



Amanda Rishworth MP

Member for Kingston

Speech to Federal Parliament

3 June 2009

Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill 2009

(Kingston) (6:02 PM) —I rise today to speak on the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill 2009 and cognate bills. This bill is important for not only the future of our environment but also the future of our economy. The legislation before us today is yet another example of the stark division within this parliament. On the one hand, you have those on this side of the House who are acting in the national interest, looking at the long term and committed to Australian jobs. On the other side of the House, you have an opposition which is deeply divided, with the Leader of the Opposition desperately looking to score cheap political points.

On behalf of the people of Kingston, many of whom live in seaside suburbs and many of whom are acutely concerned about water shortages, I can say that they want action on climate change. The Australian people clearly sent this message for action on climate change at the last election. The previous government, led by John Howard, refused to act. In contrast, the Labor Party set out a clear election policy to act on climate change; to ratify the Kyoto protocol and to design an effective scheme to mitigate Australia's greenhouse gas emissions. This was a policy that was embraced by the Australian people and this course of action was also, we later found out, then privately supported by the current Leader of the Opposition.

Since being elected, the Rudd government has been consulting with groups from all sectors around the country, has developed an emissions trading scheme through a green and white paper process and now presents it to this parliament. It presents today an emissions trading scheme that gets the balance right—a scheme that reduces carbon pollution and supports economic growth. The legislation before the House today not only sets a target range but also sets out clearly how we might achieve this reduction through a cap-and-trade system. Rather than acting in the national interest, the Leader of the Opposition has now quickly changed the position that he held while the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources in the previous government. This, one can only conclude, is to shore up his standing within his own party, where we have seen the Leader of the Opposition present no coherent policy. We know that this is because the National and Liberal parties are deeply divided when it comes to climate change. They are divided between those who are and those who are not climate change sceptics. If we do not act, if we continue with the coalition's policy of 'do nothing', then we are condemning ourselves and our children to average temperature rises of just over five degrees Celsius by

2100. Five degrees is a lot considering that just a one degree rise threatens the Murray-Darling river system and all the Australians who rely on it as a life source.

It has often been said that Australia is one of the countries that has the most to lose from the impact of climate change. The Garnaut review illustrated the severe impact on agricultural production, in particular in the Murray-Darling Basin. Not only is agriculture and food production under threat from climate change but also our water supplies. As I come from South Australia, often considered to be the driest state in the driest country in the world, I believe this threat needs to be taken seriously. Climate change is also predicted to threaten the Great Barrier Reef, the Kakadu wetlands and the Australian rainforest—some of our most important environmental sites but also, we cannot forget, some of the most sought after tourist destinations in the world.

We have heard the coalition say that we should defer—not rush in. First we heard, ‘Wait for America,’ from one member of the coalition. Then we heard, ‘Wait for an international agreement.’ The other proposition was to wait until after a Productivity Commission report. However, the coalition is ignoring that there have already been a number of reviews and inquiries, including a white and green paper process and the Garnaut review. The only conclusion that I can come up with about this delay is that it is a tactic to ensure that there is not a split within the joint party room. By insisting on delaying any scheme or mechanism, the coalition ignores one very important point—that with delay of the legislation comes uncertainty. Business groups have been demanding certainty and by passing this legislation we will provide certainty to business. This has been clearly called for by peak bodies and business groups across Australia. The Business Council of Australia put out a press release on 4 May which said:

In the interests of business certainty, the BCA calls on the Senate to pass legislation this year to establish a Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme.

The Australian Industry Group also put out a press release on the same day, saying:

AI Group supports the passage of the CPRS legislation this year ... This is critical to establish the degree of certainty business requires in assessing medium and longer-term investment decisions.

However, it is not only business groups that oppose the delay of the legislation. Residents in my electorate regularly contact me with their desire to see action on climate change. Many of their sentiments are summed up by David Gill of Morphett Vale, who wrote to me and has also spoken to me at street corner meetings in Willunga. He says: ‘The science has leapt way ahead of the policy. There is actually no other issue that anywhere near matches the importance of the climate change response. Please do what you can to ensure that my grandchildren have a decent future.’ In addition to this, more than 40 per cent of respondents of my electorate-wide survey identified action on climate change as a top priority.

Some residents have contacted me wanting even more action than the government has proposed. They want deeper cuts and they want them sooner. But on this side of the House we believe that we have got the balance right. This government has committed to a Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme in the most responsible way that recognises the impact of the global financial crisis on business

and also recognises that transitioning to a lower carbon economy will position our economy well for the future.

I have spoken about the impact of climate change on the economy and the environment. But climate change will also impact on our nation's health. The Garnaut review projected significant health impacts from climate change here in Australia. Increase in dengue fever is just one example, where the incidence of disease is likely to increase and will lead to the loss of up to an extra 36,000 work days by 2100.

The legislation that is before us today puts in a carbon reduction target range of five per cent to 15 per cent of 2000 levels, with a potential of 25 per cent reduction if an international agreement occurs on a target of 450 parts per million.

We have heard a lot about jobs from the opposition, but what we have not heard from them is the potential increase in green jobs. The CPRS, in conjunction with the government's renewable energy target, will provide the opportunity for cutting-edge green jobs such as in solar energy, wind farms and clean coal. As the Treasury modelling has shown, these measures will see the renewable energy sector grow by thirtyfold and in so doing produce thousands of jobs for the long term. An example of one of these companies in my electorate is the Hydragate Sun Farms project. This is a group of young entrepreneurs who have diversified their business from providing high-tech electric gates to installing solar farms, not only providing another economic opportunity but also increasing renewable energy and reducing our carbon emissions. This company is now looking to employ new staff and expand their company. It is one of those good news stories which we cannot ignore and has the potential to really impact positively on job growth for the future.

In addition, the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme also provides for reforestation credits, which will generate economic opportunities across Australia. It also utilises a cap-and-trade system, which will allow flexibility for firms and individuals. Despite what the coalition might have us believe, Australia will not be the first country to introduce an ETS. Twenty-seven of the EU countries have done so, New Zealand has done so and in the United States President Obama has prepared a budget that includes provisions for a cap-and-trade scheme. Also keep in mind that many American states have already introduced their own emissions trading schemes.

The cap-and-trade scheme works by reducing emissions across the economy. Under the CPRS an economy-wide emission cut will be set by the Australian Climate Change Regulatory Authority, which will auction emission units. Firms must provide units equal to their emissions to the authority each financial year.

While the opposition remains divided on whether or not to believe in climate change this government is acting in the long-term interest of the nation by addressing climate change. The Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is the foundation of a low-carbon economy. It gets us to where we want to go with our targets and I commend the bills to the House.