



THE HON GREG COMBET AM MP
Minister Assisting the Minister for Climate Change

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TRANSCRIPT OF ABC RADIO NATIONAL INTERVIEW

**SUBJECT: NATIONAL BROADBAND NETWORK; MALCOLM TURNBULL'S
COMMENTS ON THE OPPOSITION'S CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY**

E & O E – Proof only

Journalist: Greg Combet is the Assistant Climate Change Minister and he is in our Parliament House Studio. Minister, good morning.

Greg Combet: Morning Fran.

Journalist: Before we get to an ETS, can I just ask you about this appointment of Mike Kaiser without any shortlist and without the job being advertised, a name recommended by the Minister. Is this an appropriate way to be appointing to a job that pays \$450,000 a year?

Greg Combet: The National Broadband Network is responsible for the appointment at the end of the day and they obviously felt it was an appropriate way to pursue it. I have only had a quick glance at the story in the paper this morning and they indicate he was put through the hoops so they obviously felt it was an appropriate appointment.

Journalist: Do you think it is? Mike Kaiser is what anybody would call a Labor mate - a former state secretary, a former state MP, a former Premier's adviser. Shouldn't these processes be fully at arm's length, fully accountable and fully competitive?

Greg Combet: Well it is up to NBN to answer that question I think.

Journalist: So where you worried about the message, the way this appointment was made could send the voters?

Greg Combet: Look I think the NBN can go about explaining how they appoint people to these positions. They obviously thought this was an appropriate process and a good appointment.

Journalist: Ok let's get back to the Emissions Trading Scheme. Malcolm Turnbull did a good job selling the ETS in the Parliament yesterday. Some say a more effective job than anybody on your side of politics has done including the PM. Why would that be?

Greg Combet: Well I think when you are a former Leader of the Opposition giving a speech that completely contradicts the current Leader of the Opposition in the circumstances we have had over the last couple of months, that is going to be quite newsworthy and cut through. I just want to say this about Malcolm Turnbull: it is a very courageous thing for a

person to do. He is a person who has had a long association with this issue and obviously worked on it, an Emissions Trading Scheme, when he was in the Howard Government and he has been a strong advocate for it.

If you look back over the last twelve to eighteen months, one of the reasons that we are in this position is that under Malcolm Turnbull's leadership of the Coalition, it was not such a fiercely contested issue because he essentially agreed with the underpinning concepts and principles. That is why ultimately Malcolm Turnbull as Leader of the Opposition entered into negotiations with the Government.

And you have to bear in mind only ten weeks ago or so, the Government and the Opposition under his leadership reached an agreement on the CPRS legislation. We reached an agreement on an emissions trading scheme being the most efficient and least cost way of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and linking with international efforts. So he has a substantial common view with the Government but it cost him his job. He stood up in Parliament yesterday and I think said a number of things that are clearly in the national interest and as you rightly say demolished Tony Abbott's stance.

Tony Abbott does not believe in climate change. We know that he thinks the science is 'absolute crap'. He has got no commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions but Malcolm Turnbull is a serious participant in this debate, Tony Abbott is not.

Journalist: If what you say is right, the public seems to be certainly falling in its conviction regarding an ETS. Is that down to the fact that the Government did not bother to sell it all that time when you had Malcolm Turnbull on side? Because there is a growing number of opinion polls now showing that public support for an ETS is falling fast and the public likes the look of Tony Abbott's direct action plan.

Greg Combet: That is why I mentioned a moment ago that you have to see it in a sweep of the last twelve to eighteen months in particular...

Journalist: ...where the Government did not bother to sell its policy...

Greg Combet: We have done a lot of work to sell and explain it but of course you can make observations about our effectiveness. But we have certainly been endeavouring to do that and achieve support for it. But it was not a fiercely contested public policy issue in the way that it now is. Now that Mr Abbott is in leadership of the Coalition it is a fiercely contested issue.

Journalist: Yes Minister but can I just interrupt...

Greg Combet: ...so now we have to debate it out.

Journalist: But this is not just here in Australia. A BBC poll has found now that only one quarter of Britons now believe that climate change is manmade. That is a rapid drop in the number of those onside with action on climate change. I mean there is a change in public support isn't there?

Greg Combet: There may well be but the thing here is do you respect the science or not and the Government respects the science. And if you do respect the science, you have a responsibility as public policy makers, as all Governments around the world do, to do something to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and combat the impact of climate change. That is what this Government is doing. It is really when you consider that this is an

international issue and atmospheres do not respect national boundaries that it requires unprecedented international cooperation.

Of course, Copenhagen fell short of what everyone would have like to have seen as an outcome. There were important steps forward in the form of the Copenhagen Accord. However, there is still a lot of work to do here and the Government is committed to continuing to do that work in the international arena and committed to pushing on to debate these issues through try and get the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme through the Parliament so we can start to do our part. It is going to be fiercely contested because you have got an Opposition leader who thinks climate science is 'absolute crap' but he recognises it has been a political problem for the Coalition so he has put a phoney policy up that will see emissions continue to rise.

Journalist: Well, you also have an Opposition who is asking hard questions of the Government; questions the Government is now having to explain perhaps for the first time ever. Let's have a listen to this question from Liberal MP Bruce Billson.

I refer the minister to the New South Wales Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal report, which found that electricity prices will rise by 60 per cent in New South Wales, with one-third of this massive price hike due to the government's emissions trading scheme. How will this help a small business proprietor such as Jason of Bell's Foxy's Dry Cleaners, who I and the opposition leader visited this morning, who already pays \$15,000 a year in electricity costs for his business? He is facing a \$3,000 or more increase because of the government's great big new tax on everything—a tax, a system, that provides no compensation for small business.

Journalist: How do you answer that question in terms of your Emissions Trading Scheme, no compensation for a small business like Foxy Dry Cleaners?

Greg Combet: Because the entire scheme and all of these issues have been carefully thought through and I think Malcolm Turnbull made some reference to this as well from time to time. All of this has been modelled on the basis that those costs that have been referred to, without accepting the validity of Mr Billson's observations about the quantum, the costs faced by such a business will be passed through in the prices of that dry cleaning business and consumers will meet those costs. In order to assist consumers and households meet those costs, we have designed a multi-billion dollar assistance package for low and middle income households.

Journalist: So business [inaudible] and households pay it and they get compensated by the Government. That is it.

Greg Combet: It has all been modelled by the Treasury in the most comprehensive modelling that they have ever undertaken. And this is the basis on which the household assistance package has been designed. Low and middle income households and pensioners will be compensated, or receive assistance to fully meet the expected increase in costs for example.

Journalist: Alright Minister, just a quick one now. Is the Government ruling out opting for the Green's proposal of some kind of interim carbon price?

Greg Combet: Penny Wong, the Minister for Climate Change, is engaged in discussions with the Greens and we will just have to see how those discussions unfold

Journalist: Yes but the PM ruled it out last night on Q&A though?

Greg Combet: Well we are committed to an emissions trading arrangement with a market mechanism because that is the most efficient way of going about achieving reductions in emissions. The market will assist all the emitters of carbon pollution to find the most cost effective and efficient way of going about it. In contrast, the Liberals have got a scheme that won't work, that will see emissions rise, is unfunded and is high cost. Senator Joyce is now talking about mysterious penalties on business. People don't know anything about it and it is creating a lot of uncertainty in the investor environment already.

Journalist: Greg Combet thank you very much for joining us.

Greg Combet: Thanks a lot Fran.

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