



Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Cognate Bill

House of Representatives

3 June 2009

Sharon Grierson MP

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (5.39 pm)—I can only say that I am very proud to be standing today in this parliament to speak on the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill 2009 and related bills. For me, this is why we are here. As members of parliament, our aim is always to improve the quality of life of both the people we represent and all Australians, but this gives us an opportunity to sustain that quality of life well into the future, and that makes me particularly proud.

We do have to balance needs and that is also our job. We do that in every piece of legislation, and this legislation does just that. I applaud the work of the Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Wong, and the assistance of the Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change, Greg Combet, in being able to draw up, when challenged not just by climate change but also by a global financial crisis, legislation that responds to all needs, balances them in a positive way, recognises and respects all the positions that come to this debate and finds the way forward. They are part of a reformist government, and they have done this particularly well.

Climate change is perhaps not just the greatest challenge we face but the highest priority of this government, and it is one that I support entirely. It is imperative that Australia plays a major part in this international challenge. I have just heard the member for Tangney try to use science, which is laudable, to explain his position opposing this legislation. I, on the other hand, explain my position from the experiences of life. I use my experience of having visited China and seeing that country trying to do a very noble thing—create wealth for its people. I have seen that, in doing so, it has relied heavily on fossil fuels, and the emission levels are terribly frightening.

I also use my experiences of the wonderful opportunity I had to visit America and go to FutureGen to see the work that is being done in the coal industry to find clean coal solutions to a problem that is acknowledged, to meet with the US Department of Energy, to go to the UN and talk to the climate change unit there and to see a solar plant in Nevada. I have had the opportunity to see the wonderful efforts of mankind in other countries to know that there is a climate change imperative, it is

recognised and it is being responded to. I can only say how exciting it is when necessity comes together with innovation. That is what creates this marvellous world.

That is what sets us apart as human beings. So I feel very fortunate to be part of this debate. Economic modelling projections undertaken by Treasury last year tell us that the consequences of inaction far outweigh those of acting now. Although they were ignored, I applaud the representatives of business who came to the Howard government many years ago with a proposal detailing the need for change. Similarly, the Stern report concluded that action must be taken, and I do not dispute that. Cycles can be in aeons or ages, but our life is short. We see those cycles and those changes and they impact upon us.

I represent Newcastle. We have seen the impact of a severe storm event, those one-in-200-years events that are unfortunately becoming too frequent in this country. We see the repetition in Northern Queensland and northern New South Wales of those once-rare one-off events. They have human impact and cause human damage. We do not need science to tell us that. Science has its place and has played its part, but I think all of us, on the basis of the reality we share as human beings, can make some very wise decisions on this.

The CPRS white paper of December 2008 reads:

Australia faces a choice. We can either wait and leave our children and grandchildren to face the full impacts of climate change, or we can take responsible action now ...

The immediate passage of these cognate bills through both the House and the Senate is imperative. The opposition's argument that we need to wait until after the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen is certainly one of following the leader, and it is an argument that I do not support. I think that argument is really about sustaining a different leadership, a leadership that is under threat and struggling to assert itself in the opposition parties, the leadership of Malcolm Turnbull. It is important, though, that we do not fiddle while the planet burns; it is important that we act now. It is also important that, as a country, we lead.

That is not a problem; it is something we have done historically and something we should be very proud of. We know that international decisions will be made; we know that international action will be taken. We should be prepared for that. We are doing the right thing by preparing industry and business for those decisions and making sure the way ahead is planned, discussed and collaborated upon, and that the decisions are the best ones to take us forward. It is a true expression of acting in good faith, and that is a position I encourage the opposition to come to.

In economic terms, business and industry do need certainty that this bill will pass so that investment and growth in jobs can continue. The passage of this bill is also important to drive the investment in renewable energy sources to sustain the energy

use that we like in our lives—that we demand in our lives. We cannot have it both ways. We have to make those changes. Certainly business and industry, and coal, in my electorate impact very much on employment, on the economy and on our way of life. Coal is part of our industrial heritage and history. We exported 92 million tonnes of coal last year. That is something we are proud of; it is not something we shy away from in any way. The Rudd Labor government is acutely aware of the vital importance of the coal industry, and so am I. My grandfather was a coalminer who took part in the Rothbury riots. You do not have to scratch the skin of Novocastrians too deeply to find a mining history.

Knowing how well the coal industry have collaborated in my area, I do not have any doubt that the \$750 million compensation package that we are offering the coal industry can be leveraged in the smartest and best ways to sustain the industry and make the shifts we need to make. Delaying the CPRS for a year as we have done and having a soft start with a fixed permit price of \$10 will certainly assist the coal industry, as will the \$750 million in transitional assistance. Newcastle, of course, is home to Tomago Aluminium, OneSteel and the concrete industry. I have been very pleased to assist dialogue between the minister and those companies and I think it has been a very healthy and positive way forward for us.

I have great faith in people like Geoff Plummer, the CEO of OneSteel, and Andre Martel, a Canadian, who runs Tomago Aluminium. These are people of vision who will know how to cope with what some portray as a crisis. They also know that relationships with government are terribly important, and the contribution they have made shows in this legislation. I will continue to work with our local industry so that this transition phase is positive and takes us forward in a sustainable way.

Newcastle does not have a problem with being part of the future. We actually make an amazing contribution to the fight against climate change. Members will know of the activist group Rising Tide. They protested at the Prime Minister's Press Club luncheon and the Treasurer's post-budget luncheon and they unfurled a banner here. They are also from my electorate. When it comes to climate change, in my electorate the whole gamut of arguments and positions is represented. We are never shy about coming forward, no matter what our position. But we are uniquely positioned to contribute to the fight against climate change, as we have become a centre for smart energy for achieving and responsible emission targets. We have taken advantage of our expertise in energy generation, in smart manufacturing and in the research capacity embedded in the CSIRO Energy Transformed Flagship and the University of Newcastle's clean energy centre.

We have moved very quickly to be part of the solution, not just part of the problem. In January the Minister for Resources and Energy, Mr Ferguson, launched the headquarters of the Australian Solar Institute at CSIRO in Mayfield. Five million dollars was given for a new solar thermal tower and mirror array—a venture in energy generation, not just about solar research. Similarly, I am very proud that the Clean Energy Innovation Centre was officially opened in my electorate in April this year by Kim Carr, the minister for Innovation, industry, Science and Research. I look forward to working very positively with that organisation.

Another important initiative to come from Newcastle is Together Today. We are the only city in Australia that measures its emissions every day. Together Today tell me that Newcastle can exceed the government's targets at least 12 months ahead of time. We are the world's first user of a greenhouse gas speedometer. It is displayed in a square in our city for everyone to see every day. For us, responding to climate change is a collective challenge, a real part of our everyday lives in Newcastle. We create the energy and we want to create it in a cleaner and more efficient way; we produce the goods from that energy, which flow out of this country, and we want to do that in a more efficient way; and we enjoy a quality of life that we want to protect.

This week, on 7 June, is the second anniversary of the day the coal ship *Pasha Bulker* washed up on our shores. We have seen extreme weather events and we know that what we do today in the House is an important response to those experiences and that it will lead to even greater success in developing a sustainable world.

In concluding I quote the Garnaut climate change review, which said:

The risk— of climate change—can be substantially reduced by strong, effective and early action by all major economies. Australia will need to play its full proportionate part in global action. As one of the developed countries, its full part will be relatively large, and involve major early changes to established economic structure.

... There is a path to Australia being a low-emissions economy by the middle of the 21st century, consistently with continuing strong growth in material living standards ... By the end of the 21st century, and beyond, more so with each passing decade material living standards would be higher with than without mitigation of climate change.

I support the legislation.