

# federal politics – and the environment

Sustainability takes centre stage in the run-up to the forthcoming federal government election, as the need to act urgently to protect the health of our planet becomes a major global issue. Leaders from the Australian Liberal, Labor and Green parties outline their priorities for a sustainable future.

## Malcolm Turnbull, Minister for Environment and Water Resources

(edited from National Press Club  
speech, 2 May 2007)

Climate change is a fact, not a theory. Global warming has to be addressed by a very substantial reduction in the level of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. And the cost of reductions could fall very heavily on Australia because our economy and prosperity is based in large measure on cheap coal fired, carbon intensive energy. We must protect both the environment and the economy.

Scientists agree that climate change is very likely to bring us hotter and drier times in southern Australia. The Government has a comprehensive response to the prospect of worsening water scarcity: the National Water Initiative aimed at recovering water in the Murray-Darling; the \$2 billion Australian Government Water Fund supporting innovative water infrastructure around the country; the \$10 billion National Plan for Water to restore environmental flows.

As for global warming, as its name implies, it is a global problem. All of our climate change policies must be aimed at ensuring an effective global reduction in greenhouse gases.

The major framework for mitigation to date has been the Kyoto Protocol. Developing countries such as China and India have stated that Kyoto should require cuts in emissions only from the developed world.

Right now, among the developed countries, only the Europeans are committed to further unilateral binding emission targets. Our exports



Malcolm Turnbull explains the importance of saving energy through energy efficient light bulbs, to children at Double Bay Public School.

have a much higher emission intensity than that of the Europeans because they are dominated by energy intensive resource commodities. Our customers and our competitors are largely developing countries. A new Kyoto must be truly global and include the United States, China and India.

Australia is working hard now, with China and the United States among others, to develop an effective global response.

Our \$200 million Global Initiative on Forests and Climate is leading the way in building a new global initiative for sustainable forestry and reduction of deforestation in developing countries. This is vital for near term emission reductions. We continue to play a leading role in the UN Climate Change Convention and the Asia-Pacific Partnership for Clean Development and Climate, covering Australia, India, Korea, Japan, China and the USA. The Prime Minister has placed climate change on this year's APEC agenda.

After energy efficiency, the International Energy Agency identifies clean coal as the most important building block to a low emissions future. Our collaboration with China on clean coal technology is of the most critical importance.

The Government is continuing to improve the efficiency of the appliances in our homes and buildings, and requiring Australia's largest energy users to do energy efficiency assessments. We made the world first decision to phase out inefficient incandescent globes.

Through our Low-Emissions Technology Demonstration Fund we have invested more than \$340 million in solar technology; \$17.6 million into the Advanced Electricity Storage Technologies program to trial more efficient ways of storing electricity from renewable energy sources; and \$27 million in geo-thermal projects for emission free energy.

But there is one proven, reliable source of clean baseload power which is available today: nuclear energy. Already 15% of the world's electricity comes from nuclear power. We have the world's largest reserves of uranium. We are taking steps to enable Australia to consider nuclear power as an energy option.

Labor's hypocrisy on climate change is seen in its total opposition to nuclear power. It calls for low emission power sources, but refuses to countenance one which is feasible and affordable.

Labor proposes that Australia should ratify the Kyoto Protocol – putting an unacceptable burden on the shoulders of developed nations like Australia. Domestically Labor seeks to impose a 60% cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Not only will this jeopardise Australian jobs and place heavy burdens on households, but it would be futile. We would export the emissions and we would export the jobs.

Our policies are designed to get the right environmental result, at the same time safe-guarding Australia's interests. This is the way forward:

- a substantial cut in emissions as a truly global approach – including all the major emitters
- making a material impact now – forestry and energy efficiency are the keys
- supporting low-emission technologies
- protecting Australian jobs – from policies which will advantage others at our expense.

## Peter Garrett, Shadow

### Minister for Climate Change

(edited from ALP National Conference  
speech, April 2007)

The Prime Minister will take our country to the next election on a calculated lie – that Australians must choose between a strong economy and a healthy environment. We cannot have a strong economy into the future unless we have a healthy environment. We cannot have a healthy environment, and we cannot tackle climate change, unless we have a healthy economy into the future. Labor understands this.

Climate change is the greatest challenge facing our nation for 60 years. The evidence is stark, the science is in. The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change assessed the impact of climate change on Australia in these terms:



Peter Garrett

**'Since 1950, there has been 0.3-0.7°C warming, with more heat waves, fewer frosts, more rain in north-west Australia and...less rain in southern and eastern Australia and...an increase in the intensity of Australian droughts... Australia [is] already experiencing impacts from recent climate change...These are now evident in increasing stresses on water supply and agriculture, changed natural ecosystems, reduced seasonal snow cover'.**

The UN report tells us Australia will have up to 20% more droughts by 2030 and up to 80% more droughts by 2070 in south western Australia. By 2020, 60% of the Great Barrier Reef, our great national and international treasure, could be regularly bleached. 200,000 jobs are directly dependent on a healthy reef, generating around \$4.3 billion for our economy.

Australia is also facing a biodiversity extinction crisis: we are already witnessing the loss of our great natural and cultural heritage. Labor will make the protection of our biodiversity a national environmental priority. We will establish a national system of comprehensive, adequate and representative national parks and reserves and ensure a high standard of properly funded protection and management of precious World Heritage Areas.

We will seek World Heritage listing for Ningaloo Reef in Western Australia, ban oil and gas exploration and mining both on and near to the Great Barrier Reef. From the top of Cape York to the bottom of Tasmania, and right around Australia, Labor will cherish, honour and protect our great natural heritage.

We will establish an independent National Sustainability Commissioner and Council to monitor Australia's performance against a National Sustainability Charter.

We are beginning to understand that the impact of climate change on Australians could be catastrophic. Heat related deaths could increase four fold in our major cities within the next 40 years. Heatwaves and bushfires are virtually certain to increase in intensity and frequency, and floods, landslides, droughts and storm surges are very likely to become more frequent and intense.

Australians will face the consequences of climate change and scientists warn ongoing coastal development is very likely to increase risk to lives and property from sea-level rise and storms.

Labor will develop a national coastal policy to address the challenge climate change presents to this much loved and lived in part of our country.

Unlike the Howard Government, Labor does have a comprehensive plan to tackle climate change. We will:

- ratify the Kyoto Protocol
- cut Australia's greenhouse pollution by 60% by 2050
- establish a national emissions trading scheme
- substantially increase the Mandatory Renewable Energy Target
- implement a \$500 million National Clean Coal Initiative

At the next election, Australians will face a stark choice. On the one hand, a tired Howard Government, marked by eleven years of denial, delay and inaction on climate change and determined to build dozens of nuclear reactors around this country. On the other hand, there is Kevin Rudd and the Labor team; with much energy, many ideas, committed to climate change solutions and willing to meet the great environmental and economic challenges that we face.

### Bob Brown, Australian Greens Leader, Senator for Tasmania

The Holy Trinity Church sits on a hilltop near Hobart's CBD, its sandstone spires as visible and familiar to Hobartians as the - now World Heritage listed - Opera House is to residents of Sydney. Holy Trinity's foundation stone was laid in 1841 by its creator, the convict architect James Blackburn. Listed on the Register of the National Estate, this Gothic masterpiece faces uncertainty and possible sale by its owners, the Anglican Church of Tasmania, due to the projected \$5 million cost of repairing its decaying sandstone exterior. Thousands of kilometres away in Western Australia, the millions of indigenous rock carvings on the Burrup peninsula, many of which are older than Stonehenge, are threatened by the construction of a gas plant. If we don't value and preserve our heritage sites, once lost, they are lost forever.

The Australian Greens value Australia's heritage - whether it be natural, cultural or built. We believe State and Federal Governments have a clear responsibility to contribute to the conservation of our iconic heritage sites. The Greens' policy is to protect and preserve those places, buildings and cultural narratives that define us as the lucky inhabitants of this marvellous continent.

I commend the National Trust for working towards a greater appreciation of not only our built and cultural treasures, but also of our natural heritage. The Australian Greens exist because we are committed to a society which lives within the ecological and resource limits of our planet. The Greens' environmental policy



Bob Brown

recognises that Australians have a responsibility to manage this country's unique natural environment and to pass this land on to future generations in good health.

Sustainability recognises that the economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment. It is driven by the principle of intergenerational equity - doing what is right by our children, and their children's children in perpetuity.

The collapse of the Murray-Darling Basin shows that where the environment is degraded, the wellbeing of communities and the economy degrades also. No reliable rainfall in the Basin means no irrigation, higher food prices and greater pressure on farming communities and the economy. Closer to my own home, if we keep feeding Tasmania's globally significant temperate forests into the chip mill, biodiversity and water catchments will continue to suffer and massive stores of carbon will continue to be released in forestry burns. In the context of climate change, deforestation on such a scale is reckless and unjustifiable.

Climate change is already having an impact. The science tells us prolonged droughts, flooding rains and more intense bushfires are the consequence of our lack of understanding of sustainability. We human beings mess about with these natural systems at our peril.

The Australian Greens will continue to be outspoken and determined advocates for the environment in the Federal Parliament. We remain committed to legislating for a 30% reduction in Australia's greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 and 80% by 2050; to increasing renewable energy use 25% by 2020; and, to halting the growth of our energy consumption by reducing the amount of energy we waste. We will push for all Australia's responsibilities under international environmental treaties to which we are a signatory, to be clearly defined in national legislation. For more on our policies go to: [www.greens.org.au/about/policy](http://www.greens.org.au/about/policy)

There is so much for us to be proud of as Australians, from the elegant little church on the Hobart hilltop, to the Opera House to ancient rock carvings on WA's Burrup Peninsula and Tasmania's precious forests. As a society, we are 'wealthy' beyond measure. Let's look after what we have.