



TRANSCRIPT

Senator the Hon Penny Wong

Minister for Climate Change, Energy Efficiency and Water

PW 140/10

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TRANSCRIPT OF DOORSTOP INTERVIEW - ADELAIDE

SUBJECT: COALITION WATER POLICY, MURRAY DARLING BASIN, LEADERSHIP, POLLS

E & O E – PROOF ONLY

WONG: Thanks very much for coming. It's quite clear that when Tony Abbott came down to South Australia and trumpeted his great new referendum, he simply wasn't telling the gospel truth. He wasn't telling the gospel truth. If you want to know the truth about what Tony Abbott wants to do on water, listen to the bloke he's appointed in charge of water, Barnaby Joyce.

Barnaby Joyce has made clear what his real water policy is, what his real plan is. And it's this: anybody who lives south of the Queensland border should move north. So whether you live in New South Wales or Victoria or South Australia, Barnaby's message is pack your bags and move north.

This simply shows what a risk Barnaby Joyce and Tony Abbott are when it comes to water. Because Barnaby would rather have people move north than do what's required to fix up the River Murray.

Abbott and Joyce on water – a risk that Australia can't afford. Happy to take questions.

JOURNALIST: Do you think there should be a referendum though? And, I guess, a federal takeover of the Murray Darling system?

WONG: We've already had a federal takeover of planning in the system. And if Barnaby had been paying attention, he would know that. But Barnaby is not interested in agreements, Barnaby is interested in no change. He doesn't want to do what is required to fix up the River Murray.

JOURNALIST: Can you give us any estimate yet as to how much water has to be clawed back from irrigation to make the River flow again?

WONG: Obviously that's an issue that the Murray Darling Basin Authority is working on. We know that we will have a draft Plan released this year. We know that we have to return water to the River to return the River Murray to health. That's the hard reality Barnaby Joyce and Tony Abbott don't want to face up to. They would rather tell people to move north than to make the hard decisions about fixing up the River.

We've already purchased some 800 billion litres of water – that's over 320,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools. That's returning water to the River. And we know also that the Murray Darling Basin Authority will release its draft Plan this year which will make clear just how much less water we have to take out of the River for the good of the River.

JOURNALIST: Is the Basin Authority the best group to be dealing with water allocations?

WONG: Well obviously how the Plan is implemented in each valley will be an issue for State governments. But what's important is that the Federal Minister and the independent Authority will have the final say on how much water is taken out of the Basin as a whole. And that is what we've never had. In over a hundred years we've never had a cap based on science – a limit based on science – on how much water we can take out of the River Murray and the other rivers of the Murray Darling Basin. And that's what we'll deliver.

JOURNALIST: You may not like Barnaby Joyce's suggestion but at least it's a suggestion. A lot of people are feeling like there is no certainty from what they can expect from the Government.

WONG: I'm not sure what certainty there is if the alternative government says their solution on water policy is to move north. I'm not sure packing your bags and moving north is delivering certainty.

What we are doing is delivering the first plan that manages the Murray Darling Basin as a whole. We are going to deliver the first limit based on science on how much water can be taken out of the Murray Darling Basin. That is what is needed to return the River Murray to health.

JOURNALIST: On a separate issue, are you confident that Kevin Rudd's leadership is safe?

WONG: Absolutely. And I have to say, I have read a lot of media hype in recent days and it couldn't be further from the truth. We are absolutely focused and united behind Kevin. We are absolutely focused on doing what we have to for the good of the Australian people and to ensure that we continue to steer this economy forward. There have obviously been a lot of issues in recent times but we are very focused on doing the right thing by the nation.

JOURNALIST: If the polls continue to be bad over the next coming weeks at what point should Mr Rudd step aside?

WONG: Mr Rudd will remain being Prime Minister and leader of the Party, and I hope we will win the next election and he'll be Prime Minister next term.

JOURNALIST: Why are so many backbenchers upset with the Prime Minister?

WONG: As I said, I have read a lot of media hype about this and it couldn't be further from the truth. Kevin steered this economy through a very difficult time. If you want to look at what can happen if you don't make the sort of investments that the Government made under him, then you can look to many of our comparable economies overseas who have got double-digit unemployment.

Here in Australia, Kevin steered the economy through a very difficult time. Obviously we have got challenges ahead. But we are very focused on doing what is the right thing for the nation when it comes to the economy, when it comes to infrastructure, when it comes to education and also when it comes to water.

JOURNALIST: Bob Brown has said that Kevin Rudd will meet with him for the first time since April last year. Why has Kevin Rudd been so hard to set up a meeting with?

WONG: I've got to say Bob says a lot of things about meetings. He has accused me of not meeting with him when I actually have. And I have met with him on a number of occasions.

We have a system in government where responsible ministers deal with senators, including Senator Brown, on issues of concern in their portfolio. I've had meetings with Senator Brown as well as Senator Milne on issues that I have responsibility for. And other ministers have had meetings with the Greens and other crossbench senators on issues for which they're responsible.

JOURNALIST: So you're saying he's lying?

WONG: No I'm saying that the Government has been meeting with the crossbenchers in order to get legislation through the Senate. And those meetings are in general conducted by the responsible minister. So you might recall the Treasurer, as well as myself and others who had some involvement in the passage of the \$42 billion stimulus package, met with crossbench senators including Senator Xenophon. That is how we approach things.

JOURNALIST: Is this latest meeting a sign that the Government's worried about so much of the vote going to the Greens' side at the moment?

WONG: I think when it comes to the Greens, I'd make a few points. First this has been a Senate which has passed very little Government legislation. The Greens on many issues have taken the position that they would rather vote with Tony Abbott than with the Government. That's a matter for them. Certainly when it comes to climate change, the Greens chose to vote with Mr Abbott against action on climate change rather than the Government.

JOURNALIST: Are you concerned that Monday's opinion poll which is set to be released could show a further drop in support for the Labor Party?

WONG: I'm more concerned about doing the right thing by the Australian people. And right now I'm more concerned that the man who wants to be water minister under a Tony Abbott leadership, Senator Joyce, is making such irresponsible statements when it comes to the Murray Darling.

JOURNALIST: With the problems with the mining tax at the moment, do you need the Greens' preferences?

WONG: There will be an election at some point as Kevin has made clear, as we're required to. People will make their own mind up about who they would rather have steering this economy, investing in health and investing in education.

Let's remember Tony Abbott's history when it comes to health, let's remember that if we had taken the economic advice of the Liberal Party, the stimulus package wouldn't have been in place and we would have seen more unemployment and less growth. We know that if we had taken the advice of the Liberal Party we would have seen this economy shrink rather than grow.

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