



Chamber of the House of Representatives

Clean Energy Bills

20 September 2011

Sharon Grierson MP

Ms Grierson (Newcastle) (12.50pm) — Mr Speaker, today I rise to speak in support of a proactive plan to take action to reduce the harmful effects of climate change; I rise to speak in support of putting a price on carbon pollution; and I rise to speak in support of this package of Bills that will provide the foundation of our clean energy future.

Although I always welcome the opportunity to speak to issues of environmental sustainability and the future of our nation, as I said in February last year when I spoke on the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme legislation, this is not a debate that can go on forever. There is no longer a genuine debate in the community as to whether we trust the science of climate change; there is only a debate in the caucus of the Liberal and National Parties as to whether man-made climate change is occurring.

As the most recent report from the Climate Commission noted:

'This is the critical decade. Decisions we make from now to 2020 will determine the severity of climate change our children and grandchildren experience'.

Our nation is the world's 15th largest total emitter and has the highest per capita emissions in the world. The time for action on climate change is now, and it is up to us in this place to make tough decisions in the long-term interests of our nation. The choice that we will make when we come to vote on this legislation is a choice between the past and the future, between doubt and belief, between action and inaction. We on this side of the House will not stand impotent in response to these challenges. As a government, we have a responsibility to the Australian people to take action. To do any less would be to abrogate the public contract that we have entered into with the people of Australia.

To my colleagues in this Parliament, Mr Speaker, and to the men and women of the branches of the Australian Labor Party, I say that these are tough reforms. And due to the misinformation campaign coming from those members opposite, the task of

explaining these reforms is even tougher. But it is for that reason that we will work to ensure that our voice is more concise, more truthful, and better heard than the voice of our opponents.

Reform is never easy. But we cannot afford to walk lamely along the path to reform, heckled by the slogans of fear and disbelief. If we were to halt now, after we've already waited so long, we would be condemning Australia and our children to an uncertain and polluted future.

This package of 18 bills implements the Government's commitment to creating a clean energy future. This is a chance for Australia—we can create a clean energy future. This is a chance for the international community of nations—together, we can create a clean energy future.

Through these Bills we're acting on climate change, and we're doing it in a distinctly Labor way. It is only a Labor Government—not a Liberal Government or a Greens Party Government—that would get the balance right. It is a federal Labor Government that will price carbon in a way that protects jobs and makes the big polluters, not Australian tax payers, pay for that pollution. It is a federal Labor Government that will sustain industry, particularly trade exposed industries, and provide certainty for business while mandating change. It is a federal Labor Government that will ensure that pensioners and low-income earners are supported by offsetting cost of living pressures. It is a federal Labor Government that will invest in the future energy needs of Australians by incentivising renewable energy development, and thereby invest in the environment. That's the Labor way; and it's my way.

We will never turn our backs on the industries in Newcastle and the Hunter. We will never turn our backs and walk away from the metal workers, the miners, or the manufacturers. A Jobs and Competitiveness Program will support jobs in high-polluting, but trade-exposed, industries through the allocation of free carbon permits. Supplemented by a Clean Technology Investment Program, investments in research and development, and the Food and Foundries Investment Program, this reform package will clean up our economy while supporting workers.

On Thursday we heard the Member for Patterson and the Member for Canning ask who is standing up for the Hunter and speculating what workers in my electorate think of pricing carbon. What I can tell the Member for Patterson, Mr Speaker, is that the Australian Labor Party are standing up for the Hunter. What I can tell the Member for Patterson, Mr Speaker, is that support for renewable energy and the continued development of non-renewable energy sources are not mutually exclusive.

What I can tell the Member for Canning, Mr Speaker, is that Members on this side of the House consult with our electorate and, in particular, we talk to workers, and they know that we will always endeavour to keep people in jobs because we recognise the dignity of work. Although the concern of the Member for Canning for the jobs of workers is respectable, I fear that he has been misled by his own Party room. What they may not have told him is that the Alcoa aluminium smelter at Tomago of which

he spoke will be shielded from 94.5% of the carbon price. Construction consultancy David Langdon has said that the impact on the cost of aluminium will be negligible, rising by only 0.16%.

We recently heard the Member for Patterson predict that 31,000 jobs would be lost in New South Wales by 2030. What he didn't tell the House, however, was that the same report found that employment in New South Wales will continue to grow under a carbon price. What he tried to hide from the people of New South Wales was that modelling by the federal Treasury shows that around 400,000 extra jobs will be created in New South Wales by 2020 under a carbon price. According to the Climate Institute,

"all credible studies show strong employment growth under a pollution price and in the transition to a low carbon economy. It's estimated we'll see an additional 1.6 million jobs between now and 2020, whilst cutting pollution by at least 159 million tonnes. Even the coal industry is expected to see between 10,000-16,000 new mining jobs above 2008 levels".

Unfortunately, the clamouring of the conservative naysayers in the Opposition is little different to the clamouring of the Merchants of London and the landed gentry of Great Britain who argued against the abolition of the slave trade more than 200 years ago. At the time, commerce in slavery represented a quarter of Britain's gross domestic product and opponents of abolition threatened that it would bring financial ruin to the country and fatally wound the economy. But they were wrong; Britain's economy did not decline, but accelerated, while civil liberties and freedoms experienced a new age of recognition and respect. Conservatives then, just as now, were on the wrong side of history.

Mr Speaker, I believe that Australians are too honest and too civilised to wear such a fear campaign. And, Mr Speaker, we on this side of the House know that when the carbon price takes effect from the start of the 2012 financial year and the sky does not fall, that the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues on a Tea Party bender will no longer be able to disseminate untruths and misrepresentations that fly in the face of fact.

The Australian people will see that the Leader of the Opposition's plan is no plan at all. Under his plan, every Australian taxpayer would pay an extra \$1,300 each year; Australians would be subsidising industry's pollution. Under our plan, in contrast, around 500 of the biggest polluters—not Australian taxpayers—will pay for each tonne of pollution they produce.

"Give me the job or I'll trash the joint"; that's how the former Prime Minister, Paul Keating, described the approach of the Leader of the Opposition. Keating, as always, had the Leader of the Opposition's measure. He'll not only trash the joint, he'll trash the economy, trash the environment and he'll trash the nation.

Since my election in 2001, I've seen my electorate welcome, and subsequently embrace, change as we, together, have worked to build a clean energy agenda for

the city. It's an agenda that has seen more than \$300 million invested in a clean energy future in my electorate, including \$20 million for the Clean Technology Innovation Centre, \$30 million for the Newcastle Institute of Energy and Resources, and \$150 million for the Australian Solar Institute.

These investments came under a Federal Labor Government and my leadership. For eleven years the Howard government was missing in action on climate change, just as the Member for Patterson was missing in action when we began developing a clean energy future for the Hunter and positioned Newcastle as a hub for clean energy. On his website, the Member for Patterson, says that he 'ran for parliament because [he] wanted to create a better future for [his] children, and all children'. If that's truly the case, he should cross the floor and vote with the government. If he wants to create a better future for all children, he should work with the government to create a clean energy future, and he should work with the people of his electorate to build on the clean energy future that we've been developing for the Hunter.

This clean energy reform package will incentivise further investment in clean energy technologies and infrastructure by increasing the viability of renewable technologies for consumers. According to Treasury modelling, the implementation of a carbon price will see over 40% of Australia's electricity coming from renewable sources by 2050. These reforms will help build the clean energy future our children and our grandchildren deserve—the clean energy future our children and our grandchildren need.

But we've seen that it's not only the Conservative Opposition that have obstructed the path of change. Members of the Greens Party in the Senate, in their unwillingness to pass the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme legislation in 2009 and 2010, demonstrated their Party to be one grounded in political opportunism rather than a commitment to acting on climate change. They demonstrated that they are not a Party committed to the protection of workers in the steel industry, or the manufacturing industry, or the coal industry.

However, I welcome, now, the constructive approach adopted by all on the Multi-Party Climate Change Committee. I'd like to acknowledge the conscientiousness and dedication of the Prime Minister, the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, Greg Combet, Members of the Greens Party, and the Members for Lyne and New England.

All major economies are acting on climate change; limiting pollution and unlocking clean energy technologies. Emissions trading schemes exist in more than 30 European Countries and in New Zealand. Carbon pricing systems exist in Canada, China, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, India, Japan, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Like dominoes, every nation is gradually introducing measures to cap pollution and transition to a low-carbon economy.

Writing today in *The Australian*, Adair Turner, the chairman of the United Kingdom Committee on Climate Change, wrote that 'in Britain there is a general appreciation

that a low-carbon economy can be a prosperous one, and that the costs of global inaction on climate change would be great'. As the Climate Institute have said:

'There is absolutely no risk of Australia moving ahead of the rest of the world; the far greater risk is that Australia gets left behind'.

When we look at the wonders of our natural environment, under threat from rising sea temperatures and weather fluctuations, the imperative to act is clear. As the coral of the Great Barrier Reef bleaches at an increasing rate, the importance of this reform package for the future prosperity of our nation and the ongoing sustainability and biodiversity of our natural environment cannot be muddied with the slogans of fear and hate of those opposite. My colleagues and I know that we must build a better future for our children and our grandchildren. All our words, all our policies, and all our actions are directed to this end.

That is why, to the men and women of my electorate, I ask, will you allow inaction on climate change?

To the men and women of my home state of New South Wales, I ask, will you entrust the future of our nation to those who had 11 years in government in which to take action on climate change, and yet did nothing—can Australia afford another three years like the last term of the Howard government?

To all Australians, I ask, will you accept the misinformation campaign of those opposite? Or will you work with my colleagues and I in the national interest to build a clean energy future? As the Prime Minister has queried, will you be on the right side of history?

With the passage of these Bills through both Houses of Parliament, we will be committing our nation to a great future. We will be turning a corner, and it's a clean energy future that's coming around the bend.