

Extract of transcript from media conference with Ministers Bark Butler and Ged Kearney on 10 May 2024

JOURNALIST: Minister, do you agree with the Resource Minister's position on gas?

BUTLER: The Resource Minister is responsible for releasing a paper that is the Government's position on gas. It's important to say the key policy lodestar for our Government in energy, and manufacturing, and transport is our commitment to net zero emissions by 2050, and also our commitment to having strong five-yearly emissions reduction targets in accordance with our obligations under UN treaties, but in accordance with long standing Labor policy. In contrast, we saw a wasted decade of 22 energy policies, which all failed to stick and lead to a massive dearth of the sort of investment we need to renew our energy infrastructure. I know there's been a bit of attention to this paper over the course of the last 24 hours, but I do remind people that the key element of our energy, our transport, our manufacturing policy, when it comes to emissions is our net zero emissions commitment and the gas paper along with everything else must be seen in that context.

JOURNALIST: Climate groups are arguing the strategy can create more emissions rather than less, do you disagree?

BUTLER: For the first time, because of decisions taken by our Government, gas projects, gas-fired generators - there are a number of my electorate, the neighbouring electorate, Hindmarsh - those big producers of gas are covered for the first time by the safeguards mechanism, which requires them as a matter of law to be reducing their emissions along with every other large emitter in the Australian economy. We are deadly serious about our commitment to net zero emissions by 2050. We are deadly serious about the five-yearly reductions that we've committed to. We're deadly serious about our target of 82 per cent renewable energy in the Australian energy system by 2030. We've doubled the number of renewable energy projects being approved since we came to Government. All of this signals the very clear direction that Australia under our Government is taking, and that is to invest in clean energy, which overwhelmingly will be renewable energy. By contrast, all that Peter Dutton has is some sort of plan to build a whole host of nuclear power stations up and down the Australian coastline that will deliver the most expensive form of electricity known to humanity.

JOURNALIST: Minister, there's been some criticism from within the Labor caucus about this policy, and some have said that they've been blindsided by it. Has there been a failure in process carrying the backbench with you and developing the strategy?

BUTLER: A whole number of members of our party are deeply passionate about this area. Their communities are passionate about this area and have been so deeply frustrated by a lack of action on climate and energy policy for 10 long years. Many of our caucus members, many members of the community expressed that frustration constantly as this debate and this policy development process continues to unfold and frankly play catch up on 10 years of inaction. I don't think that's a problem at all. I think that's a reflection of a healthy caucus that is deeply passionate about the transition in Australia that is underway to a clean energy economy.

JOURNALIST: Ged, you've been critical of the Government's future gas strategy, and you've said that the strategy sees a role for gas beyond 2050, and you said that we shouldn't rely on it, any more longer than necessary. When do you think we need to stop extracting and producing gas?

KEARNEY: What my message clearly was, that as Mark said, we've had 10 years, over a decade of inaction on climate change. We've had a policy disaster. We finally have a Government that is spearheading the production of renewable energy because we know we need to get to net zero by 2050. We know that we on our road, on the right path to having 82 per cent renewables by 2030. My constituency and many of the others around me, and other members, Louise, your constituency, I'm sure is very passionate about that progress. The very strong message that my constituency wants me to be talking about, is the fact that this is a Government that is 100 per cent committed to making Australia a renewable energy superpower. That means a reduction in reliance on fossil fuels, and that means, I say that the future, which this Government is committed to, the future is renewables and over time, we will become less reliant on fossil fuels.

JOURNALIST: From what you're hearing from your constituents, when do you think that we should stop relying on gas?

KEARNEY: I'm no expert in that transition. I've worked with wonderful people in the party like Mark, who was previously the Shadow Minister for Climate Change. I will leave that up to the experts. But the very clear message is, and I know that we can't turn gas off tomorrow, so much of our industry relies on it, but the fact is that the future is renewables. We are committed to that and a less reliance on fossil fuels over time is essential. We had Minister Bowen in Victoria just this morning, for example, announcing a fantastic investment starting the tender process for the capacity investment scheme, which will see in Victoria alone, around 700,000 houses being powered by renewable energy. That is the sort of commitment that my constituency wants to see from the Government and that is the commitment that we are delivering.

JOURNALIST: Do you support what the strategy has laid out? Do you support the planning and the development of the strategy?

KEARNEY: I support us moving as fast as we possibly can to a renewable future, and I support the Albanese Labor Government's trajectory towards that.

JOURNALIST: Were you aware that this policy was coming? Or were you blindsided as others say they were?

KEARNEY: There has been discussion about this policy over some time. The Minister has engaged the caucus. In hindsight, there might have been a little more discussion about when the paper was going to be announced. I'm sure there will be some reflection on that in the caucus. But as Minister Butler says, we are a robust caucus, we have these discussions, and that is one of the wonderful things about the Labor Party is that we feel we can have these discussions. But overall, my message to my constituency is that the Labor Party is 100 per cent committed to renewables future.

JOURNALIST: Is your position on this policy, somewhat influenced by the strength of the Greens vote in your electorate?

KEARNEY: My position on the need for us to be a renewable superpower is driven by my personal belief, and certainly that of my constituency who let me know loud and clear that that is the direction they want this country to go, thank you.