.

FAINE: Victoria has always said it is not interested in lowest common denominator reform?

WONG: Well, what we are interested in from the Federal Government's perspective is resolving the current impasse which means that we cannot manage the Basin as a whole. I think that all people in the Basin, no matter what State they're from would benefit from a basin-wide approach - a co-operative approach - from State and Federal Governments, and that is what we want to try and achieve. We want to try and end the political game playing that characterised the previous Howard Government when it came to the Murray Darling Basin.

FAINE: ABC News online reports that some 2000 kilometres of earthworks - unauthorised, illegal, possibly earthworks - including levies, channels and dams have been built through the Murray Darling Basin according to satellite imagery, in what would seem to be farmers simply taking matters into their own hands. What are you going to do about that?

WONG: Well, this is an issue in particular the Macquarie Marshes in NSW, which has had some attention and what I said very clearly is that we need strong compliance systems in place, we need to ensure when we do have agreement around allocation levels that they are observed, that is obviously something that we have to work with State Governments to achieve.

FAINE: Why wouldn't you just prosecute people who break the law? Simple as that.

WONG: Well, that ultimately is a matter for the relevant State Governments. But we recognise that whilst this is primarily a State responsibility we do want to work with the States to get this right. Everyone does expect that if there is agreement reached about allocation and environmental resources that these are adhered to and we've put in funding to assist NSW, to support NSW in ensuring that these compliance measures are put in place.

FAINE: People are just helping themselves to water - while the Governments dither - is the obvious conclusion to jump to Senator.

WONG: Well, as I said to you Jon, you have to have two things, don't you? You have to have an agreement about what can be taken out of the river and second you do have to have a compliance mechanism in place. We want to proceed further with the discussions between the States and Federal Governments and obviously compliance is one aspect of that because as you rightly point out, people do expect that if there is an agreement, that it is honoured - that people comply with it.

FAINE: And just finally, are you satisfied with the quality of national debate about Professor Garnaut's report? Do think we are mature and we are reaching the point of coming to grips with the issue?

WONG: Look, I think that Professor Garnaut has made an enormous contribution to the discussion. These are difficult issues, aren't they? We're talking about a very substantial shift in terms of Australia's emissions profile, that has significant consequences across the community and it takes time for people to come to grips with some of these consequences.

FAINE: Including the Labor Party in government instead of in opposition, it's harder when you actually have to do it, isn't it?

WONG: Well, as a Government we have been elected on a platform to progress our climate change policy. I have released today a report card which says we are on track to meet our Kyoto targets and what is very pleasing about that, is that it shows that the Government's renewable energy policy will deliver much more significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

FAINE: Penny Wong thank you for your time this morning. Senator Wong, Minister for Climate Change and Water in the Rudd Federal Government.

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