

# Transcript from the Environment Forum

17 March 2015

Parliament House Theatre

Hosted by the Environmental Liaison Office<sup>1</sup>

## Quentin Dempster

Thanks Kate and welcome everybody. I acknowledge we meet on Aboriginal land, always was, always will be. The environment, at last, 11 days out from the State election from polling day is getting a go and we're delighted that our panellists have come forward. This is not a debate, I emphasise. This is a Q&A. We've got a politically, scientifically and environmentally aware audience here so I'm asking all the panellists not to engage, to minimise their rhetorical flourishes for constituency reasons, and all the prejudices, we know, which exist. What we're trying to do, and this is being audio and video taped, to get our panellists on the public record before the State election, both for policy clarity and also for accountability. After elections we find that with video recording nowadays that it's a very valuable aid for boosting trust in government and it's hopefully lifting the standards of what we hope will be a restoration of trust in government after the appalling period we've been through in the history of New South Wales.

We've got a lot to cover. Don White is our disciplined time keeper. He's going to keep us to the couple of minutes we want to get to each subject we're covering. And as Kate has said, these questions have been compiled from all the participant groups here, honed down so that we can get to the crunch, the point of difference between the major parties. We're covering biodiversity and land clearing, coal seam gas, marine conservation, logging in native forests, environmental regulation, performance of the EPA, impacts of coal mining and planning approval process, climate, national parks and wilderness, urban bushland, and if we've got time, dam proposals. We want to get out of here by soon after 7 o'clock.

## BIODIVERSITY AND LAND CLEARING

*So let's start on biodiversity and land clearing, and we'll be alternating between the speakers. We won't have the same one coming up each time, so there will be fairness in the proceedings. Over the past 200 years New South Wales has experienced a marked decline in biodiversity with more than 100 plant and animal species having become extinct. The government has recently received a report from an independent panel that recommends significant changes to our biodiversity laws, including repealing the Native Vegetation Act, removing the requirement to maintain and improve biodiversity and increasing reliance from biodiversity offsetting.*

*Question: The Coalition government is about to embark on a massive rewrite of the State's biodiversity and land clearing laws. What must be done to guarantee that biodiversity, threatened and endangered ecological communities and threatened species are maintained, or preferably, improved under the new laws? And will you commit to rewriting the biodiversity offsetting policy in New South Wales so there is genuine*

*like-for-like offsetting standards, red lights that identify no-go zones and less reliance on supplementary measures like monetary payment or mine rehabilitation in lieu of genuine physical offsets.*

### **Rob Stokes**

There's a lot to answer in two minutes but thank you Quentin. In the first place, there was the biodiversity review that indicated 43 specific recommendations. The recommendation in the *Native Vegetation Act* was just one. In fact, what they did recommend was that the State's biodiversity laws be properly integrated into what they call a biodiversity conservation act. What's clear in the government response is that there cannot be a countenance of a return to any broad scale land clearing. That's not something that we can go back to. What instead we need to focus on, I believe, is landscape level conservation benefits. We need to focus, and this was certainly something that the panel identified, is that there needs to be a significant increase in the amount of funding going into biodiversity programs. It's not enough just to have prohibitions, instead there has to be a proper funding of biodiversity restoration.

In relation to the other points, sorry which were? Oh, biodiversity offsetting. Well we will look for constant improvement in biodiversity offsets policy. We will note that the Coalition has provided the first integrated biodiversity offsets policy in New South Wales. If you remember back to the Catherine Hill Bay case I think Justice Lloyd described the approach of a former Labor government as "land bribes" in terms of the ad hoc relation of offsets that were applied then.

In relation to like-for-like, the reason the existing policy focuses on equivalent by providing that in some areas, for example, Eurobodalla Shire, the majority of that Shire is already under some form of protected land tenure. It may be sensible in certain projects, rather than applying a like-for-like, you may get an even better environment benefit if you can find areas that are under-represented and look to apply offsets to those areas rather than using them to simply acquire areas that are already sufficiently represented.

### **Luke Foley**

Quentin, thank you. I'm glad it's not a debate, after three debates with Mike Baird I'm spent. Glad to be here for a civilised forum. Three points. Firstly, no backward steps on the laws that protect our biodiversity. We'll defend our own *Native Vegetation Act*, our own *Threatened Species Conservation Act*, Australia's Kyoto targets were met by the New South Wales *Native Vegetation Act* and the similar Act with the Beattie government in Queensland put into place. So we're proud of those laws, no backwards steps.

Secondly, when you're talking about biodiversity I think it's important to look at native forest biomass. We will return to the ban on burning native forest biomass for electricity. We'll prohibit it again.

Thirdly, on biodiversity offsets, a Labor government will review and replace the current biodiversity offsetting rules that we believe allow unjustifiable loss of habitat and wildlife. Our biodiversity offset policy will be built on the foundations of like-for-like

offsetting. No net loss of biodiversity outcomes and recognition that there's some high conservation value lands that should be off limits to offsetting. We'll work in accordance with the principles identified by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and the International Council on Mining and Minerals.

### **Dr Mehreen Faruqi**

Thank you Quentin. We've heard reports from WWF just recently, one late last year and one early this year which actually highlight the importance of the *Native Vegetation Act* and our biodiversity conservation legislation in protecting biodiversity. We know that globally, nationally and interstate, there are massive declines in biodiversity that can't renew even with these *Acts*. So it is deeply concerning what the recommendations of the review are, especially given that 80 percent of the 395 submissions that came to the review recommended very strongly that this legislation be kept and strengthened and the Greens will oppose any moves to water these down. We had a very strong case and opposition to the changes of the *Native Vegetation* regulations which happened a couple of years ago and introduced a disallowance motion. It is absolutely critical that no irreversible damage to any biodiversity takes place in New South Wales, or in Australia in fact.

In terms of offsetting, of course if the government is adamant on having an offsetting policy it should be the strongest policy possible. But the effectiveness of offsetting biodiversity loss as a policy for ecological restoration is really not supported by evidence because it's really difficult to measure. There's huge uncertainties about recreating like-for-like biodiversity and the loss takes place over a long time now so it's really important, again, that we use the precautionary principle here and don't actually cut down and chop down high conservation areas. So the Greens believe that market based processes and trading mechanisms such as biodiversity banking and offsets, the trade of high conservation land for development lead to a net loss in biodiversity. It must not be used.

## **COAL SEAM GAS**

### **Quentin Dempster**

*Coal seam gas has emerged as a very hyped State election issue, alongside privatisation. Also all political parties have acknowledged that coal seam gas is inherently risky and a threat to the environment. In the past two weeks the Coalition has cancelled more exploration licenses over Sydney, the Central Coast and the north-west. The ALP has declared CSG free areas in the northern rivers, in Central Coast and the Greens have maintained their stance to ban CSG completely. News by the major parties are welcomed by environmentalists but do they do not go far enough, they say, to protect our land, water and communities.*

*Question: What else will you do in the first year of the new parliament to address community concerns about coal seam gas? What measures will you put in place to enhance protection for our water catchments, communities, farm lands and special natural places?*

**Luke Foley**

Thanks Quentin. First and foremost we'll put in place a state-wide moratorium on coal seam gas activity. That moratorium will remain in place until all 16 of the chief scientists' recommendations are implemented in full. We're not prepared to allow the industry to operate, to proceed until and unless all of Professor O'Kane's 16 recommendations are delivered in full. Above and beyond that we commit to a number of no-go zones that will be permanently off limits to coal seam gas activity. They include core drinking water catchments. We've identified the special areas of the Sydney Catchment Authority and we'll work with local government authorities to ban coal seam and unconventional gas activity in the core drinking water catchments around the state. The two kilometre residential setback that this government has implemented, we commit to that and today I announced further to that a two kilometre buffer around our national parks and our Ramsar listed wetlands. That is there will be buffers put in place where within two kilometres of national parks and Ramsar listed wetlands, that will become permanently off limits to coal seam gas and unconventional gas activity.

**Dr Mehreen Faruqi**

So for the Greens it's pretty clear that there are major risks with coal seam gas exploration and mining, revolving around contamination of ground water, of surface water, human health for the chemicals that are used in fracking . And also major risks to our fantastic, productive agricultural land. So for us we've been listening, going out there, travelling New South Wales, listening to what the rural communities have been saying and there is no teetering around the edges for the Greens, there is only one way to stop this industry and that is to ban coal seam gas exploration and mining across New South Wales.

The Greens are unequivocally opposed to this and we will be introducing legislation in the next term of parliament for a permanent ban on all coal seam gas mining across New South Wales and I call on the other parties as well to join this and protect our land, our water and the future of our generations.

**Rob Stokes**

So we will continue with our work in the voluntary buy-back of the exploration licenses that had been given by the previous Labor administration. We inherited a situation about 60 percent of the state was covered by coal seam gas exploration licences due to the actions, so far we've reduced that down to about 11.5 percent of the state. So more than 75 percent of those explorations have now been bought back. Like Luke, we will commit to fully implementing the recommendations of the O'Kane Review and that effectively in so doing we endorse a precautionary approach to this industry that until the serious questions about things like seismic impacts, about biodiversity loss, about fugitive emissions, and I note that there's a study currently underway into the fugitive methane emissions from coal seam gas activity and also the serious questions about impacts on groundwater. Until all those issues are resolved we won't be proceeding further with exploration licenses.

## **MARINE CONSERVATION**

### **Quentin Dempster**

*More than 80 percent of New South Wales residents live near the coast. Our coastal lifestyle, which is core to our identity, depends on a healthy environment. Marine sanctuaries which provide a similar level of protection as terrestrial national parks are overwhelmingly popular. More than 80 percent of people in New South Wales support sanctuaries protected from fishing and mining and other damaging activities.*

*Question: Given this very high level of support what would your party do to close the gap between public will and government policy and will you restore protection to the 10 sanctuaries currently unprotected?*

### **Dr Mehreen Faruqi**

Thanks Quentin. We all know that our oceans and other marine biodiversity are already under massive threat from climate change, from plastics and from other waste that flows in through our storm water systems. What we need to do is to have the strongest protection. Our community understands that; science is pretty clear on this. Scientists have been telling us that we need to have some areas of our oceans protected if we want to have a healthy marine biodiversity, which of course we want for our environment, for our economy and for our communities to enjoy the beautiful oceans and beaches that New South Wales has. And we already have 93 percent of the ocean available for fishing, so it was pretty concerning and I think pretty damaging for the government to have the amnesty about two years ago without any scientific basis and then to remove parts of it but not all of it. The Greens are committed to restoring full protection to our sanctuary zones, as the signs tell us, as the community tells us and as many fishers tell us as well. I have so many friends up in the mid-north coast who fish and they completely understand the importance of fully protected sanctuary zones to be able to have healthy fish within the ocean.

But the Greens actually want more than this. For us, we have a clear policy that commits us to protecting ecologically significant areas of marine environment in a system of comprehensive, adequate and representative marine parks and we want 30 percent of each representative marine eco-system and bio region to be fully protected in all sanctuary zones. I think we have to move that way because we know that climate change is upon us and unless we take that approach we are really in for massive irreversible damage.

### **Rob Stokes**

So hopefully you have noticed that since the Baird government, certainly since Mike Baird became premier there has been a lot of activity in this area and that's activity we intend to continue. In relation to the remaining 10 sites we've committed to a rezoning process and with that I would encourage everyone in this room who is passionate about marine protected areas to participate in that rezoning process and make your voice heard because obviously government will react to the submissions that come to it in relation to the rezoning of those 10 remaining sites.

We've also indicated that we accept the advice of the independent auditor of marine parks that we need to look at additional protections in the Hawkesbury bio-region or Hawkesbury Shelf bio-region. That's why we have indicated that we are looking over a period of one year at areas of additional protection within the Hawkesbury Shelf bio-region. That's not just as in with Labor's policy within Sydney's Harbor and beaches but it actually extends right across the central coast, Hunter and the Illawarra. We've identified 11 priority sites. The NCC has already identified others that are being looked at by the marine expert knowledge panel and that will form a basis of evidence upon which we can make future announcements about increasing marine protected areas in the Hawkesbury Shelf bio-region.

Also in relation, Mehreen mentioned plastics and the impact of plastics on marine environment. That's why we've already indicated that we will move to a ban on micro beads in personal care products by mid-2016. That is why for example we've acted to ban smoking in the State's national parks, which includes 45 percent of the coast because we recognise the impact of cigarette butt litter in the marine environment. And that's why we're also committed to the introduction of a container deposit scheme, because we recognise the impact of plastics on the marine environment.

### **Luke Foley**

Well Labor will deliver the final piece in the jigsaw when it comes to marine protected areas in this State. We will create a Sydney marine park from Pittwater to Port Hacking. Labor in office delivered six marine parks; the Hawkesbury Shelf bio-region as Rob said is the one bio-region without a marine protected area. We commit unequivocally to a Sydney marine park. In order to create it we'll have to lift the current government's moratorium on the creation of any new marine parks. We will also restore sanctuary zones to full protection. A sanctuary zone that doesn't deliver full protection is not a sanctuary zone. So we will deliver the true meaning of a sanctuary zone.

In building the terrestrial national park estate, we'll prioritise protection of breeding areas such as the islands and headlands and beaches where sea birds nest and raise their young. We'll re-establish a New South Wales Coastal Council, we'll establish a Healthy Rivers Commission with a focus on restoring our rivers to health. And we'll reinstate the protections for the grey nurse shark and ask the scientific committee to examine a potential listing for the Hawksbill sea turtle.

## **LOGGING IN NATIVE FORESTS**

### **Quentin Dempster**

*New South Wales taxpayers subsidise the native forest logging industry to the tune of millions of dollars every year. The pressure to fulfil unrealistic supply contract is driving unsustainable rates of logging that are degrading native forests and driving some species, including koalas, to extinction in some areas.*

*Question: Given the environmental and economic costs of native forest logging, why should the NSW Government continue to prop up this industry? If you believe this industry has a long-term future, what measures would you implement to make it ecologically and economically sustainable? If you think native forest logging should be phased out, what strategy do you have to manage the transition and support jobs growth in the regional areas that would be affected?*

**Rob Stokes**

The first thing I'd like to say is I recognise the need over the longer term certainly to transition to more plantation timbers. It's very clear that this is the future in terms of the timber harvesting industry. We certainly need to work with the federal government to identify more tax incentives for investors to invest in hardwood plantations. One of the challenges we had is that the existing tax incentives have only supported the development softwood plantations, which has created the pressure, if you like, to go after particular species in native forests, in particular blackbutt. So that is certainly something I note and agree with.

As part of the remake of the integrated forestry operations approval we are committed to no loss of environmental standards but we are also committed to meet the contracts that have been previously entered into. However, where that cannot be done, we've already demonstrated that where that can't be done we will move to buy out the existing contracts, as we did with Boral on the north coast.

In relation to, there's been some talk about this supposed cable logging trial. Can I just say in relation to that, there is a proposal that has been put forward, nothing has come to me as yet. What I will say is in relation to any purported trial in relation to cable logging, straight away I'd like to rule out that it would occur in any areas that hadn't previously been subject to logging. And I will also say in keeping with my responsibility and my commitment to ensure no loss of environmental standards, it would be difficult to conceive of a proposal in logging slopes of greater than 30 degrees where that would be able to be done in a way that didn't involve a loss of environmental values. Obviously I can't prejudge a proposal before I see it but hopefully I've given you some indication of the attitude I'll take towards a proposal if it does in fact come.

**Luke Foley**

Thank you Quentin. Well a Labor government, first and foremost, will continue with what we did when we were last in government to massively increase the size of the national park reserve estate. In northern New South Wales we commit to a Great Koala National Park of 316,000 hectares. That will take a great many public forests out of timber production into conservation reserves. It will be a massive leap forward for those forests that are the remaining core koala habitat in the north of the State. The policy is aimed at saving the koala from extinction in northern New South Wales.

Very quickly, we will increase penalties for forestry breaches tenfold. That's a private member's bill I introduced to the parliament three years ago. We will ban cable logging,

steep slope logging, whatever you call it. We'll reintroduce the ban and we commit to no wind back of the rules and regulations in the integrated forestry operations approvals. We will reinstate, as I said earlier, the prohibition of burning native forest material for electricity generation. And we will not permit the Commonwealth to rollover the regional forest agreements. What we want, first and foremost, is for an exercise to be done where all of the assumptions in the original RFAs are revisited against the experience of their operation, both in terms of resource management and biodiversity outcomes.

[interjection]

**Quentin Dempster**

I don't want to encourage these interjections but Mr Foley, a quick response?

**Luke Foley**

No, I just think it's quite rude. There's 200 people here to listen that you think the floor's yours.

**Quentin Dempster**

Mehreen Faruqi.

**Dr Mehreen Faruqi**

Thanks Quentin. So what we have to do here is address root causes, not try and put band-aids on symptoms. We all know that native forest logging is a lose/lose situation. It's a lose situation for our precious forests, for our biodiversity and it loses millions of taxpayer dollars every year propping up a failing and a loss making woodchip industry. We know that there are other solutions. We know that plantations can be a sustainable way for logging because we know we do need that wood and they don't destroy essential habitats for our native animals and our wildlife. So the Greens would end all logging and mining in state forests, state native forests by 2016, covering 2 million hectares. And all high conservation state native forests will be converted into national parks and managed by the Department of the Environment, not the Department of Primary Industries.

We have an \$80 million transition package to assist timber workers and communities to exit the industry over that four years because it's really important that we do that transition. And also another \$40 million tourism package for forestry related tourism because what we can do now is open up our state native forests for bushwalkers, for campers and for sensitive eco-tourism. And also just really quickly in terms of logging in other state conservation areas, the Greens are strongly opposed to logging of the white cyprus pine forest in the Brigalow and the Nandewar, as well as the river red gum parks as well. So I think it's really important and we oppose that because that's not for ecological purposes, it is for propping up the industry as well.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION AND PERFORMANCE OF EPA**

### **Quentin Dempster**

*Communities in New South Wales are becoming increasingly concerned with the failure of the Environment Protection Authority effectively to regulate environmentally damaging industries such as mining and forestry. While many were pleased to see the EPA lead the way in areas such as waste management, effective regulation has been lacking in other areas. The recent Upper House enquiry into the performance of the EPA found the Authority had failed to communicate effectively with stakeholders in relation to the regulation of forestry operations at Royal Camp State Forest and mining and gas operations in the Hunter and Pilliga regions. While the Committee made a number of recommendations on EPA governance, it did not provide a broad framework for regulatory reform.*

*Question: If elected, would your party implement all of the recommendations of the Upper House enquiry? What additional changes would you make to ensure that environmentally damaging industries such as the mining and forestry are effectively monitored and environmental breaches are adequately prosecuted and remedied? Would you support increased fines for threatened species regions under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 and restoration of third party rights to enforce environmental protection measures under the Forestry Act 2012.*

### **Luke Foley**

Thanks Quentin. Well I established the Upper House enquiry into the EPA after working with numerous community organisations and environmental groups on the ground over the last few years. I think the enquiry performed a very valuable exercise in shining a light on the work of the EPA. The central overarching recommendation for better governance of the EPA, removing the current situation where one person is both the chairperson and the CEO. In other words, not accountable to a governance board offends every principle of corporate governance in this country. We absolutely commit to separating the offices, roles of chair and CEO of the EPA. That will deliver proper corporate governance. The CEO should have a proper performance management agreement. The board, with the CEO, we think that's vitally important. There's a number of other things I've already talked about tonight; increasing tenfold the penalties for illegal forestry activities, we commit to.

The Royal Camp State Forest, I've seen enough, I've been there on several occasions, it's a very important public forest near Casino in the north of the State that provides critical habitat for koalas, yellow bellied gliders and other threatened species. We will bring that into the National Park Reserve Estate, the Royal Camp State Forest. So there are a range of actions that we take in response to the recommendations of the Upper House enquiry that we established. I worked with Mehreen on it and members from all parties. I think it's been a valuable exercise and can and will improve the operations of the EPA.

One last point, I almost forgot, coal dust pollution. We'll give reference to the chief scientist. If she says cover the wagons in the interest of human health we'll do it.

### **Dr Mehreen Faruqi**

Yes, I had the pleasure of sitting on the enquiry as well and it was, like Luke said, a very valuable enquiry and it did make some good recommendations. And of course we'll be supporting all those recommendations. But again, I think it was essentially tinkering around the edges. Of a few specific cases; the Greens introduced a range of recommendations and amendments, 58 in all. And quite a few of them were agreed to but many of them weren't and some of them go to the heart of some of the issues that we had, in terms of strengthening the independence, the scientific integrity and improving regulation and enforcement and compliance through the EPA.

So just giving you an example of some of the ones we really pushed for and I think that need to be implemented in the next term of whoever gets into government. Is setting up peer review process as a standard process for EPA to look into the reports that the EPA produces. Also establishing a scientific division within the EPA, rather than relying on the Environment Department to be able to get those specific scientific expertise. Also, amending the *POEO Act* and this is really important to operationalise ecologically sustainable development principles because that has been what's been lacking. Yes, we have the principles but it's really hard to see how they're operationalised. As well as having a program where the EPA can actually implement a regular program to sample the data that is provided by the Environmental Protection license holder. We know that the Protection licence holder is the companies provide that data and there's no way of independently actually checking that monitoring data, and that has been a clear issue.

The Greens also propose an independence and integrity charter for the EPA, which the US EPA has, which is a really clear means of ensuring that the EPA does maintain its independence, because the community in submission after submission raised the issue that there was a perception that the EPA wasn't as independent. And yes, it might be a perception but it's quite easy to have that perception deleted if you have a charter for the EPA. So there's much more to be done.

### **Rob Stokes**

I think the point I'd like to start by making is that this enquiry would not have been possible under the former Labor government because no one quite knew where the EPA was. It had been so dismembered and scattered and so supined to other authorities that there was no sense of an integrated Environment Protection Agency within government at all.

I think it's important to recognise where the EPA came from, from when the Liberal government first got into office to where it is today. In the last two years alone we've seen a 20 percent increase in the recurrent budget for the EPA. We've seen an increase in staffing. We've seen an increase in enforcement options available for the EPA. We've seen a tenfold increase in the quantity that can be issued under a PIN, a penalty infringement notice, to being the highest in the nation. I noticed Luke's comment in relation to increasing forestry penalties. We're already committed to review forestry penalties as part of the integrated forestry operations approval and I think there is

capacity to increase penalties by far more than ten times. Ten times would only bring them up to \$3,000. With other penalty infringement notices we're at \$15,000. So I think there is extra capacity to look at increased penalties there.

I will say that in relation to a number of the recommendations we're already implementing a number of the recommendations. Luke mentioned the coal dust issue in Newcastle. We have already engaged independent consultants to provide advice in relation to the covering by the nearer coal wagons and we're committed to doing whatever that advice comes back and tells us. But what I will say is we want a world's best Environment Protection Authority. We are well on the way to achieving that aim. Obviously there are many opportunities for reform but I think it's incumbent on me to point out where it was and where it is now and sure, we'll look at this as an opportunity for positive criticism for more positive reform.

## **COAL MINING AND PLANNING APPROVAL PROCESSES**

### **Quentin Dempster**

*The assessment process for coal mining projects is clearly failing our communities, environment and climate. Past and present governments have changed legislation and approval processes to facilitate coal mining at the expense of existing industries and public health. The Independent Commission Against Corruption has made recommendation to reform the approval process and the organisations behind tonight's forum have made repeated representations to all the parties about the reforms needed.*

*Question: Regardless of the election result what will you do to protect our communities from coal dust air pollution? We had a little bit of conversation about that, protect the water supply of over 4.5 million people around Sydney, protect the State's outstanding natural areas such as the Gardens of Stone region and increase community confidence in the determination process for mining approvals.*

### **Merheen Faruqi**

With the coal dust we made a very strong recommendation to the EPA enquiry that all coal train wagons be covered and washed. And that needs to be done now. There is enough evidence out there that coal dust is impacting on the community's health in the Hunter region. So we don't have to wait for more evidence. We use the precautionary principle and we do it now. We force the coal companies to cover those wagons. Our community's health is much more important than a few hundred thousand dollars that a company might be making in profit.

ICAC made 26 recommendations in relation to operations Jasper and Acacia, in terms of concerning mining exploration license and many of them have been adopted but some critical ones haven't been, especially one that relates to investigations into corruption risks involved in lobbying. That one hasn't been implemented. And the Greens have already introduced legislation in New South Wales parliament which would stop mining and exploration companies to give donations to political parties and we've done this

through the introduction of The Responsible Mining Bill 2014. This framework for responsible also would ensure that impact assessment looks at cumulative impacts, which is not the case at the moment. Cumulative impacts that also include climate change, agricultural land and critical industry clusters. The Greens also have legislation before federal parliament which would give landholders and communities the right to say no to coal and gas mining on their land. [0:41:40.2] Greens have never accepted corporate donations and have been actively campaigning, both in parliament and in our communities, against the corrupting influence of such donations and how they impact on our democratic processes.

Also just lastly, in terms of coal seam gas mining as well, it's currently administered, the licensing under New South Wales *Petroleum Onshore Act* rather than the *Mining Act* and I think the *Mining Act* grants greater rights of access for exploration and production and protection of landholders isn't there, so we want to change that as well in upcoming parliament.

### **Rob Stokes**

In relation to the ICAC proceedings referred to in the question, we've already taken action through legislation to cancel those licenses referred to in operations Jasper and Acacia that were found to have been, the process tainted by corruption. In relation to corruption risk, we've already taken action. Premier Baird has already taken action to ensure that ministerial diaries are fully available so that people can see who I've met with and who other ministers have met with and I'd certainly encourage the Labor party to adopt the same standard.

In relation to the air quality issue, the New South Wales government is currently leading the development of the ambient air quality national environment protection measure review in participation of the clean air agreement that's due for adoption by the 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2016. And we've already started that process in relation to diesel emissions from cruise ships. We're looking at diesel emissions from a whole range of non-road sources, including from mining operations. In relation to coal dust we've got, as I've already mentioned, work currently looking into the impacts that covering coal wagons [muffled] would have in terms of air quality in the Hunter.

### **Luke Foley**

The first and most important point is that we will repeal the SEPP, the State Environmental Planning Policy that was introduced by ministers Hazzard and Hartcher a couple of years back that go to the process for dealing with major mining applications to seek approval for a new mine or the extension of an existing mine. That elevated the economic value of a project above the social impacts and the environmental impacts. We believe in a genuine triple bottom line assessment that treats the environmental and the social impacts of a proposed new mine or proposed mine extension equally with the economic dollar value of the project that is seeking approval. The legislative council saw the Labor party, the Shooters and Fishers party, the Greens party and the Christian Democratic party all vote for the repeal of that SEPP. That SEPP remains today. Labor in government would repeal it.

Can I say, the difficulty I have with the suggestion that individual landholders should be allowed to say no to coal projects, if you apply the same principal farmers would be allowed to say no to the native vegetation laws in this state. I lead a left of centre political party, I'm a collectivist. I believe our native bush and the mineral resources of this country belong to society as a whole, not to individual property owners. So when it comes to questions of mineral extraction or retention of our biodiversity, our native vegetation, I believe these are community assets, communal assets and questions for society and government as a whole.

When it comes to the 26 recommendations of the ICAC report reducing the opportunities and incentives for corruption in the State's management of coal resources, we do commit to implementing all of them. Those that haven't been implemented we commit to.

## **CLIMATE CHANGE**

### **Quentin Dempster**

*2014 was the hottest year on record globally. Extreme weather events and heat stress are already taking a toll on people, animals and plants, as well as placing pressure on infrastructure and agriculture. Recently the Climate Council ranked New South Wales in fifth place behind South Australia and Victoria in terms of new renewable energy generation.*

*Question: What will your party do to reduce the State's emissions and mitigate the effects of climate change? Also, what will you do to encourage the federal government to adopt and implement a strong emissions reduction target?*

### **Rob Stokes**

Thank you. In relation to the question I will note that the New South Wales government has a clear role in leading work in adaptation to climate change. Mitigation is a fundamental role of the federal government that's been agreed through a COAG process. Nevertheless we recognise the need to do what we can to lead in mitigation as well.

In terms of adaptation, we're investing currently about \$10 million into world leading research into the impacts of climate change and through the NARClIM research, for example, that is world leading research in terms of fine grained, sort of granular research into the impacts of climate change and the likely impacts over the horizon to 2030 and 2070 across New South Wales, down to a 10 kilometre grid. So that work is literally world leading. We're working with the Climate Group to identify new opportunities in the State to lead through innovation.

But in terms of mitigation there are two clear ways in which we leading. One is through, well through renewable energy and energy efficiency and we've got two action plans that are related to each other. We recognise that in terms of transitioning to a local carbon economy the first thing we need to do is become more efficient in the way in which we

use energy. That's why we've committed more than \$350 million towards an energy efficiency program and for the first time have clear targets for government agencies in terms of their emissions intensity of their operations. I was fascinated with Labor's announcement just today in relation to energy efficiency which related to light bulbs, which is sort of something we did 10 or 20 years ago. There's far more we can be doing in the energy efficiency space, which is what we're doing in New South Wales. We seek to emulate California which since 1971 has seen energy demand stabilise while their economy has grown more than 22 times. That decoupling of economic growth from energy use.

In terms of renewable energy generation, we're leading the country in terms of the development of large scale solar. We've got more than 200 megawatts of large scale solar currently under development. This is something I could happily talk about for well over my allotted time.

### **Luke Foley**

Thanks. Look, when it comes to energy policy the first and most important thing we'll do is retain the electricity network in public ownership. It's not possible to facilitate the energy system this State needs, the shift to decentralised solutions, increasing the share of renewable penetration if we sell the network to a private owner. A private owner understandably will be focused on selling more electricity. We're about the public policy goal here of affordable and clean energy for people and businesses in this State. In Germany authorities are buying back their electricity grids because of the national commitment to increasing renewables in that country. So keeping the network in public hands is essential.

Battery storage is coming. It will do to the electricity grid what email's done to Australia Post and a smart government will own the network in order to build the energy system of the future with decentralised solutions, building in the ability for people to generate and store and share their own electricity.

I announced today a range of initiatives in this space. We'll legislate the State's 20 percent by 2020 renewable energy target in light of the uncertainty of the federal level. With respect to Rob on his point about energy efficient lighting, the commitment we make today is an additional commitment. We're not seeking to replace the good work that Rob has bought to bear in the energy efficiency space. We're going further with an additional commitment to roll out energy efficiency lighting across all of New South Wales's public hospitals that were highlighted in an audit a couple of years ago as not being where they should be on energy efficiency. We'll knock over the draconian restrictions on wind farms. We'll establish an Office of Renewables in the Department of Premier and Cabinet. We'll create a Hunter Renewables Hub that we announced during the Hunter bi-elections last year and a fair price for solar. If you're generating energy through household PV and you're exporting some the IPART recommended rate should be mandated. You should receive it, no ifs, no buts.

### **Dr Mehreen Faruqi**

We all know that burning coal is the single largest cause of global warming in the world today. And the world's leading medical journal, The Lancet has described it as the biggest health threat of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. New South Wales is the highest emitter of greenhouse gases in Australia and in addition to that we're going to dig up and ship out millions of tonnes of coal every year so that it can be burned elsewhere and produce massive greenhouse gases. So it is incumbent upon us to make sure that we not only adapt to climate change but really be serious about mitigation and to do that we have to have the courage to move away from fossil fuels and invest in renewable energy. And the Greens have a fully-fledged consistent plan to do this. We can transform to 100 percent renewable energy by 2030. It is possible, it is affordable and it is essential. We really have no other choice here, there is no plan B.

To do this we actually are committed to of course maintaining poles and wires in public hands but also to ban any new coal mines. We also want a timetable to phase out existing coal mines and coal fired power plants. There is no other way out of it. We have to do this but while we're doing this we also have a plan to transition the workers in that industry while we have some choices left for us at the moment. There will come a time if we don't act now when the rest of the world would have weaned itself off coal and we'll be sitting here without a plan, without any transition. So we need this transformation urgently because it will keep the lights on in New South Wales. It will create an excellent export industry. It will create tens of thousands of jobs and it will create a future that is viable for our environment and our people and our planet.

### **NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDERNESS.**

#### **Quentin Dempster**

*Only about 9 percent of ecosystems in New South Wales are protected in reserves, almost half the government's target of 17 percent by 2020. Important ecosystems west of the Great Dividing Range remain under represented in the reserve system and the list of animal and plant species facing extinction in New South Wales continues to grow. Even a species as iconic as the koala is at great risk of extinction in parts of the State if urgent action is not taken to reduce threats to its survival. Changes to the management of existing reserves means that high impact activities, including grazing, logging and horse riding are now being trialled in our protected areas.*

*Question: If elected will the government lead by your party protect at least 17 percent of the State's high conservation lands in national parks and nature reserves by 2020? If not, why not? How will you manage protected areas into the future so conservation continues to be the primary focus of protected area management?*

#### **Luke Foley**

Well we'll continue to do what Labor at its best always does, increase the national park reserve estate. 3 million hectares was added to the national park estate during the last period of Labor in government. This government in four years has increased the national

park estate with some welcome but small additions, totalling 80 odd thousand hectares. It would take the Coalition 142 years at this rate to do what Labor did in 16, I've committed to the Great Koala National Park, 316,000 hectares. We want to continue to increase the reserve estate in the far west of New South Wales. Particular focus on the Paroo Darling to bring into the reserve estate those pockets of native vegetation that remain, which are refuges for our native birdlife.

The current budget this year for land purchases to bring land into the national park estate is \$2.5 million. Today I committed \$150 million over four years for acquisitions to the national park estate. That will allow the next Labor government to make massive additions to the reserve estate in New South Wales. Secondly, we will not permit commercial logging, amateur hunting and grazing of hooved animals in our reserve estate.

### **Dr Mehreen Faruqi**

Well we know that New South Wales is well behind international targets, as well as behind in Australia as well. I think it still ranks third last in Australia for the amount of protected areas that we have that meet international standards. So the Greens are committed to major and immediate expansion of a national parks estate. With the focus on conservation outcomes, not amateur hunting, not logging, not horse riding. We also want to put more resources into national parks and wildlife to be able to do that. So in our package for this election particularly we announce the reservation of at risk and high conservation areas that are under imminent threat from coal seam gas and expansion of coal mining to be first up, like the Pilliga and the Leard and the Gardens of Stone stage 2 proposal. They need to be immediately reversed and then we have to have a plan to quite quick reservation of other areas to protect our biodiversity. It's just too precious to lose and we will, as I said, we are committed to campaigning against inappropriate uses of wilderness areas, national parks and other parts of the reserve system.

The government has this notion of adaptive management, which is to open up the areas for these activities. When we know that they are damaging and then kind of a 'suck and see' approach. That's not what adaptive management is about. Adaptive management is about using a prevention approach, not opening up these activities when we know that damage can be caused. So we will be introducing legislation to make sure that these activities cannot happen in high conservation areas and national parks.

We're also committed, actually, to having ecological consultants being accredited properly. We tried to introduce a bill a few years ago but it's really important that the way we assess our biodiversity is done in a way that recognises the actual value of biodiversity. So we would want to do that as well. And one other weakness in the environmental impact assessment system, which is the problem of consultants being hired by proponents. We want to make that at arms' length. So we will be looking at it [applause] proponents are at arms' length. The BIS consultants are at arms' length and independent of proponents.

## **Rob Stokes**

Well the Baird government certainly doesn't agree with some of the Australian political firmament who think there are too many national parks in Australia. We will be looking for further additions to our national park estate. Already just in the past few months we've had a focus on wetlands, on connectivity conservation and also on very high value coastal environments. For example, in wetlands we announced the acquisition of the wider wetlands of Doodle Comer Swamp and the Everlasting Swamp national park. Just today in terms of connectivity conservation there's an addition of well over a thousand hectares to Captains Creek nature reserve in the north of the State. In terms of high value coastal acquisitions we just recently announced the acquisition of the Bambara estate within Brisbane Water national park. We've had an addition to Glen Rock state conservation area. Also down at Narrawallee on the south coast and we'll be looking for further high value conservation additions in accordance with the principles that our reserve system should be comprehensive, adequate and representative.

We also believe, however, that acquiring land is only part of the challenge. Protected lands also need to be effectively managed. That's why an additional \$40 million into the management of pests and weeds in our national park estate and that's why Luke's announcement in relation to more money for national park additions, well in one sense that's wonderful but again, we need to recognise that for every dollar spent on national park addition we also need to reflect on the fact that we need to increase the budget for management of parks as well. If we are to return to the rate of national park addition under the former Labor government, which equates to about 200,000 hectares a year, at the lowest value of management, the cheapest national park estate lands to manage works out about \$36 a hectare. So that's an extra \$72 million that will be required for management each and every year on a recurrent basis. And that will accumulate as each additional hectare is bought. So we need to also look not just to acquiring lands but also additional money to manage those lands as well.

## **URBAN BUSHLAND**

### **Quentin Dempster**

*After 220 years of urban development Sydney has lost most of its fauna and much of the flora that existed in the original mosaic of ecological communities. Bushland areas within greater Sydney have been consistently threatened by urbanisation, weed infestation, illegal dumping and pollution. The creation of new parks, such as the Coalition's proposed Bungarabee super park in Western Sydney are welcome but do not compensate for losses of green space and bushland in other areas. In 2014 the Coalition government introduced the 10/50 bushfire code that has seen the removal of many trees across Sydney and regional New South Wales for non-bushfire reasons.*

*Question: What can be done to better protect our urban bushland and green urban spaces? Do you support the immediate withdrawal of the 10/50 code and repeal of the 10/50 vegetation clearing amendment 2014 to the Rural Fires Act?*

### **Dr Mehreen Faruqi**

I'm very proud to be here today to say that our parties name, the Greens, comes from the green bands movement which started in Sydney some 45 years ago and which was actually about banning the building activity from destroying Kellys bush reserve. So from destroying natural park. And it has been disturbing that we have been losing and fragmenting our biodiversity and our native vegetation. Mainly because of inappropriate development, you have to say. And we have to, for that again, we have to have much stronger planning laws. We have to make sure that community and ecologically sustainable development principles are at the heart of any decisions that we make about planning. That's critical and the Greens will keep fighting for that.

We have projects that are going ahead, like the westconnex which go through bushland, will go through community housing, which go through destruction of lots of green spaces, which we have to stand up and fight against. There's similar projects going up ahead in the north where a critical koala habitat is being destroyed because of Pacific Highway route, which can be avoided. Yes, it might cost more but surely we have to place some value on our iconic koalas which we've been losing at a very rapid rate.

We've been standing strong. The Greens have been standing strong with our community against the 10/50 code, which really is the core that must [applause] our biodiversity. And we will immediately repeal as soon as parliament starts. Repeal the damaging 10/50 clearing code. It is just unacceptable. We have lost tens of thousands of trees already. And this is biodiversity that we cannot afford to lose any more so it's vital that we need to do that.

Just one quick thing. We have these precious parks in our cities and at the moment accessibility to these parks is becoming harder and harder. Just recently we found out that Centennial Parklands is charging schools and it's getting harder for school kids to access that because of that charge. We are hearing stories about Sydney Cricket Ground wanting to takeover Moore park. We are losing these precious parks to transport projects, which we can avoid and that's what we need to do. We are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I'm a civil and environmental engineer, I know that we can do much better planning and implementation of projects but we need the will from the government to do that and the Greens will make sure that we make governments accountable, no matter who they are.

### **Rob Stokes**

On 10/50, so obviously there were concerns in relation to 10/50. It was well intentioned, it was clear it was open to [muffled] abuse. It was clear it was open to abuse and that's why the government took action very quickly to pare back the application of the code to the same distance as applied by local councils in relation to their bushfire plan. So there is the equivalent now in relation to the application of the code and the bushfire buffers maintained by local government. I will say in relation to the rhetoric from the Greens on this issue, they didn't – and I checked the parliamentary record – they may voice opposition now but when they had the opportunity to vote in the parliament on this legislation they remained silent. The only vote there was in relation to the 10/50 code was when the Shooters and Fishers put up an amendment that it be the 25/50 code and all

parties joined forces to defeat that amendment. But in relation to rhetoric, in relation to 10/50 that was absent in terms of formal opposition in the parliament.

In relation to urban bushland, I agree with the premise of the question, as our city continues to grow and development, bushland will become more important. That's why today, for example, I was pleased to announce the creation of the new Wianamatta regional park, or at least an additional 240 hectares to what will ultimately be 900 hectares of regional park and also nature reserve. Also the Edmondson regional park in the south-west of the city. We are creating new parklands because we recognise that our growing community will require them. I'm also pleased to use this occasion to announce the creation of a new \$5 million urban bushland rehabilitation fund which will be available to local councils and local groups to use in terms of rehabilitating local bushland. We recognise that with urban renewal there must be an increased focus on bushland renewal as well, because these places are going to be so important in connecting people and connecting people in urban areas with natural areas. Because it's only there that people learn a love for the bush and an appreciation of the bush and that creates lobbies for the future in terms of protecting our national parks estate. I can say from my own background it was the bit of bush at the end of my street that captured my imagination and love for the Australian bush. That's the opportunity we want to provide for the next generation of kids who come along.

### **Luke Foley**

Can I say on 10/50, I have called for a number of months now for a moratorium on the 10/50 code. I had the mayor of the Blue Mountains on the phone when the legislation was pushed saying "we need something like this for the mountains" after what his community had been through with their bushfires. I had to listen to the mayor of the Blue Mountains and his pleas. Clearly there was an overreach contained in the legislation. I will accept a share of responsibility. Labor voted for it in the parliament. I won't lay all of the blame at the feet of the government. Michael Daley did make a strong speech in the Lower House that warned against potential knock on consequences of this, seeking assurances from the RFS and the emergency services minister. It became clear that there were very damaging consequences from that legislation in metropolitan Sydney. That's why we've called for the repeal of the 10/50 code in metropolitan Sydney. There are still some provisions that are necessary for the Blue Mountains, frankly, given what they've been through.

There's a range of different urban bush matters raised by Rob and Mehreen. Let me deal as quickly as I can with a couple from my perspective. Mehreen raised the Pacific Highway in the north of the State. It's tremendously damaging that the minister's preferred route is ploughing through a koala colony. We said we want to reroute it. Use the existing route, that will be subject to costings, ensuring value for taxpayers' money. But I've been to the Blackall Ranges there with the Friends of the Koala. We have to do better than ploughing Pacific Highway upgrade through a koala colony.

Urban bush isn't just about Sydney. In the Tweed we've committed to the protection of Lot 490, which is tremendously important. Prioritising koala conservation reserves will

involve limiting urban expansion in the north of the State. In Sydney, Labor did establish the Western Sydney parklands. I welcome the announcement that Rob, or was it Michael, both of you made last week about the Bungarribee. We all ought to be working to extend those pockets in Sydney that protect native vegetation and native bush. To that end I've announced a focus on perhaps the most iconic bit of bush on Sydney Harbor, Mrs Macquarie's Point, that we will take the tourist buses away from there, turn the road 100 metres up and reclaim Mrs Macquarie's Point for nature, with native plantings there to return Mrs Macquarie's Point to the people and to nature.

## **DAM PROPOSALS**

### **Quentin Dempster**

*The New South Wales government has committed to funding an assessment of several dam sites on the Belubula River in the State's central west and raising the Warragamba Dam wall. Large dams are not only harmful to the environment, they are costly and do little to increase water security in times of real need. The preferred dam sites at Needles Gap and Cranky Rock in the central west will have the added impact of flooding at Cliefden Caves, internationally significant cave system.*

*Question: Will your party rule out building anymore mega dams in New South Wales, including raising the Warragamba Dam wall, but also commit to protecting the incredible Cliefden cave system.*

### **Rob Stokes**

Well I can start by saying there are no plans in relation to raising the wall at Warragamba Dam. In relation to water security at a regional level, there is a \$550 million package to look at options to increase water security. Part of the options that are being looked at include dam proposals. Obviously dam proposals that would involve serious or irreversible environmental damage would not be ones that I would support. But at this stage there are no concrete proposals. There is a proposal to look at options to improve water security.

In relation to will we rule out building out anymore dams, or mega dams as they're described? Obviously there's a \$550 million package to look at increasing water security. While there are no specific proposals being ruled in or ruled out I'm happy to say that I wouldn't support any proposal that will result in serious or irreversible environmental damage.

### **Quentin Dempster**

Would you carry the cabinet?

### **Rob Stokes**

Well again, I can only say what my position is.

### **Quentin Dempster**

Okay. Luke Foley.

**Luke Foley**

Well we won't be raising the height of the Warragamba Dam. On the questions at Orange, we oppose the Needles Gap dam proposal. I've had many, many discussions with the group of concerned citizens who are active there in trying to save or protect the iconic Cliefden caves. Go to their website, have a look at the videos and you'll see a very special place. The option B, the Needles Gap dam light version is now called the Cranky Rock proposed dam. We rule that out too because they would still damage the caves' ecosystem. We want to look at all options for water security for Orange, and there's some very important questions there for that community. All options for water security that do not involve the construction of an environmentally damaging dam. We rule out the construction of a dam there.

**Dr Mehreen Faruqi**

I grew up in Pakistan where there are two of the largest rock fill and earth fill dams and I've seen firsthand the environmental devastation and the devastation to the community which was uprooted in the 1950s and complete communities had to move from their agricultural land and resettle somewhere else. So mega dams are a 1950s solution to water management problem. There are much better ways in this day and age to look at how we manage our water, including storm water harvesting, including water efficiency, including recycling. And I think in New South Wales we really have to get serious about those measures. With climate change coming dams are completely inappropriate, they never were appropriate. We should learn the lessons from the past. But with impending climate change as well it's really impossible to see how the patterns of rainfalls will change and what sites we might select now will become irrelevant in the next 10, 20 or 50 years. So dams are not the way to go. The Greens are completely opposed to mega dams, the Needles Gap and the Cranky Rock dam. And especially because these are not the right solutions for water security but also because these dams are going to really damage the Cliefden Caves, which have amazing limestone structures, which have 400 million year old fossils in them and which also have permanent springs in there. So absolutely to mega dams and no to these particular dams. And looking at much more innovative ways to manage and secure water.

**Quentin Dempster**

*We're just a little bit of time over. Thanks everybody for being so disciplined and we've exhausted our panellists. But one more piece of exhaustion if you would be so kind. I'll give you a rhetorical flourish and Ace, if you could come up and get some cutaway shots.*

*I'll ask Minister Rob Stokes for why should we vote for you?*

**Rob Stokes**

Well because we recognise as a party and as a government the foundational importance of our ecosystem services. That before we look at questions of economic advancement or social advancement we have to recognise the value of our natural resources and why those natural resources need to be properly safeguarded in order to meet our needs as a community, as well as recognising the need that we have to pass those same resources on as an inheritance to future communities. We've invested more than a billion dollars into energy efficiency and renewable energy, and have policies to do that. We are looking to expand our national parks system and reserve system. We're also looking to increase the amount of funding put into biodiversity conservation and also introduce a container deposit scheme to change the culture in relation to society's appreciation of the importance of waste and recycling.

**Luke Foley**

Well on the day I became Labor's leader, 72 days ago now, I said that I was committed to the broadest possible agenda for Labor and I will go to the election with an economic agenda, a social agenda and an environmental agenda. I've been speaking about my environmental agenda for the last four years for my inaugural speech when I entered parliament and I've been speaking about it since the week I became Labor's leader. I released today at the Conservation Park in Wentworth Falls what I believe is the most comprehensive environmental protection policy that's been taken to an election in this State's history. We commit to a major expansion of the national park estate, including koala conservation reserves to save the koala from extinction in the north of New South Wales. We commit to a Sydney marine park to protect the jewel in Sydney's crown, the world famous Sydney Harbour. We commit to restoring so many protections for both our terrestrial parks and our marine parks that have been unwound over the last four years. We commit to a state-wide moratorium on coal seam gas. We commit to repealing the SEPP, the unbalanced SEPP for mining approvals and we commit to a major initiative to boost renewables in this State and by keeping the electricity network in public hands. We'll have leadership under a government, led by me, on building the energy system of the future with battery storage. It will change the game. People will be able to move to decentralised solutions, generate their own electricity, store it and export it as well. So I believe Labor stands at this election with the most comprehensive suite of environmental protection policies that a major party has ever taken to an election in this State's history.

**Dr Mehreen Faruqi**

The Greens stand up for our communities and the environment because it's the right thing to do for our people, our planet and our future generations. We have re-imagined a New South Wales where we are powered by 100 percent renewable energy. Where we have sustainable long term jobs, where our precious gems, our national parks, our forests and our oceans are protected. Where people are connected by world class public transport systems and where we have equality and justice for all. This is what matters to us this election. And we must make this a reality. We have to reset the compass now and we can do this. We can do it together. We can achieve this great transformation now and after this election.

## **Quentin Dempster**

Let's call it a wrap. Kate.

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<sup>i</sup> The Environmental Liaison Office is the Nature Conservation Council of NSW, the National Parks Association of NSW, Total Environment Centre, Blue Mountains Conservation Council, Colong Foundation for Wilderness, North Coast Environment Council, Central West Environment Council, South East Region Conservation Alliance.