

National Press Club Address

Senator Bob Brown
Leader of the Australian Greens

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Ladies and Gentlemen

Last week Bob Hawke, Tasmania's former Labor Premier Doug Lowe and, by video from Byron Bay, former Democrats Senator Norm Sanders, joined me and 1000 other guests in Hobart to celebrate saving the wild Franklin River.

Twenty-five years ago the High Court, by a majority of four judges to three, had endorsed the Hawke government's power on behalf of the nation, to override Tasmania's Liberal Premier Robin Gray. Gray had famously described the Franklin as a brown leech-ridden ditch and had been determined to dam the heartland of our island's wild rivers wilderness.

Time has vindicated Hawke and Lowe and the millions of Australians who understood the worth of our natural heritage. Tasmania's isolated West Coast has not seen the economic collapse predicted. It has had healthy investment and job creation, rather than becoming a backwater after the dam-building surge had passed. Nowadays, nearly 200,000 visitors, from all over the world, are drawn to the West Coast's historic, wild and scenic attractions each year.

The Franklin triumph is one facet of the emerging 21st century fact that environmental and economic wellbeing go hand in hand.

The Franklin took Australia to a new understanding of the environment as a collective national issue. Now it is climate change which challenges us Australians to take a lead in a globally collective campaign to save the whole Earth's environment.

At this National Press Club podium last year, Sir Nicholas Stern took this challenge a step further when he called for one per cent of gross global product to be employed in tackling global warming.

He forecast that, if we don't act, our grandchildren will face a six to 20 per cent diversion of their gross global product instead.

It is unconscionable for us not to act, and urgently, for those who will inherit Australia from us. Yet, the influential oil, coal and logging lobbies are pulling back on their reins on Canberra.

Professor Ross Garnaut, at this podium last Wednesday, described global warming as a diabolical policy challenge requiring 'strong, early action' to avoid an 'indelible surrender' which 'deliberately misses low cost options' for mitigation.

Yet the Garnaut assessment is minimalist. For example, Professor Garnaut pointed out that he has not assessed the massive costs of losing the Great Barrier Reef, our global icon which sustains more jobs than the whole of the Australian coal mining industry put together and generates close to \$6 billion in tourism revenue each year. He has not assessed the cost of higher mortality rates from heating cities and towns across Australia, or the costs on the environment such as the extinction of Australian birds, mammals, reptiles, fish and plants. Already, his daunting data of a 10 per cent chance of no flow at all in the Murray–Darling river system in future years is being overtaken by data indicating that drought is the new norm across Australia's greatest food bowl. Meanwhile, visiting the Coorong last weekend, Prime Minister Rudd admitted unnecessary defeat by not committing to urgently bringing water down the river to revive this Ramsar wetland and bird and fish feeding and breeding ground, another Australian environmental icon which is dying before our eyes.

The Swedish scientist Arrhenius first postulated global warming 112 years ago, in 1896. It has been on our own national agenda for at least 40 years. Professor Ralph Slatyer of the Australian National University warned about the impact of atmospheric pollution as far back as the 1960s. The Democrats created a Senate inquiry 20 years ago. Yet the major polluters have kept the body politic caged and ineffective. This must end.

My fear is that, after 11 years of culpable inaction by the Howard government, the Rudd government's action will be too tentative and ineffective.

The tests are clear. First, will the government reduce emissions fast enough and deep enough to match world's best practice and so realistically address dangerous climate change? Australia should have an emissions trading scheme which aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020, and by some 90 per cent by 2050. (By the way, that agreement on a 50 per cent cut in emissions by the G8 overnight will translate to at least an 80 or 90 per cent cut for Australia by 2050 under any globally equitable model).

Second, will the emissions trading scheme be fair to all Australians rather than pandering to the demands of the big polluters? The debate on petrol taxes, led by Brendan Nelson, indicates how a political appeal to popular self-interest can so easily overrun the much greater and more profound interest of Australia in tackling the long-term problem of global warming.

The Prime Minister must resist the big polluters' special interest pleadings or the scheme will become more expensive for everyone else. There will be less money to assist ordinary Australians and less money for renewables research and development.

We Greens want an emissions trading scheme that actually helps stop climate change and avoids that dangerous tipping point of a two degrees warming. That requires a rigorous and comprehensive scheme which not only lowers Australia's 1990 pollution

levels by 40 per cent by 2020, but which also turns down the growing rate of emissions by 2015. If the Rudd government falls short of these targets we will move to amend the legislation when it enters the Senate. That said, emissions trading is not, of itself, the silver bullet. We need an array of other policies such as a Mandated Renewable Energy Target and feed-in laws, which I will come back to in a minute.

While the worst polluters clamour about the costs of addressing climate, the Greens, like the population at large, know the enormous benefits of early action. Besides the new industries and long-term jobs that will be created in the sunrise businesses of the future, climate change remediation generates deep satisfaction in people's hearts. They know that we are re-creating our society and economy in a way that will protect the planet and its wildlife and provide a secure lifestyle for future generations.

Our nation needs massive investment to retrofit all eight million Australian homes with solar hot water and insulation; to provide fast, cheap and efficient public transport and bikeways; and to utilise the huge advantages of energy efficiencies, baseload solar power and geothermal power.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am back here speaking at the National Press Club not just because the Greens lead the political debate on global warming, but because the political focus has inevitably turned to the Senate.

Last year Australian voters changed the government and prime minister and, logically, ended the Coalition's majority in the Senate.

So, when the Senate resumes next month it will have neither Labor nor Coalition nor Greens control. No party has the necessary 39 seats for a majority.

There are 76 seats in the Senate. Half plus one – 39 – is required for legislation to pass.

The Coalition, with 37 seats, will need two extra votes to pass its own measures or will need just one extra vote to have 38 – that's enough to block government bills.

Labor, which has 32 Senate seats, will need an extra seven votes to get its way.

There are five Greens and two independents. That makes seven. Bingo! Mr Rudd.

After the election last October I wrote to our new Prime Minister, not just to say 'Bingo!', but to congratulate him.

Being a restrained fellow, I did not mention that Greens preferences had made sure Labor won 10 seats, including Bennelong, and helped Labor win in another 15.

With the fine exception of the Member for Solomon, Damian Hale, no Labor bouquets have ever come our way in recognition of this fact. Labor's love was lost. Or maybe it never existed.

Mr Rudd replied to my letter, saying, and I quote "We have a great job of work ahead of us, and I am looking forward so much to seizing the great opportunities that Australia has. I will greatly value your continued support as the work now begins."

Well, steady on a minute, mate.

The Greens Senate vote was 1.17 million people.

We are Australia's third political party. The Greens have more than 100 local government representatives, 15 state parliamentarians and now, with five Senators, we qualify as an official party in the national parliament.

With true democracy, that is, proportional representation, Australian voters would have elected ten Greens to the House of Representatives in 2007. Far from being the unrepresentative swill in the Senate, the Greens are the unrepresented will of Australian voters in the House of Representatives.

So we too share the claim of a modest mandate. We Greens look forward to Labor's support for our policy initiatives in the Senate, as we move to make it a house of innovation.

Here are some Greens' priorities, all of which will have high popular appeal among Labor voters and the Australian electorate as a whole.

1. Senator Christine Milne proposed feed-in laws, like those which are such a stunning success in Germany, a cloudy country that generates more solar energy than Australia right now. People who generate renewable power (for example, with solar panels on their shearing shed) would be paid four times the rate paid to coal generators, when they sold that planet-saving power into the grid.
2. An end to the wood-chipping of native forests and the clearance of Australia's wildlife-filled woodlands. This measure alone could cut our nation's greenhouse gas emissions by more than ten per cent, according to Australian Greenhouse Office data. As Sir Nicholas Stern pointed out at this National Press Club last year, ending deforestation is the most immediate and effective way to help save the Earth from catastrophic warming. Allowing our natural forests to grow to full maturity may soon be more profitable than logging. This will occur when full carbon accounting methods, like those we are promoting in Papua New Guinea and Indonesia, are adopted here. It is inevitable. So, the prospect of Gunns' pulp mill in Tasmania's Tamar Valley, belching out vast volumes of greenhouse gases, is beyond comprehension and a very serious early test of the Rudd government's environmental credentials.
3. Senator Rachel Siewert's amendment to restore the Racial Discrimination Act and remove the exemption the Howard Government gave itself when it intervened in the Northern Territory Aboriginal communities. Those communities deserve enormous assistance, but not ever in a racist way. Restoring the Racial Discrimination Act is core Labor policy.

4. The Greens challenge Labor to eliminate discrimination on the basis of sexuality from all statutes, including the Australian Marriage Act. The most recent Galaxy poll showed Australians, by 57% per cent to 37% per cent, back marriage laws – like those in California, Spain and South Africa – for all couples regardless of their sexuality.
5. We Greens have had a long campaign for a decent rise in pensions. In the Senate, we voted against Treasurer Swan’s inflationary tax cuts for the very rich. That \$3.6 billion should have gone to Australia’s pensioners, lifting them out of poverty, with a \$30 to \$100 weekly increase in income.
6. Fair maternity and paternity leave. After the 11 Howard years, Australia is one of the rich world’s worst performers in ensuring parents have good amounts of time with their babies. It is time no one can ever recover. Sweden ensures that mothers and fathers get 16 months leave. So should Australia.
7. The Greens challenge Labor to uphold its election promise to not dump radioactive waste on Aboriginal communities and the people of the Northern Territory, by repealing the Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Act 2005. Labor voted against this legislation saying quite rightly that it was “extreme, arrogant, heavy-handed, draconian, sorry, sordid, extraordinary and profoundly shameful”. The Greens will help Labor to repeal it.
8. Holland puts 0.8% of its GDP into overseas aid, which is, by the way, a potent way of countering terrorism. So, how come Australia, under new Labor, dropped its sights to just 0.5% of GDP, and that not until 2015 – at least three governments away? The world needs more aid to alleviate poverty and gross injustice. In this age where \$1 trillion is spent on armaments each year, the Rudd government’s aid projections warrant a decent lift.
9. Every Australian should have the right to die with dignity. How dignity is ensured can only be determined by the individual – not by that troubled obsessive minority which advocates leaving people to suffer. My Bill, now before the Senate, will return the right of the elected territorial assemblies in Darwin and Canberra to legislate for death with dignity. I hope the Prime Minister will let this Bill be debated, in government business time, and allow a free vote determined by conscience – just as John Howard did for the Andrews’ Bill overriding territory rights in 1997.
10. Australia should regain the lead for an internationally consistent policy to have everyone’s political, religious and other human rights guaranteed. This includes for Tibetans, West Papuans, Zimbabweans, Burmese and Iraqis. The movement for democracy in China deserves a much more gritty advocacy by the Australian Government. Democracy cannot be left to the market place.
11. The Greens will campaign for excellence in food labelling. The current laws allow confusing and too often misleading labelling. Food sold in Australia should be clearly labelled for its country of origin, its genetically modified status, its nanoparticle content and its allergen content, for example. Australia’s farmers, not

least our organic growers, will reap benefits from good product labelling. I intend to see that producers and consumers get these benefits.

So, the Greens will work to improve government performance with a special eye on public benefit to guide our work.

We will use our share of the Senate balance of power responsibly.

And it *is* a balance we share.

I have known Nick Xenophon since early in this decade when, after the Tampa episode, he kindly came to Hobart to support my re-election campaign in 2002. I look forward to working with him in Canberra.

I will also work closely with Steven Fielding to improve the Senate outcomes, and I am sure he will be mindful that he was elected on Labor preferences in his relationship with the Rudd government in the years ahead.

However, it's not the Greens' responsibility to negotiate for Labor with the two independents. Nor will we.

I am also looking forward to working with the Coalition. I have had very good talks with Brendan Nelson. Our door will always be open to discuss any issues with the opposition.

These are exciting times and my Greens team has depth of experience as well as a charge of youth. Both Christine Milne and I have managed the balance of power in Tasmania to gain quite historic and longlasting gains – she with the Liberals and I with Labor.

Rachel Siewert has been a true success in her Senate role for Western Australia and is one of the most hard working and resourceful members of the Senate committees. One matter that is close to her heart is her proposal that the cap on the fringe benefit tax for people working in charities be raised from \$30,000 to \$40,000 to keep pace with indexation and to help thousands of low income workers who do so much, for so little, for their fellow Australians, get a fairer income.

Now we are joined by Rachel's fellow West Australian, Senator Scott Ludlam, and our youngest senator – she is a very formidable 26 – Sarah Hanson-Young from South Australia.

We are a very good team and are eager to sit together on those Senate cross-benches in August. Many of you will know Ben Oquist and I'm very happy to tell you that he has accepted the post as our Chief of Staff. Our Director of Media and Strategy, heading up our new media unit will be Russell Kelly from Lismore, who began his working life with the Hobart Mercury.

Our party is growing and this year will exceed 10,000 members.

The Green Institute, our small Greens think tank, equivalent to Labor's Chifley Research Centre, the Liberal's Menzies Research Centre and the National's Page Research Centre, will also consolidate in the coming three years.

And at the second Global Greens conference in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in May this year, our motion to set up a Global Greens Information Centre in Australia was carried with great support.

Labor and the Coalition, products of the 20th century, have more in common with each other than either has with the Greens, who are the innovative thinkers for this 21st century.

In May this year, a Morgan poll found that most Australians rate the environment as the biggest issue confronting Australia and the world – bigger than economic issues, education or terrorism. No doubt, people's concerns have been heightened by 11 years of ecological neglect from the Howard government.

Yet the Rudd government backs expanded coal exports, uranium sales to China and Russia, Gunns' pulp mill, and the unnecessary, energy guzzling desalination plant on Victoria's Bass coast. Seventy-five per cent plus of Wayne Swan's transport budget is going to roads compared to 24% for rail and public transport.

So Labor is going to keep us busy, and we are keen. We will keep Labor on its toes. And that will be good for Australia.

The Greens always do best when Labor is in office. People wanting better social or environmental outcomes turn to us.

I have no misconceptions about the huge problems facing global society. But I am hugely optimistic about Australia's potential to be a world leader in 21st century problem solving – given not just good but great leadership. That's the challenge for the Rudd government and I want to help Kevin Rudd achieve it.

Australians will back leaders who, explaining themselves well, appeal to the decency we all harbour to change direction and to ensure that our children, and theirs, inherit a safer, saner, happier world.

Climate change is a singular challenge. Every year the scientific assessment of the impact on the planet gets worse.

The Arctic ice sheet is suddenly shot. Nearly all glaciers are melting. Sea levels may rise metres in the lifetimes of today's infants. Hundreds of millions of people may starve or be on the move due to climate change by mid century.

Our Australian of the Year, scientist Tim Flannery, is even talking about turning our skies puce with sulphur in a desperate bid to stave off cataclysmic climate change by bouncing sunbeams back into space. Not so long ago he would have been burnt at the stake for such an idea. Now it is the world at stake and a whole new ideology is needed to save it.

As Labor was the right party to emerge at the start of the past century, the Greens are the right party now.

In a world where indifference to the challenges confronting humanity edges towards political culpability, I am honoured and deeply privileged to lead this new and, for these unprecedented times, most responsible of parties in our Australian Parliament.

I have enduring political experience and I will, with my Green team, ensure that this experience is used for the maximum benefit of all Australians in the coming years.