

Sharma calls for Australia to play a bigger international role on climate

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

The Liberal candidate in Wentworth, Dave Sharma, has called for Australia to do more on the international stage to address climate change, declaring this is “where our efforts can have the biggest impact”.

These efforts should include trying to turn around the United States’ decision to leave the Paris agreement, Sharma told the Coalition for Conservation on Tuesday night.

As Scott Morrison this week has sought to boost his government’s credentials on the climate issue, Sharma said a small improvement in the emissions trajectories of large emitters such as China would have much greater impact than anything Australia could itself do.

Read more: [Morrison to announce \\$2 billion over 10 years for climate fund](#)

Australia produced only 1.3% of global CO2 emissions. “This is not an argument for doing nothing. We need to be credible in our own efforts to reduce our emissions. But it does make clear that Australia cannot solve climate change by ourselves,” he said.

“This [international effort] is where Australia should be more ambitious and invest greater effort. In the diplomacy and the negotiations to ensure all countries keep their Paris commitments. In helping to raise the level of ambition over time, as technology allows.

“And in persuading countries that have pulled out of the Paris agreement - including the United States - to come back in.

“This is where we should be investing additional effort, and where I believe my own experience in multilateral negotiations could help us,” said Sharma, a former diplomat.

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Sharma, who last year lost in the Wentworth byelection to independent Kerryn Phelps, is running again in Malcolm Turnbull's old seat. The Liberals believe they have some hope of regaining the seat, on the assumption the savage protest vote against the ousting of the former prime minister is likely to have diminished.

Climate change was an important issue in the byelection campaign, and Sharma presents as one of the more progressives voices in the party on it.

This week Morrison announced initiatives including A\$2 billion over a decade to extend the emissions reduction fund that Tony Abbott established, now rebadged as the Climate Solutions Fund, \$1.38 billion towards building the Snowy 2.0 scheme, and support for a new interconnector between Tasmania and the mainland.

Read more: [*The government's \\$2bn climate fund: a rebadged rehash of old mistakes*](#)

Sharma said: "We need to be serious and credible in addressing the risk posed by climate change, and for that we - and I mean the whole world here - need to be lowering our emissions and reducing our carbon footprint".

"We are in the midst right now of a technology-driven energy transition.

"From centralised, fossil-fuel based power generation, with a 'dumb' one-way grid.

"To a more decentralised network, with greater renewables generation, backed by storage, and a 'smart' two-way grid where households are both consumers and suppliers of power.

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"This transition is being driven by market forces, competitive pressures, consumer and corporate behaviour, and capital markets."

Coal would continue to have a role during this transition. Sharma said. "But market forces are pushing coal out of the energy mix," and not just in Australia.

"In Australia, new coal-fired power generation simply cannot compete with the cost of renewables plus storage.

"And - whether people like it or not - carbon risk is real and is already being factored in by banks, investors and the markets. Glencore's announcement last week is illustrative."

But if coal was closed down with haste, power bills would go up and the lights would go out, he said.

"A steady transition to greater renewable energy sources is feasible and practical — but an overnight switch is not".

The energy markets were headed in the right direction, Sharma said.

"If we work with the grain of market forces, help smooth out the necessary transition, and ensure clear signals are sent to investors, then we can meet our Paris emissions reduction targets in the electricity sector without having an impact on price or reliability".

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

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