



TRANSCRIPT

Senator the Hon Penny Wong

Minister for Climate Change and Water

PW 222/08

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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW, *BBC WORLD NEWS (TV), ASIA TODAY PROGRAM.*

SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE AGREEMENT NEGOTIATIONS

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JOURNALIST: How much are you concerned Minister, that your determined efforts on climate change in particular are in danger of being watered down, diluted, because of these enormous pressures economically now around the world?

WONG: Well obviously all governments are concerned about the impact of the global economic crisis and focused on the need to take action to stabilise the financial system and to increase liquidity. But what we would say from the Australian Government's perspective is this: we believe it is important to take action on climate change, we don't believe delay is the responsible way to approach this.

JOURNALIST: But you've got to make choices, your Prime Minister has got to make choices. He has just announced an enormous package, a recession-beating package, as he put it.

WONG: Yes, we've announced an economic security strategy which is focused first on securing Australia's continued economic growth in these difficult times. But I suppose the point is this, if you believe – and we do – that climate change is occurring, then what is required is a significant economic transition over many years to move to a lower carbon economy. Then clearly what we know is that delay will in fact cost you money. Nicholas Stern showed that, the Garnaut Report, which Australia commissioned, also demonstrated that. We know that the costs of inaction are greater than the costs of responsible action and we know that delay will in fact increase the cost to us of the transition we have to make.

JOURNALIST: Wouldn't it be fair to say that you, as Minister for Climate Change and Water, are facing a much more uphill battle after the election victory last year when Labor was put into office? Because there are many businessmen and chief executives who are not convinced by that argument.

WONG: Well can I say I have also noticed, reported quite widely, that quite a number of Australian businesses have spoken about the need for certainty. And of course, what we know is that delay increases uncertainty. As you know, one of the things business has said very clearly to governments of various political persuasions internationally, one of the things business has said that governments need to do is provide certainty and we're very conscious of that in the Government.

JOURNALIST: But they're not convinced by your arguments. In other words, you're fighting much more of an uphill battle to convince those who have to take strategic decisions about how they spend their money in business.

WONG: Well, a couple of points. First, quite a number of business leaders have said that we should not delay because of the certainty issues. Second, of course, we'll take current and future economic circumstances into account in terms of how we implement and develop our climate

change policies – any responsible government would do that. But I again reiterate this: that we believe that delay is simply going to defer a transition that we know we need to make.

JOURNALIST: Do you think you've still got political support for what was a key plank in the Labor victory in the election last November? Do you think you've still got that overwhelming public support for what you're going to do, given the sacrifices which will have to be made?

WONG: Look, we have never thought that this was an easy task. Tackling climate change is not easy and we have been up-front with the Australian people. We have said that there is no cost-free way to tackle climate change but what we do know is that the costs of failing to act will be greater. Now we are involved in a process at the moment where we are consulting with business, with the community, with a range of individuals and sectors across the Australian economy about what is the best way to tackle climate change, what is the best design for our emissions trading scheme, which we call the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. So we are approaching this in a responsible and methodical way and that's how we will continue.

JOURNALIST: What would you say the image is now of Australia on climate change? This time last year you hadn't signed up to the Kyoto Protocol under the previous John Howard Government. One of the first things your Prime Minister, your leader did was he went and signed the Kyoto Protocol. What difference has that made to your position on this issue internationally?

WONG: Well, the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol was in fact the very first official act of the Australian Government and what it demonstrated is that Australia was now prepared to be part of the solution on climate change.

JOURNALIST: And what has been the impact internationally, having made that decision?

WONG: Well I am sure that people, like yourselves, can probably put a view about that. My view is that it has shown to the world that we are prepared to be part of the solution. We've been able, through these international negotiations, to be a full player in terms of these negotiations and to play a constructive and strong role in those negotiations and we intend to continue to do that because we have a very strong interest in a global response to climate change.

JOURNALIST: Minister, what's your assessment - there's a very big meeting coming up in Poznan, in Poland followed by the Kyoto follow-up meeting in Copenhagen next year which is designed to create a new Kyoto. There are many who say that the traction is being lost on this issue of climate change internationally. That the Poznan meeting is now going to be much more difficult than expected. What's your assessment?

WONG: Well, firstly at a general level: it is not an easy task to put together an international agreement on any issues, including on these issues, and we are under no illusions about the scale of the challenge nor the imperative of it.

JOURNALIST: Is it difficult at the moment?

WONG: It is. It is difficult at all times, and it is difficult at the moment. Poznan will, I think, be very focused on the work program. The key issue is seeking to get an agreement by Copenhagen. We have a lot of work to do, but there are a great many countries who are very committed to working through the process and working through the disagreements to try and forge, to try and build an effective international agreement.

JOURNALIST: A quick one word answer here, do you believe that Copenhagen will produce that deal, post-Kyoto, to take forward this absolute momentum on climate change?

WONG: I believe Copenhagen has to produce an agreement.

JOURNALIST: Minister, thank you.

WONG: Thank you.

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