



# MEDIA RELEASE

**Senator the Hon Penny Wong**

*Minister for Climate Change and Water*

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## **TRANSCRIPT OF DOORSTOP INTERVIEW**

### **SUBJECT: WATERPROOFING THE SOUTH**

#### **E & O E – PROOF ONLY**

**WONG:** It is great to be here today, here in Adelaide's south with the Member for Kingston, Amanda Rishworth and my ministerial colleague John Hill, announcing the formal funding of 34.5 million dollars for Adelaide's Water Proofing the South Project. Developing new sources of water is a priority for the Rudd Labor Government. We understand that climate change means we have to look to other supplies than rainfall for water supplies. We need new sources of water that don't entirely rely on rainfall. We are investing 34.5 million dollars in the water proofing the south project so that families and businesses in this region can rely on recycled water, on water other than precious drinking water for watering their gardens and watering their crops. So this is about ensuring we have a water supply able to be used on gardens and on crops that isn't taking away from our precious drinking water. So this is a great project and a project the Rudd Labor Government is very pleased to support.

The second aspect of this project which is important is that it will lay the infrastructure to enable the delivery of our second election commitment to this region: 3.5 million dollars to connect irrigators in McLaren Vale to the pipeline. This will ensure that small and medium businesses, businesses which are so important to the local economy will have access to recycled water. Again another election commitment delivered by the elected government and as I said, an election commitment that is all about ensuring that we prepare for the impacts of climate change, that we look for diversified supplies of water for this region and for Adelaide more generally.

I will turn to Amanda and then to John Hill and then we can take some questions.

**RISHWORTH:** As I mentioned before climate change and also water is the number one issue on the southern residents' minds and I think this is a very exciting project, and I think it is something that will go ahead and really prove to be popular in the community and secure the water for the future.

**WONG:** Happy to take questions.

**JOURNALIST:** Can you talk about the scope of this? The state government has already committed 150 million dollars to upgrade this plant that was in the last state budget. Are you just adding to it or are you making more money available to the overall project? How this is all fitting in?

**WONG:** Well John Hill may be able to help me with the details of the state government's contribution, but certainly what we are delivering as I said is the 34.5 million dollars. I understand that the project has been on the table and has been re-scoped in recent times certainly the Federal Government's contribution is the 34.5 million dollars that I have announced to day and the 3.5 million dollars that we announced during the election campaign. The good thing about this project is as I said; it is about ensuring we look to the diversification of water supplies. Climate change means we have to look for water supplies other than rain fall. We have to look to recycling, we have to look towards stormwater management and this project delivers on those priorities.

**JOURNALIST:** Are these savings likely to reduce our reliance on the Murray or ground water? Or where are you expecting the savings to come from?

**WONG:** Well clearly what this project means is that we don't have use precious drinking water on crops and gardens. That is what is important, but you raise the issue of the Murray Darling, obviously that is one of the key critical issues facing South Australia and the nation. That is why we were very pleased at the COAG meeting in Adelaide we achieved an historic agreement. A lot more needs to be done. We have to sign an inter-government agreement by the next COAG meeting, but what is important is that the states have agreed that we need to treat the Murray Darling Basin as a nation wide issue, as a national issue, that we have actually have a coherent national response to the Murray Darling.

## **ADELAIDE DESALINATION PLANT**

**JOURNALIST:** When it comes to the desalination plant can you specify how much the federal government will be committing to Adelaide's desalination plant?

**WONG:** Can I say first we welcome the determination of Premier Rann and his government to ensure that Adelaide has access to supplies other than rainfall for water. We know that climate change means that we have to look at water supplies from other sources. I welcome the Premier and government's commitment to ensuring Adelaide has supplies that are not entirely dependent on rain fall for human needs. We will need to ensure that our water supplies are diversified and we have to look for other sources. What we said during the election campaign is what we will deliver on. We are supporting a desalination plant for Adelaide. We would seek that it be carbon neutral and what we will do is work with the state government around the appropriate commonwealth contribution and involvement in the project. As you know we have an election commitment for a billion dollar urban water fund. Details of that will be announced shortly and we will work with the state government context of that announcement where state governments such as the South Australian would apply to the federal government for funding. And as I said we welcome Premier Rann's commitment to securing alternative water supplies for Adelaide

**JOURNALIST:** So they haven't come to you with a figure yet?

**WONG:** I think the issue is that we have not yet announced the parameters of our billion dollar fund so at this stage they are obviously keen for us to do that and we will do so that in the very near future. We will deliver on another election commitment which is a billion dollar contribution to urban water in Australia

## **LOWER LAKES, MURRAY DARLING BASIN**

**JOURNALIST:** When it comes to the Lower Lakes has there been any more thought given to flooding that with sea water?

**WONG:** I visited the Lower Lakes on a trip the week before I went to China. I am very aware of the concern in those communities, the concern from those who rely on those areas for business, but also the ecological and environmental concerns. There is a real urgent problem in the Lower Lakes. What we did at the Murray Darling Basin Council meeting sometime ago was to commit five million dollars to looking at a range of urgent actions for the Lower Lakes. I am yet to receive that advice. We are waiting from the commission for that advice we will consider the options from the experts put to us. As I said previously, governments can't make it rain but we can manage the system better. Long term we need for the Lower Lakes and we need for the Murray generally a

system that manages far better the Murray Darling Basin and the Murray River. We need long term water security and that means better management and that means recognising that climate change is likely to mean reduced rain fall in the basin and we have to prepare for that.

So in terms of the urgent action we will wait for the advice from the experts to look at what urgently needs to be done at the Lower Lakes. Certainly we will be discussing that with the local community.

**JOURNALIST:** Does that also include looking at changing the way we look at agriculture in terms of how much water we need to grow what we are growing and whether that is sustainable?

**WONG:** I did a range of visits to rural Australia a couple of weeks ago: New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria. I went to a lot of irrigation districts. I think the one overriding issue for discussion was the reduced availability of water. I think all of us understand whether it is in a rural context, in the agricultural context or whether in the city, we have to do more with less. We have to do more with less water because the likelihood is that the future we are likely to see, due to climate change, reduced rainfall in the southern part of the Murray Darling Basin. So yes the overriding issue is how does this country prepare for a future where the weather patterns are significantly affected by climate change. How do we prepare for climate change - climate change is a key challenge for the future, how do we prepare for it. In terms of water what it means is that we have to do more with less.

**JOURNALIST:** When will you be able to announce the finalisation of the results of the 50 million dollar buy-back of licences?

**WONG:** Well as I made clear in the previous interview in South Australia, the 50 million dollar tender closes around mid May, so we will be looking at announcing, or outlining how that progressed after the tender closes. We obviously are very keen to learn from this process; it is an important aspect of the Labor Government's approach of addressing over-allocation of the Murray Darling Basin. This is the first time the national government has entered the water market directly to purchase water, but we always described it as a down-payment for the future of the River Murray. We know that more will need to be done. But as I said around mid-May the tender closes we will look to indicating how that went subsequent to that.

## **ADELAIDE DESALINATION PLANT**

**JOURNALIST:** Just going back to the desalination plant. It has been given major project status, are you looking forward to seeing that up and running?

**WONG:** Well as I said I absolutely welcome Premier Rann's commitment to ensure that Adelaide has access to water supplies which are not reliant only on rainfall. That is a prudent approach, that is a sensible approach; it is an approach that focused on the future challenges facing this state and the nation. As I said to you, we have a billion dollar commitment to urban water more generally, we will be announcing more details of that, we will be talking to state governments about how to make application for that.

## **U.S. PRESIDENT ON GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS**

**JOURNALIST:** Senator just on comments from the US President overnight on emissions.

**WONG:** Well can I say this on President Bush's statement, for the first time the US has indicated it will agree to an economy-wide goal on emissions and it is open to including that goal in an international agreement. This is a significant step however we would urge the US to go further. We

would urge the US to go further because we believe that climate change is an urgent challenge, and we believe that developed nations must take the lead when it comes to responding globally to climate change. So it is a significant step that the US has, for the first time, countenanced an economy-wide emissions goal and placing that within that international agreement, however we would urge the United States to go further.

**JOURNALIST:** Do you think 2025 is too far away for us?

**WONG:** As I have said we would urge the US to go further. The Australian Government's position is we will be announcing a mid-term reduction goal subsequent to the Garnaut review, and our modelling. We will do so before the end of the year. The Rudd Labor Government has already committed a 60% reduction by 2050.

## **2020 SUMMIT**

**JOURNALIST:** Just a question on the 2020 summit this weekend, we have mentioned climate change and water today, what you would like to see come out of in terms of your portfolio?

**WONG:** Can I say how much I am looking forward to the 2020 summit. It is an opportunity for Australian from a range of experiences and a range of backgrounds to put their ideas to government. This I am sure will be a creative and dynamic process and I certainly look forward to hearing what people have to say, listening to their ideas. There are some ideas that have already been put forward which are very interesting. But this is a process which I am sure will be creative and dynamic and I hope that we can see some good ideas that will come out for the summit that will really be important in the medium term. Clearly climate change and water are critical issues facing this nation, they are critical challenges for the future and we welcome as a government the opportunity to engage with people from different parts of Australia on these issues.

## **ADELAIDE DESALINATION PLANT**

**JOURNALIST:** If you could just explain how this project is working and where the money is going.

**SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND THE SOUTHERN SUBURBS, JOHN HILL:** I will do the bit that I know about. We can ask Jeff Tate from city council about how this will be implemented at a council level. Essentially this is a project that has been funded by the state government, Commonwealth Government, local council and some private enterprise. We are each looking after bits of it. So it's the state government's plan to upgrade this facility, to expand it to take the settling ponds out of the river basin and bring them on-site, to increase the capacity, to increase the standard to which water is treated. We are also, in addition, going to connect this treatment plant with the Aldinga treatment plant. That will be upgraded as well and the water that is sent down there will be treated to a level which can be used for recycling purposes for communities, so that is part of our commitment. So we will also connect this plant with the Seaford-Meadows development, to allow reticulated water supply to be provided to all of the residents of that area alongside their normal water supply, so they will have purple lime taps so that they can water their gardens and their toilets and so on. So that's part of the project as well. Things that is additional to the upgrade which makes it possible for the water that is produced here to be recycled into the communities. As I understand it the private sector will be taking some of the water and building pipes, and the 3.3 million dollars will allow smaller grape growers to do this. To connect up more and smaller viticultural properties to get access to this water and the council will be using some of the commonwealth's money and their own money to create a series of connections between this plant and the Aldinga plant and parks and gardens so that green space in

the communities that would otherwise use drinking water will be able to use recycled water. I think that roughly explains the relationship between them all.

**JOURNALIST:** And of the desalination plan, giving it major project status means that an environmental impact statement must be carried out. There is local concern about the impact on the gulf of the desal plant. How confident are you that this environmental statement will allay their concerns?

**HILL:** Well it certainly will address the issues at the highest standard that is possible the EIS will allow that to be done. So whatever concerns people have will be able to be addressed. The EIS process as you know means that the proponents develop an environmental report that then is put out for public comment and other experts have a look at it, and then those criticism and comments are taken on board and there is another iteration. So it is a complex and very very thorough process. The Government believes this is the best site to build a desalination plant. It's close to the city, close to the infrastructure. It's a good site here that we can use, so from every point of view it works. But we have to make sure that the environmental impact is minimal, and that is what we will do and everybody can observe that process and participate in that process. I think what it means is that we will have, I mean the desal plant, this waterproofing the south will mean that the southern suburbs will become an international focus for water technology, water security and ideas. I think that's great for the south and I think the majority of the people in the south will be very proud of this achievement.

**JOURNALIST:** There are some concerns from locals – how we will meet power and the amount of electricity that will be needed. How do you respond to that?

**HILL:** Government has said that the process for powering will be carbon neutral so we will have to work through how all of that happens but that's our commitment and we will stick to that.

**JOURNALIST:** Has ETSA already have issues in the area though with the power blackouts.

**HILL:** Well no more than other areas that I am aware of, but this is a level commitment of time to go. All of the solutions have not been nussed out in every bit of detail but that is a process that we are now going to enter into, but the Premier has made it plan that water security that it is our intention to make this carbon neutral.

**JOURNALIST:** Does the state government have a figure on how much it wants from this billion dollar urban water plan from the Commonwealth?

**HILL:** Half of it would be great but we know we would get our share. I guess it will depend on all of the other requests that are put in to the Federal Government and how good our request is and that's a competition process and I am sure the Commonwealth will take into account the relations sharing and they will also know we are the driest state on this very dry continent so our needs are greater than most.

**JOURNALIST:** So you are making a bid now?

**HILL:** Absolutely!

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