

# Transcript



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Compere: **SABRA LANE** Summary ID: **M00072291753**  
Item: **NATIONAL PRESS CLUB ADDRESS WITH PETER GARRETT, FORMER FEDERAL LABOR MP.**  
**TODAY'S TOPIC IS 'TRASHING OUR CROWN JEWEL: THE FATE OF THE GREAT BARRIER REEF IN THE COAL AGE'.**

<b>Audience:</b>	Male 16+ 5000	Female 16+ 2000	All people 7000
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**SABRA LANE:** Good afternoon and welcome to the National Press Club and today's Westpac National Address. Hello, I'm Sabra Lane, and I'm a director here at the National Press Club. Our speaker today is Peter Garrett: rockstar, environmentalist and former politician. If you are following this conversation online, our hashtag is #NPC and our Twitter handle is @pressclubaust.

Peter Garrett's had a fascinating career, and it's not over yet by a longshot. In the political sphere, he was Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, and the Minister for the Environment and the Arts under prime ministers Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard, and for 10 years he was the president of the Australian Conservation Foundation, and he's still a rock star. He's the gangly front man of Midnight Oil, recently reformed and currently now on a world tour, and they're playing here tonight in Canberra. Peter Garrett's passion for the environment has been the common thread that's run through all of these elements, and he's no stranger here to the Press Club

either. Today's speech is titled Trashing Our Crown Jewel: The Fate of the Great Barrier Reef in the Coal Age. Please welcome Peter Garrett.

[Applause]

PETER GARRETT:

Thanks, Sabra. I do want to begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land and waters of this area, including the Nunnawal people. And yes, this is my fourth address to the National Press Club, and I thank the club and its sponsors for this invitation. Now returning to my first love, music, I'm in town to perform with my colleagues in Midnight Oil on the Australian League of The Great Circle tour. On previous visits I've addressed you as ACF president, as a member of Parliament and later as a government minister. Amongst other things, I've called for environmental tax reform and for the rejuvenation and democratisation of the arts, and these still important issues. At some point, hopefully they will be realised. Still, I believe this is the most critical address that I've given here.

After many years of working both outside and inside the system, in inverted commas, I'm convinced more than ever that we face an existential threat greater than any other, as humans literally upend the world's climate and natural ecosystems. To do nothing in the face of this threat, of which we are well aware, is to acquiesce to a world diminishing in front of us. We will deservedly reap the scorn and anger of our children if we fail to act now. There's a fundamental divide in our response but it's not between insiders and outsiders, it's between those willing to act and those clinging

desperately to an empty, corrupted ideology, unwilling to open their eyes or their hearts to what's happening around them. Regardless of our day jobs and our status in the political firmament, it still boils down to one basic proposition: are we part of the problem or part of the solution?

Our world is astonishing in its diversity and beauty, but one thing is crystal clear. The oceans, the continents, the atmospheres: they're finite. Living within a closed biophysical system, the human endeavour to secure shelter and food, to build communities, to create culture is impressive, and this endeavour has a redoubtable history, replete with triumph and tragedy, a song book of sorrows and soaring moments. And it, too, is an unfinished journey, yet humans' infinite capacities for organisation, communication, innovation, desire, acquisition and so much more have brought us to a precipice. Our way of life now imperils life itself. Just last year, a group of scientists led by Dr Thomas Crowther argued in the journal *Nature* that our planet is at a tipping point. Two years ago, the Pulitzer Prize for Non-fiction went to a book that posits we're on the cusp of a sixth extinction that could eliminate our species from this planet. The threat is literally existential. To borrow a good line, the time has come.

Now, my band mates and I have travelled to 16 countries this year and the symptoms of this malaise were apparent everywhere we went. From Brazil, where the city of Sao Paulo narrowly avoided catastrophic water shortages following the harshest drought in recent memory, to the United States,

experiencing more extreme hurricanes and intense bushfires, to Canada, where the rate of warming is around twice the global average, and eroding of permafrost and melting sea ice is expected to significantly threaten coastal communities. However, the most undeniable evidence of the precipice on which we stand doesn't require a Visa or a passport. It exists off our own shores: the majestic Great Barrier Reef. The future of the reef is the issue of its time, a symbol of the ultimate choice confronting us all. The Great Barrier Reef is literally a canary down a coal mine.

The Great Barrier Reef is one of the seven natural wonders of the world. It shares that extraordinary status with the likes of Mount Everest, the Grand Canyon and Victoria Falls. The Reef is the world's largest living organism, visible from space. Its superlative natural beauty and biodiversity have drawn millions of people from around the world to come to Australia to experience this marvel with their own eyes.

The Great Barrier Reef's Natural Heritage values are outstanding. The Reef contains more than 1600 species of fish, more than 130 species of sharks and rays, 30 species of whales and dolphins. It includes some 3000 coral reefs, 900 continental islands, and more than 600 species of hard and soft corals. Seagrass meadows and mangrove forests grace its shores, providing habitat for dugongs and turtles and fish, a profusion of life from the world's largest fish, the whale shark, to thousands of small creatures such as sea anemones, starfish and

colourful sponges, adding to an extraordinary diversity. It truly is a natural and a cultural wonder. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the reef is an integral part of their identity and culture. Today they have a continuing connection to the reef, and many traditional owners are actively engaged in this management.

The Reef is of huge economic significance, too. A report by Deloitte Economics for the Great Barrier Reef Foundation found the economic, social, and iconic brand value of the Reef to be \$56 billion. In 2015, 2016, the Reef generated \$6.4 billion. Nearly 90 per cent, or \$5.7 billion, was contributed by tourism, an industry that has continued to grow. In the past decade alone, visitor days and nights have increased by 17 per cent in the Reef region, but it's the employment numbers that fill out the big picture. The Reef enables more than 64,000 jobs in Australia in a wide range of employment opportunities. Tourism supports nearly 59,000 full-time equivalent jobs, jobs that can't be done by machines, increasingly infiltrating the mining sector. Jobs, which if the Reef is managed well, can be done year in and year out without damaging the natural asset on which they depend.

A potted history of the challenges to the Reef goes like this. In 1967, a cane farmer in North Queensland applied to mine coral limestone for use as fertiliser, and the claim was that the Reef was dead. Four - that's right, four - intrepid individuals stepped up to object. They won the day, but a bigger threat was forming. By 1969, the Queensland Government under Joh Bjelke-

Petersen had approved petroleum exploration licences over most of the Great Barrier Reef. Years of gruelling campaigning by fledgling environment groups, including the Australian Conservation Foundation and the Australian Marine and Conservation Society followed. Eventually, the Whitlam Government laid the groundwork, and the Fraser Government in turn passed the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act of 1975, banning all drilling and mining in the entire Great Barrier Reef region. It was a world first and an extraordinary achievement. In 1975, the Reef was inscribed on the World Heritage list for places of global, environmental and cultural significance. At the time, it seemed the Reef would be safe for ever.

Despite the establishment then of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the gradual creation of conservation zones, by 2004, commercial and recreational fishing was still allowed in more than 95 per cent of the Marine Park, depleting its rich biodiversity. In 2004, then, the world's largest network of green no fishing zones came into effect, following strenuous public campaigning by local and national conservation groups, this time with the World Wildlife Fund playing a prominent role. 2009 and 2010 saw the mining boom in full swing and a concerted push by industry for expansion of coal ports, along with dredging and dumping of dredge spoil in the World Heritage area. The Fight for the Reef campaign, again led by conservation organisations, reached out to the Australian people and the World Heritage Committee responsible for global oversight of the health of the Reef.

Eventually both the Federal and Queensland governments banned dumping of capital dredge spoils from new works, and in late 2015, the Queensland Government pass new legislation to restrict port developments to four existing ports. Yet after all this effort, the Great Barrier Reef now faces an even greater threat. To quote Sir David Attenborough, the Reef is in grave danger. The twin perils brought by climate change, an increase in the temperature of the ocean and in its acidity, threaten its very existence.

We need to pause and reflect on this for a moment. It's a hard thing to accept that the existence of the Great Barrier Reef is threatened. We don't want to believe it. We assume the Reef will last for ever. As Australians, it's important to us, it's a part of our DNA. The vibrant colours and a dazzling array of seascapes and sea life epitomises who we are as a nation. We should be proud and honoured to be its custodian on behalf of the world. Imagine, though, in 30 year's time, the reef as we know it no longer exists. We've lost it on our watch when we weren't watching closely enough, and its loss is by our hands. This isn't a future any Australian wants, but it's the path we are on now, unless Australia and the world acts decisively on the warming emergency we face.

Two summers ago, a massive pool of abnormally warm water sat for weeks over the northern third of the Marine Park of Cape York Peninsula. The usual ocean currents failed to materialise and there was no cool relief. In the end, two thirds of the corals in that region suffered heat stress and died. This ecological tragedy

occurred in what had been the healthiest section of the Reef, the part unaffected by agricultural pollution. Scientists who'd invested their life's work in conserving the Reef were stunned by the scale and severity of the event. Reports of the dying Reef appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the BBC. An essential poll taken in November that year said two thirds of Australians believe the state of the Reef was a national emergency. Prime Minister Turnbull's response was notable for its silence.

Eventually, during the federal election campaign, the PM and his then-environment minister, Greg Hunt, announced the \$1 billion Reef Fund, one tenth of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation's \$10 billion would now supports clean energy and technologies to reduce farm pollution in the Reef Catchment. Whilst it made for a good sound bite, policy might be worse than doing nothing. It turns out it's much harder for the Clean Energy Finance Corporation to spend a billion dollars on worthwhile projects that achieve both those goals. It was small beer which subsequently went flat. Early this year, 2017, the Reef experienced another severe bleaching event. This time the central third suffered the worst damage. Many reefs were affected, and they were prized tourism sites between Port Douglas and Townsville. The tourism industry was shocked at the unprecedented back-to-back bleaching. With 64,000 jobs dependant on a healthy Reef, there was serious soul-searching about what the future might hold.

Over two summers then, 49 per cent of the reef's shallow water corals had died. The worst affected area stretched along 1500 kilometres. If ever there was an urgent need for a rapid national response to climate change, and the adoption of an ambitious, post-2020 renewable energy target, this was it. Once again, the Turnbull Government failed to respond.

Not so the World Heritage committee. This year, the committee expressed - and I quote - its utmost concern - end quote - about the serious impacts of coral bleaching on World Heritage properties. The committee went on to urge all state parties to undertake - and I quote - the most ambitious implementation of the Paris Agreement, including actions to address climate change under the Paris Agreement that are fully consistent with their obligations within the World Heritage Convention to protect the outstanding universal value of all World Heritage properties.

Yet now, in the midst of the greatest crisis the reef has faced, the Turnbull Government has rejected ambitious implementation of the Paris Agreement. As a result, it is failing to meet its obligations under the World Heritage Convention to protect the outstanding universal value of the Great Barrier Reef and all World Heritage properties.

To make matters worse, it is unashamedly backing the development of the Carmichael mine, the world's largest export coalmine in the Galilee Basin of Central Queensland, which will further desecrate the reef. At

full scale, this mega mine, about 30 kilometres long, comprising six open cut pits and five underground mines, being developed by the Adani Corporation of India, would dig, transport and burn 60 million tonnes of coal every year for 60 years. It would require one million cubic metres of seafloor to be dredged in the World Heritage area for a port expansion, and send hundreds more coal ships ploughing through the Marine Park.

The mining and burning of Carmichael coal would emit 4.6 billion tonnes of carbon pollution into the atmosphere over its lifetime. This is an astonishing figure. At a time when the world is moving rapidly to renewable energy, the Adani mine will accelerate climate change impacts around the world. How could it be otherwise? Worse droughts, floods, bushfires, heatwaves, and intense cyclones, and, of course, destruction of coral reefs.

The mine would obliterate the ancestral lands, water, and wreck the culture of Aboriginal people in the region. The Wangan and Jagalingou people have repeatedly said no to the mine on their land. Despite this, Adani has actively worked to divide the Wangan and Jagalingou, to claim they've consented to the mine.

The proposed mine would use vast amounts of precious water. It's liquid gold for local farmers, essential to maintaining healthy landscapes across the basin. Adani is licensed to take an unlimited amount of groundwater, estimating that they may take up to 9.5

billion litres of water every year. They can also take another 11.5 billion litres of surface water from nearby rivers in flood, depriving downstream users and the environment of those flows. It's so preposterous, it's actually hard to believe. Semi-arid Australia is, in effect, exporting water to India, and to add insult to injury, Adani is getting the water for free.

Adani's Carmichael mine would be a mammoth producer of pollution, a giant vacuum cleaner sucking up the natural resources of the land and water of the region. It is little wonder that a majority of Australians are becoming increasingly alarmed by its looming shadow. Stopping Adani is emerging as the battle of our times, just as the Franklin Dam and Jabiluka were to an earlier generation, awakening to the need to protect the natural environment and the rights of Aboriginal people.

The #StopAdani campaign, the fourth major fight to save the Great Barrier Reef, is a defining moment that must be won if we are to have any hope of preserving a safe climate and the reef itself.

Now, we may be inured to statistics that tell a stark story, but the medical journal *Lancet* recently published research showing nine million premature deaths already occurring over 2015-'16 due to air, water and land pollution; 15 times the losses of life in war and other forms of violence. The burning of Adani's low-grade Carmichael coal will only lead to more deaths, making a mockery of Josh Frydenberg's so-called moral case for coal.

Added to this, if Adani's mine and rail link ever get off the line, the entire Galilee Basin coal reserve could be opened up for development too. The Galilee is the largest untapped coal basin in the world, containing 29 billion tonnes of low-grade coal. That would be a nightmare scenario for the world's coral reefs and oceans, which absorb 93 per cent of global carbon pollution. A quarter of all marine life use coral reefs for at least part of their life cycle, so losing coral reefs would have a devastating knock-on effect for an already depleted ocean food web.

Such a gargantuan expansion of coal mining would completely undermine a world trying desperately to reduce greenhouse emissions with actions large and small, yet the Federal and Queensland governments still remain in thrall to Adani, and despite significant reservations concerning the corporation's business practices, and both the economics and operations of the proposed mine and existing port, that situation remains.

Some of you may have seen ABC's *Four Corners* program, which recently raised serious questions about Adani's corporate structure, its business practices, and poor environmental record. On the program, former Indian environment minister, Jairam Ramesh, warned Australia that Adani's group's track record on environmental management within the country leaves a lot to be desired.

Local police harassed the ABC journalists making the documentary; one can only assume that the behest of

Adani. Adani's complex company structures and tax arrangements are the subject of considerable scrutiny, and they lie when presenting information to the public. One recent example, their targeted Facebook ads that happened in Melbourne.

There is nothing about this Adani project that doesn't stink to high heaven, and yet amazingly, the Government's own Northern Australia infrastructure facility is considering giving a \$1 billion concessional loan - i.e. taxpayer money - to Adani for a rail line from the mine to Abbott Point on the reef coast.

Federal Labor has rightly been critical of the opaque nature of the Northern Australia infrastructure fund, and has opposed the loan on the grounds that the project should be able to stand on its own two feet. The majority of Australians agree, including the majority of Queenslanders. Unfortunately, Premier Palaszczuk has lined up with the Prime Minister. Both have flitted over to India to shake hands with the Adani chairman, and would gladly see the taxpayer-funded loan given to Adani, despite Adani already breaching Queensland's pollution laws. From the Queensland Government's perspective, it is all about being seen to support jobs in North Queensland.

The Queensland Government's first priority should be protecting the future of the existing 64,000 jobs dependent on a healthy reef, most of them in regional Queensland. Putting them at risk for 1200 full-time jobs in Queensland and 1460 or so across Australia that the project will apparently create doesn't make sense.

These figures come from one of Adani's own experts, speaking outside the Queensland Land Court. I beg your pardon, speaking in the Queensland Land Court. Outside court, Adani and both governments regularly claim a magical 10,000 jobs.

Creating jobs that will accelerate global warming and further damage the Reef, given what we know now, is simply reckless. There is one ray of light here, and a clear sign of what the future could hold. The Queensland Government has a 50 per cent renewable energy target by 2030. The policy is generating an investment boom in regional Queensland in solar and wind energy, with numerous projects expected to create up to 6700 jobs; good jobs that won't damage the Reef.

It is now widely accepted in the financial markets that coal is in terminal decline and will not recover. The range of technologies emerging, solar rooftops, home batteries, electric cars, will give us cleaner cities, better health, and save us money. Seen through the prism of investing in renewable energy, it is an exciting time. Yet a cautionary clause is necessary, because by itself the market won't save us. The reason is simple: physics.

The impacts of climate change come decades after the emissions that cause it. So, if we spend 20 or 30 years letting the market deal with the fossil fuel industry, we and our children and grandchildren will spend 50 to 100 years suffering the consequences. The beautiful Great Barrier Reef will be gone. There would be huge and irreversible losses of biodiversity, food crises

would be inevitable, and refugees would be on the move in the hundreds of millions. We would most likely see economic impacts worse than the Great Depression. So, we cannot and will not allow this to happen.

The future is here, and it is positive. Solar not coal, clean jobs, not dirty ones. It is utilising the ever present power of the sun in a sunburnt land, instead of digging up the very stuff that is stoking the flames of a warming planet. Now that we have reached one minute to midnight, we have to ask: how much more dredging and coastal development? How much more carbon pollution and agricultural run-off? How many more bleaching events and severe cyclones can the Reef sustain before the resilience of the whole system collapses?

As the custodian of the world's largest living organism, Australia has a global responsibility and a legal and moral duty to ensure we are doing everything we can so that the Great Barrier Reef can survive. In his documentary on the Reef, Sir David Attenborough asks us: do we really care so little about the Earth on which we live that we don't wish to protect one of its greatest wonders from the consequences of our behaviour?

Right now, we face a choice. Shall we move beyond the age of coal and secure the future of the Reef, or do nothing for a few more years and lose our most precious national asset? There is no time to lose in making that decision, we have to act as good stewards now. What does good stewardship mean? It means

drastically reducing our carbon emissions and doing our fair share of global carbon reduction. Our current target of 26 to 28 per cent is grossly inadequate, and will lead to 3 degrees- to 4 degrees of warming, should other governments commit to a similar level of ambition. This is a temperature rise that will destroy all the world's coral reefs.

Good stewardship means no more new coal mines, because the carbon budget is spent. The UK has just announced that it will move to end burning coal by 2025. Good stewardship means phasing out coal-fired power stations by the early 2030s and a switch to 100 per cent renewable energy. It means an orderly phased transition in coal mining areas. It means ending fossil fuel subsidies that support dirty energy, and it means supporting a national renewable energy target to turbocharge the renewable energy boom.

Globally, it means we must be world leaders, not laggards, in engaging in effective and ambitious climate diplomacy to encourage other carbon polluting nations to step up to safeguard our future.

Good stewardship means giving the Reef a fighting chance to get through this period of higher sea surface temperatures by tackling local threats. Tree clearing, now back at astronomical levels of 400,000 hectares a year, courtesy of the former Newman Government's decision to relax land-clearing laws in Queensland, must end.

Regulations on the amount of sediment, nutrients and pesticides that can flow into the Reef must be passed. Investment in the Reef must dramatically increase to the order of \$10 billion over a decade, to solve legacy pollution from past practices and change current ones. And here, effective compliance is critical.

Good stewardship means a strong Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority driving effective policy, making the right decisions on uses, ensuring compliance. Again, with adequate funding. Above all, good stewardship is what the Australian public expects of our political leaders, but it is nowhere to be seen under the Turnbull Government.

In 2007 the Federal Labor Government began that task, with a \$200 million additional investment in Reef rescue; increasing research and development, assisting farmers reduce nutrient loads, developing the first annual report card on reef health. This was done with the expectation of a price on carbon coming into force. I wish we had the opportunity to do more.

Crucially, today's deficit of leadership in relation to the environment isn't confined to lack of action on climate change. This Government is also overseeing the decimation of the expanded National Marine Reserve system that Labor introduced, on the back of no fishing zones established by the Howard Government.

The jewel in the crown of this new estate was the Coral Sea, the cradle of the Great Barrier Reef. This vast sea of nearly 1 million square kilometres was one of the

last places on earth where massive tuna, sharks and marlin could roam with relative low risk of being caught.

Now I confess to a personal stake in this issue, having declared the Interim Coral Sea Protection Zone when environment minister. Subsequently, my colleague Tony Burke advanced a vast reserve over the Coral Sea, protecting half from all extraction. At the time, it would have been the second largest Marine National Park on the planet. Agreement to establish many other small Marine National parks around the continent followed.

As soon as it was elected, the Abbott Government pulled the network and established a review. After years of blather and red tape, the Turnbull Government finally released the new maps a few months ago, and they are a disgrace. The Abbott Government's changes were bad, but the Turnbull Governments changes are far worse. The proposed changes would be the largest removal of area from protection ever by any government.

Malcolm Turnbull is trashing the Liberals' marine park legacy, and caving in, yet again, to a minority in his party that better approximate the punk band Suicidal Tendencies. Our seriously stressed ocean environments deserve better. Much better.

Professor Terry Hughes, the director of the ARC Centre of Excellence in Coral Reef Studies, has urged us not to give up hope for coral reefs, despite the pervasive gloom and doom, and Sylvia Earle, founder of the

global Ocean Elders group, has encouraged the declaration of hope spots in the world's ocean; national parks that protect marine life from extraction.

Soon it will be too late for coral reefs, but it isn't now. We need to ensure this extraordinary exemplar of the Earth's beauty and biodiversity is safe forever, on our watch. We need to seize this moment in time because it won't come again. If this means putting ourselves on the frontline to stop a mine going ahead, so be it. If it means exercising our democratic freedoms, engaging in peaceful civil disobedience, even going to jail, that's a step I, and I expect many others, are willing to take.

Let it be clear: we are placing the protection of farming communities, precious inland water resources, tens of thousands of jobs, the Great Barrier Reef itself, the rights and interests of Aboriginal people, and the health and well-being of the international community ahead of the interests of a very large corporation.

Many young Australians and numerous local, regional and national conservation and climate action groups are already working hard to stop Adani and save the reef. This is true 21st century patriotism, acting on the local scale for the local and global good. They need support from you in the media, from political parties, the corporate sector, from communities and individuals across the nation.

The Labor Party must decide which side of this debate it is on, and provide a clear alternative to the mad anti-science climate culture wars that permeate the

conservative parties at the present time. Should the Northern Australia Infrastructure Fund decide to waste a billion dollars preferencing Adani, Labor should give notice that it will tear up the decision. We need stronger laws introduced to protect the environment, including placing a greenhouse trigger in the Environment Protection, Biodiversity and Conservation Act as well.

I know Australia's artists and musicians, writers and actors, filmmakers and digital designers will rally. Midnight Oil will play and support those who express their opposition to this mine, as we have done in the past. We are not alone. Whether we are outsiders or insiders, the existential threat facing our planet and the Great Barrier Reef affects us all. We breathe the same air, we are fed from the same land. The only question is: will we decide to live sustainably and protect our future, or will we continue to live unsustainably until the future no longer exists for any of us? If the past is any guide, it will take action from both non government and government actors to make sure that the right choice is made.

It is simply untenable in 2017 to sit and watch one of the greatest natural wonders in the world be destroyed before our eyes, simply because we lack the imagination and the will to move beyond coal. For those of you on the inside, it's time. For the rest of us, the time has come. Thank you very much.

[Applause]

SABRA LANE: Peter Garrett, thank you very much for your speech. We'll take questions in a moment. I get the liberty of asking the first one. You've just said that you are prepared to put yourself on the line. Well, imagine that the Queensland Government is very shortly due to call an election. Re-elected, they propose to give full approval to this mine backed by the Federal Government. What exactly will you do?

PETER GARRETT: Well, I'll consider what the most effective use of my presence on this issue is, Sabra, and I'll talk to the groups that are already active and working on the issue. My feeling about this, and I know it's the same feeling that Midnight Oil has, is it is our job to help and support, and we will do it in ways that people think are useful.

SABRA LANE: Mark Kenny.

QUESTION: Mark Kenny from Fairfax Media, *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*. Mr Garrett, welcome back to the Press Club. I hope the voice holds out.

PETER GARRETT: Well, only just, Mark, I've had a few glasses of water.

QUESTION: A couple of nervous band members here wondering whether tonight's gig is in doubt, but one hopes not. There's a lot of talk around at the moment about the idea of a political consensus emerging around the Government's National Energy Guarantee. Some arguments about how far it goes, and so forth, but I think it's fair to say that there is more hope around about the possibility of a consensus than has been the

case for some time. As someone who, as a former environment minister, someone who was in federal politics right through the period when we saw the most toxic divisions in this area, can I ask you to opine, I suppose, on how important it is that there is some agreement, if only on the architecture and not, perhaps, the task itself? And, if I could ask you on another front - so that's one question on the environment ...

PETER GARRETT:

How lucky am I to be asked to opine on something?

[Laughter]

I'll do my best on the second. Sorry, go on, Mark.

QUESTION:

And just on another front, Paul Keating last week weighed into the Victorian voluntary assisted dying bill debate. As a committed Christian, I wonder whether you would have a view on that subject.

PETER GARRETT:

Well, let me deal with the first one. I think that, whilst I'm sure it's accurate for you to characterise this as a brief moment of hope, and the potential for some form of consensus to arise on the back of an eight-page bit of stuff that they've cooked up when they didn't like what Finkel had given to them, that's understandable, but to be really clear about it, the NEG and everything that goes with it, in the way it's currently, as I understand it, constituted, goes nowhere near to dealing with the sorts of issues that we face, both in relation to addressing climate change, and frankly, I'm not even sure about energy security either. It's too

early to say. There's no detail in that documentation that I've seen. It relies on the cooperation of the states. It relies, essentially, on whether or not we have some overall strong driving policy that provides certainty in the market for investment in renewables, and also driving demand management, energy efficiency, and so on and so forth in the years to come.

So, if you'll permit me this observation, having been out of this place for some time, I understand that Mr Turnbull and those people following the debate closely are grasping at this. Mr Frydenberg is having his moment as a young rising star. This thing has been cooked up to deal with a political problem, and the perception that there's going to be power blackouts and that politicians will be made to blame. It doesn't look anything like comprehensive enough to me to deal with the real issues we face, and the great tragedy here is that we have the wherewithal in the country to do this.

One of the heartbreaking things for me, when I was the member for Kingsford Smith was to go to the University of New South Wales and spend time meeting with the researchers there who were the early innovators on solar energy. One of the most incredible things for me is to let you know that, when I was a minister, industry sources were always downplaying the fact that renewable energy would go anywhere. Support for solar energy has never been strong in this country, except for a brief period when the Rudd government was in power - that's federally - and yet we've got over a million households in the country with

solar panels on their roof, and South Australia is now breaking the records for the delivery of renewable energy of its rooves on certain days. They're nearly at 50 per cent. We completely underestimate the speed of transition to renewables that's underway in other countries, because we have been mired in a toxic debate and hampered by the most bloody-minded, contrarian and deeply unscientific and irrational contribution from some members of the conservative parties. And they have so fouled the waters on this issue that, when occasionally you see a fish swimming by with a bit of colour and you manage to catch it, you think that the job's been done. We are a long way from that.

I wouldn't call my faith system necessarily committed in the way you have. I think it's evolved over time. But I had some sympathy for what former Prime Minister Keating was saying. I certainly understand that this debate is one about the express wishes of an individual to determine how and the way in which they may finish their time on earth but, as someone who did serve in the Cabinet for nearly six years and had close interactions with government and respects the Australian public service and the work they do, I'm deeply, deeply concerned about function creep in this area. I think, historically, function creep has been one of the inevitable consequences of providing frameworks for actions where there are clearly held views, and sometimes disagreements, about a moral right and wrong. It's very hard for political systems to adjudicate on that. So I had some sympathy for Mr Keating's views. I'm not sure it fell on fertile ears.

SABRA LANE:

Tim Shaw.

QUESTION:

Thanks Sabra. Peter Garrett, welcome back to the National Press Club. Tim Shaw from Radio 2CC in Canberra. Business and politics. You are in business. Midnight Oil is a global business and it's touring right around the world now. Welcome back to Canberra. But the compromise between business and politics has been an age long endeavour, and you've made it very clear how you feel about Adani. Where is the compromise between business and politics in that six out of 10 of our major trading partners have nuclear energy in their economies? Would you see, to save the Reef, as you've articulated today, the Adani matter, as you've said, would you ever see a compromise in the political narrative here for the use of yellow cake and uranium energy and nuclear energy in this country? Second part question, on 18 September 1977, Bob King, the rock photographer, took a photograph of a 24-year-old ANU graduate called Peter Garrett. He claims it was the first photograph ever taken of the band and you. What would the 64-year-old Peter Garrett today ...

PETER GARRETT:

Thanks for reminding me.

[Laughter]

QUESTION:

... say to the ANU graduate at 24? Thank you.

PETER GARRETT:

Great question, thank you. On the first one, I've always opposed the provision of nuclear power as an energy source, because I think the issues around the

containment of waste, in terms of economic prudence as well as anything else virtually insoluble. I'm much more of that view now than I was when I first had a look at it. There will be no mass development of the nuclear industry as a way of dealing with reducing climate- greenhouse emissions, to save the climate, because the lead time of developing these stations is very long. It is only governments that essentially have to underwrite the risk, and there are massive unresolved questions about long-term storage of waste. It doesn't mean that plants won't be built, but it'll be nothing like the numbers that the proponents claim, and I would argue it's not necessary, and there are studies that show that we can meet our energy needs by rapidly deploying and transitioning to renewables. There's one area that I didn't address and have time to address in the speech, and it's something which has become completely absent in our debate about energy, including the NEG and other matters, and that is: all of the significant low cost savings that can be had through demand management; all of the significant low-cost savings that can be had through energy efficiency through altering transport policies; even things like carbon farming and looking at the in which you- and you'll find that landscape is burnt in Northern Australia. I mean, there are so many areas where we can significantly start to bring our emissions profile down which just require- not so much even government to give you the money to do it, but just the framework within which to do it, and a sense, a consensus, that it's worth doing. Not that it's crazy work. And it is mind-blowing and mindboggling to return from an overseas world tour with the Oils and find that in a number of countries where there are

conservative governments in power they are proposing to do the very things that the conservatives in this country say are unconservative - that are anathema to them. And I think we've just had this terrible, terrible point of time in our history and I think historians will judge it extremely poorly to believe that we could have been hijacked by this nonsense for so long. And the former Prime Minister, Mr Abbott, bears a weight of responsibility on that count.

On the question of what I would say to a young 23 or 24 year-old ANU student; well, I guess I would say go for it. You know, why not? That part of your life - and we do have some young people in the room - is such an exciting time. It's not set in stone what you should do. You'll be aware of the expectations of your teachers and your parents, and of course you should be mindful of them, but you'll also be aware of your own inner earnings, your own hopes. Sometimes they're the hidden hopes and dreams that you only confess to yourself, and I think it's very important to find that in whatever work that you do. Whether we work here in Canberra - we've got distinguished former journalists here, and we've got other senior journalists in the room - they love what they do. We've got people working in business, people working in government - they love what they do. So if you love what you do, then go for it.

On the bigger question about a Midnight Oil career, I might spend a little of time here and I'll just see whether my colleague, Martin Rotsey, who plays guitar with us, raises his hand and calls order on me. The

thing I think that's noticeable to me now, and I'm sure to the other guys in the Oils after many years playing - and in the period of time when we didn't play, including when I was here - is that if it wasn't working for us musically, if we didn't get on with one another and respect what we were doing, there'd be no point in going out to play again. But having said that, when you're starting out - in our wonderful country which I love - a lot of people are always telling you it's too hard, or it's not good enough. The knocker mentality is still out and about a little bit, and especially when you've got big dreams you've just got to block that stuff out.

The final thing I would say is: write good songs.

[Laughter]

And I've been lucky enough to be in a band with good song-writers [laughs].

SABRA LANE: Just- sorry, just on that last point, writing good songs: at the AFL Grand Final, The Killers actually performed *The Forgotten Years*.

PETER GARRETT: They did, yeah.

SABRA LANE: Brandon Flowers has actually lamented that he wished he'd written that song. How did you feel when- did you hear their version, see their version?

PETER GARRETT:

Well actually, I can give you a little scoop- not that it's going to mean much for the ABC or for Fairfax or anyone else, but we actually bumped into them when we were playing in Sweden. Europe has these fantastic outdoor festivals because they don't get as much summer as we do, and we were playing an outdoor festival in the north of Sweden and we bumped into Brandon in the airport, and he said, oh look, we're doing the Grand Final. I said, oh mate, yeah, well done. He said, I love that song *Forgotten Years*. I didn't say anything, Sabra, honestly, I didn't say a word. I just said, oh yeah, okay great. And then of course, they did play it and they played it well. They pulled it off and I think- look, it's flattering when someone does one of your songs, but also a bit cringey because you're not sure how it's going to sound, but it sounded neat.

SABRA LANE:

Good.

John Miller?

QUESTION:

Thank you Sabra, and thank you- John Miller, freelance, and thank you Peter for a most comprehensive address.

When you were Minister for the Environment, you came under considerable criticism, particularly the conservative voices, about being Minister for the Environment formerly a President of the Australian Conservation Foundation and a prominent activist. The current Minister for the Environment is also the Minister for Energy. Which do you think is the greater conflict of interest?

[Laughter]

PETER GARRETT:

Well- yeah, thank you John.

I'm willing to say that I think having Environment and Energy together is not a good idea. My experience working here was that the Environment Department was very capable and able, and doing a difficult job but labouring under significant resource restrictions. And really, the Energy Portfolio and Energy is an economic question as well as an environment question. And even though every aspect of the scheme that eventually my former colleague- my colleague, Greg Combet, brought forward, every aspect needed some refinement, it was a scheme that worked, and it was interesting at the time - and I'm not betraying any Cabinet secrets here because I think I've written about it - but the modelling by Treasury was pretty much spot-on. So they modelled the cost of living increases for low income families, they modelled the likely reduction in greenhouse gas emission- and remember, that scheme reduced greenhouse gas emissions effectively. It was an economic instrument. And that's the important thing about it. And my speech is about the why. Why we need to do it. And that economic instrument worked as it should be, designed by people, because we'd made a decision then as a Labor Government to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to get on with the job. If you haven't made that decision and you're then a Minister of Environment but you also have responsibility for Energy, then it's very hard to see how you can do credit to both aspects of that role.

QUESTION: Thank you.

PETER GARRETT: No worries.

SABRA LANE: Peter Phillips.

QUESTION: Peter Phillips, one of the Directors of the National Press Club. It's great to welcome you back here, great to see you looking so well. Perhaps a little bit slimmer. Back to pre-Parliament House days, but that wasn't what I got up to comment about.

Question: you spoke eloquently, amongst other things, about the Coral Sea and the Great Barrier Reef area, particularly its northern extremes, and about the need for more intense work on regulation and protection and conservation. Within that, I note recent reports disquieting about increased incidents of appearance of meat from protected species - green turtles, dugongs - appearing in illegal markets but in the south. Is there a case that should be made for a closer and tighter regulation of some of the activities of some of the, perhaps, less desirable or rogue elements in Aboriginal communities on Far North Queensland out on the Gulf? Illegal activities relating to the taking of species such as green sea turtles and of dugongs?

And then, a second question-

PETER GARRETT: Everybody asks two questions here, you've noticed? They're smart aren't they?

[Laughter]

QUESTION:

A couple of weeks ago we had a couple of old colleagues of yours - former Prime Minister Bob Hawke and Gareth Evans, and now a Chancellor of the ANU - and they spoke very, very fondly of the days of the excellence of the frontbench of the Ministry of Bob Hawke and Gareth Evans referred to the excellence of the quality of the Opposition frontbench at the moment. Would you like to offer any observations or thoughts, (a) about the quality of the frontbench of the Opposition at the moment, and (b) about any other frontbench which you might have some thoughts on?

PETER GARRETT:

I must have come out of politics to be given free kicks like this.

[Laughter]

PETER GARRETT:

Let me just put my bubba boots on. No, no. Well, let me go to the first part of that question, Peter, very quickly. I could have written another speech with help of others, experts and so on, about the complimentary huge challenge that we face with ocean health generally. Because climate change and oceans are inextricably linked because the oceans are the seek(\*) for carbon pollution. But at the same time the oceans are in some ways have been with exceptions of very remote areas of land mass the last frontier for exploitation and access, particularly when we see how active nations like China now are in securing access to areas. South Korea another one, Japan another one. So I don't believe that the issue of unregulated or illegal

catches and finding endangered species, dolphins or whatever it might be, whether they've come by bycatch or deliberately is something which is a significant question in management for Indigenous communities, even remote Indigenous communities. There are quite well established protocols there. Sometimes the community might need to have the opportunity to work with parks and rangers and wildlife to ensure that the protocols as laid out are followed.

But the far, far, far, far bigger problem is essentially those players in international fora who don't play by the rules or who seek to get around the rules. I mean there's no better example of this than our major trading partner Japan and them seeking to get around the rules that have come through the International Whaling Commission, following the successful court case which we took to the ICJ to have their scientific whaling declared invalid under the IWC and that's a fairly clear example and it happens in other places as well. Driving a consensus multilaterally and being able to seek greater regulation, greater frameworks whatever it might be, can only happen if you've got the bona fides under your belt when you walk into the room. If we're not prepared here in Australia to take the steps necessary to reduce emissions and impact, if we're not prepared to be a strong player in that place, then our leverage on nations who are doing things we disagree is much much less and any former minister or foreign minister will tell you that.

So, I really worry about the oceans, I worry about the amount of plastic that's in the sea. I worry about the fact that it's showing up in fish that's been caught and in peoples diets and I'm concerned about the fact that the law of the sea as we currently know it isn't properly being maintained and observed across either the Northern or the Southern Hemisphere. And of course we have the Trump presidency as well which has added another quite unpredictable element into multilateral regulation under existing convention. Now it seems like quite a technical answer - I apologise to the kids who have come in here from school to hear all this stuff but that's kind of the language of how countries make these things work internationally. At a very basic level though, it's about ensuring that those citizens in those countries, just as citizens in our countries who in many cases are facing the same sets of problems themselves that their voices are heard and that this upwelling if you like, the kind of upwelling which give whales decent feed becomes an upwelling of direct action participation and ultimately of governments to start taking the environment a lot more seriously.

On the question of shadow frontbenches and frontbenchers. Look I'm going to leave it actually. I mean I could- I obviously strongly support the Labor Party and I think it's a pretty strong frontbench that they've got now in Opposition. I can say that I did have the privilege when I was ACF president of working with a number of different governments and prime ministers. So I worked with Prime Minister Hawke and Keating, I had interactions with the Howard Government and so even though I was playing a lot of music and getting up and down around the place on

stage, I was in and out of Canberra a fair bit and my experience about that for what it's worth is that you've got to give your ministers, his or her, head to make a go of it. Try and get the people who've got good talent and want to make a difference and essentially have a decent policy framework in place, i.e. old style policy - this is what we say we're going to do, this is how we're going to do it and now this is why we're doing it and then get on with that work. Now the modern day to day political environment is much different, it's much more highly charged, it's much more time sensitive and you're getting less people coming into the Parliament who've had wide experience in other areas other than politics, so there are some limitations with that approach but I still strongly endorse it.

SABRA LANE: Our last question today, Leo Alder.

QUESTION: Hello, Leo from the University of Canberra Press Club. You can rest easy as I only have a single question for you today.

[Laughter]

PETER GARRETT: The last one's always a doozy.

[Laughter]

QUESTION: Yes. But having experienced both activism as well as the grim reality of political compromise, do you think the political process hampers real change in Australia?

PETER GARRETT:

Look it's a good question. But I think the answer - and I hope it came through a little bit in this address - is it's actually about both. You know, I worked inside the system and some of it was grim. Some of my colleagues here will know that parts of it were but some parts were not and I considered it an incredible honour to do that work. And also, I knew as an activist that quite often what we were doing is we were asking governments to make decisions. So it's a partnership actually. Probably sometimes it's uncomfortable but it's the way that our system works and I don't think anyone is better or worse than the other. I think we need them both to be working as well as they can and I certainly encourage people, especially young people, to consider both activism and politics and in that way they can make a difference.

SABRA LANE:

Excellent. Everyone, join with me in thanking Peter Garrett.

[Applause]

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