

Shorten distances himself from Green overtures on climate policy

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Bill Shorten has rebuffed overtures by the Greens leader Richard Di Natale to work closely with a Labor government to promote a strong policy on climate.

Shorten accused the Greens of “trailing their coat and saying, ‘Look at me’”.

“The fact of the matter is that if we get elected we’ll be making decisions in a Labor cabinet and the decisions will be made by members of parliament of the Labor party,” Shorten said, in anticipation of Di Natale’s Wednesday address to the National Press Club.

“What we will do is we will implement the policies we’ve put forward,” Shorten said.

In fact a Labor government, which would be in a minority in the Senate, would probably have to negotiate with the Greens to get its climate policy through the Senate.

After the backlash against the formal Labor-Greens alliance under the Gillard government – in which the two parties worked in conjunction on the carbon pricing scheme – Shorten is anxious to keep maximum distance between the ALP and the minor party.

For its part the government paints Labor and the Greens as “joined at the hip”. Scott Morrison said on Wednesday: “We know who holds the chain – if it’s not the Greens it’s the militant unions”.

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In his Press Club appearance Di Natale ran a double line – attacking Labor policies on climate and the environment as inadequate, while stressing the need for co-operation in government.

The Greens were “deeply concerned that Labor has taken a weaker climate policy in 2019 than what they proposed in 2016, which was weaker still than what they took to the 2013 election”.

Di Natale said he was not seeking a formal alliance between the Greens and Labor as in 2010 – rather “we want to work constructively. We want to negotiate”.

He was “not surprised to hear the response from Bill Shorten today [...] we hear that time and time again in the lead-up to an election.

“But we need the Greens in the Senate working with the Labor party and other voices to ensure that the policy that’s delivered meets the science and that is up to the challenge of transitioning our economy”.

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A Shorten government “will have two pathways open to them after the election, ” he said.

“They can either pursue a climate and energy policy designed to pass through a divided Coalition party room [...] or they can negotiate a comprehensive response, based on science, with the Greens.

“My message to Bill Shorten is that you can’t achieve bipartisanship with the Liberals because

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they can't even agree among themselves," he said.

"The decision for Bill Shorten is whether he follows the take-it-or-leave-it approach of Kevin Rudd in 2009, or negotiates with the Greens, just like Julia Gillard did in 2011, to deliver a climate policy that gives future generations a chance".

Di Natale would not be drawn on what approach the Greens would take if negotiating climate policy with Labor. "The key part of any negotiation is not to conduct it publicly through the media."

The Greens leader defended his party against criticism over its refusal to support the Rudd government's scheme, saying Rudd's policy "would have locked in failure".

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Meanwhile a number of independent MPs and candidates have signed a statement initiated by the Australian Conservation Foundation committing, if elected, to work with each other and other parliamentarians to promote initiatives on climate.

"We recognise that to be a true servant of our communities and our national parliament, we must demonstrate and deliver strong leadership on climate change," they say.

Among the objectives they commit to are:

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opposing the development of the Adani mine

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ensuring Kyoto Protocol carryover credits are not used to meet Australia's 2030 emissions education target

-

developing a roadmap to power Australia from 100% renewable energy, aiming to achieve at least 50% by 2030

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opposing attempts to commit public money to new or existing coal or other fossil fuel operations, including any government underwriting of coal or gas power plants.

Those signing the statement are Andrew Wilkie, member for Clark; Kerryn Phelps, member for Wentworth; Julia Banks, member for Chisholm who is running as an independent candidate in Flinders; Dr Helen Haines, independent candidate for Indi; Zali Steggall, independent candidate for Warringah; Rob Oakeshott, independent candidate for Cowper, and Oliver Yates, independent candidate for Kooyong.

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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