

Climate Action Moreland

Questions for Wills Candidates – Federal Election 2013

Response from Tim Read, Greens Candidate

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1. With scientists forecasting substantial sea level rise this century, many people from low lying coastal regions of Southeast Asia and islands in the South Pacific will be seeking asylum in Australia as climate refugees. What should Australia's response be?
 - A) *Australia's response should be compassionate and practical rather than punitive. I believe we should be prepared to settle some here. But communities may not want to be dispersed in Australia and more creative solutions may include assisting communities to resettle closer to their home, with financial assistance from Australia. Given the enormous profits made from coal exports, some of these profits will need to be set aside for this future use. The Greens propose a \$2 per tonne tax on thermal coal exports to fund disaster mitigation and response. This is a good precedent for the sort of fund-raising that will be required. Neither of the old parties wishes to acknowledge or account for the emissions from coal exports.*

2. The Australian government has committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 5% below 2000 levels by 2020. However, under the emissions trading scheme, Australia does not need to reduce local emissions, but can purchase emission reduction certificates from overseas.
 - What do you think Australia's emission reduction targets should be by 2020? 2030? 2040?
 - A) *The Greens believe that a atmospheric CO2 should be reduced to 350 ppm to ensure a safe climate. We have called for emissions reductions of 25 to 40% by 2020 (the old parties want 5% from 2000 levels). The Greens want 90% of Australia's energy generated by renewable sources by 2030 and net zero carbon emissions ASAP.*

 - Should these targets be conditional on the actions of other countries?
 - A) *No. We should be providing leadership to other countries, rather than waiting for them. We have the resources, the know-how, and – given our coal and other exports – both the moral and practical imperative to provide this kind of leadership.*

 - How would these emission reductions be achieved? Could you please describe how the emission reduction schemes that your party proposes will work in practice?
 - A) *The Carbon Price is already working. Emissions from electricity generation fell by 7% in the year following its introduction – see <http://theconversation.com/how-clean-are-our-energy-policies-15926> for a full discussion.*

Investment in renewable energies is already working. In the week beginning 10 August, wind farms supplied 47% of South Australia's electricity. The issue is for continuing political will that stays the course and doesn't cave in to narrow interest-groups – often the most wealthy ones, who ironically cry poor.

- What is your position on whether Australia should be required to reduce its local emissions rather than purchasing certificates from overseas?

A) *A large proportion of emission-reductions should continue to be Australian. Local reduction in emissions often means new jobs and skills in renewable energy generation – all necessary for us to move beyond a coal-dependent economy.*

Offshore reductions, provided they are genuine and verifiable, are also necessary. This is a mechanism for funding reductions in poorer countries less able to afford renewable energy technology. Since we export a lot of coal, we have a responsibility to spend some coal tax on overseas wind farms or replacing inefficient polluting equipment.

▪ *How do you propose to reduce emissions produced in Australia?*

A) *1. Remove fossil-fuel subsidies.*

2. Maintain a significant carbon price – the Greens insisted on this in return for supporting the minority government in 2010. Without the Greens we would have had a citizens' assembly.

3. Promote energy conservation/efficiency and reduce demand. The Greens propose an Energy Savings Agency which will manage peak power demand, reducing the need for more expensive poles and wires and which will also set a fair price for solar electricity to stimulate investment in this.

4. Invest in public transport- the Greens are the only party calling for high speed rail

5. Promote renewable energy generation with a high renewable energy target 90% by 2030, mandating that 90% of electricity is generated by renewable sources. The Greens will boost funding to the Clean Energy Finance Corporation from \$10 billion over five years to \$30 billion over ten years. RenewEconomy gives an independent overview of where the Greens differ from the old parties: <http://reneweconomy.com.au/2013/election-2013-where-major-parties-stand-on-clean-energy-and-climate-82709>

6. Move money that Australia invests in the Future Fund out of fossil fuel assets: an estimated \$2.5 billion and into more ethical assets. Divestment of this sort is necessary to help convince business that we are serious about leaving 80% of our coal in the ground. The world's corporate balance sheets lists five times the amount of fossil fuel reserves required to lift global average temperatures above two degrees. Two degrees is the agreed "safe" upper limit of increase.

3. *Australia is regarded as particularly vulnerable to climate change. Given the lack of action to date, it is inevitable that Australians will be subject to serious impacts, including adverse health impacts and increased mortality due to rising temperatures and heatwaves, changes in rainfall and water availability for drinking and agriculture. What are your policies to reduce the impact of climate change on Australians?*

- *A) The abovementioned \$2 per tonne tax on thermal coal exports is intended to fund natural disaster preparation, such as permanent firebreaks, flood levees and coastal protection. A dollar spent on preparation achieves more than two spent in responding to disasters. Prevention is even better, but we're already seeing disasters and CO2 lasts decades in the atmosphere, so we'll be seeing more.*
- *The decade-long drought that ended two years ago meant that for several years, the Murray didn't reach the sea. Irrigation water was over-allocated and South Australian communities were missing out and the Coorong was dying. Australia's major water supplies must be publicly owned and managed through a fairer system of regulated water allocation. Instead of expensive, environmentally damaging and power-hungry water plants, we need better water effi-*

ciency and recycling. Water conservation must be an integral feature of all new mining, agricultural and building projects, large or small.

- 4. Heatwave induced mortality is expected to increase in inner urban areas like the Wills electorate due to the interaction between increasing temperatures caused by climate change and the urban heat island effect. While 173 people lost their lives in the Black Saturday Bushfires, 374 people died in Victoria due to the heatwave according to Victoria's chief health officer, Dr John Carnie. The 2013 State of Australian Cities report found that heat-related deaths are expected to quadruple in number by 2050. What is your response to this public health threat?

A) Prevention is critical. While we need to take steps to protect those vulnerable to heatwaves, we need to reverse global warming to have any hope of a healthy environment for humans on this planet in the centuries to come.

Meanwhile, multiple arms of government need to take action to prevent heatwave deaths. The health system needs to identify vulnerable individuals, such as those with renal or cardiac failure and prepare heatwave plans which may involve temporary dose reductions of certain medication, such as diuretics. Cooling refuges with back-up power will be needed. The continuing uptake of power hungry airconditioning needs to be matched by uptake of solar-panels. The Greens want to encourage solar PV by lifting the feed-in tariff.

Local and state governments needs to encourage the revegetation of the city by protecting urban parkland and increasing street trees, to reduce the trapping of heat in the city.

5. Transport is a large contributor to climate change. What are your policies to transform the transport sector to ensure it is sustainable?

A) High-speed rail- a fast train to Sydney and Brisbane will be popular, generate revenue and take cars off the Hume and planes out of the sky.

The East-West link freeway and tunnel project will rapidly fill up and redistribute congestion, rather than fixing it. This and other large road projects should be shelved, and the resulting funding redirected to more urban public transport and active transport facilities: foot and bike paths.

Sustainable urban design, minimizing urban sprawl, is important to improve the cost-efficiency of public transport and reduce dependence on cars. We need to stimulate development of more fuel-efficient trucks, buses and cars and the Greens propose a Sustainable Transport fund for this role.

6. Approximately \$10 billion is paid out each year to subsidize the use of fossil fuels, including in aviation, which helps to keep the price of flying low. Green groups have proposed that instead of subsidizing activities that contribute to climate change, we should be funding technologies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions including energy efficiency and renewable energy. What are your policies on these subsidies to fossil fuels? If you propose to remove these subsidies, please describe how you would do so and over what time frame. What are your policies on redirecting these funds to technologies that do not contribute to climate change?

A) *The Greens call for immediate cessation of fossil fuel subsidies because they encourage greenhouse emissions and waste needed revenue. This funding should be transferred to the renewable energy, energy efficiency and sustainable transport sectors.*

7. The burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas) are major contributors to climate change leading to a substantial carbon bubble in conflict with emission reduction targets, according to the Carbon Tracker Initiative, Grantham Institute, and Australia's Climate Institute. What are your policies regarding the following: coal exports; use of coal for power generation; use of natural gas for power generation? What would be your strategies for phasing these out?

A) *Australia's Future Fund is estimated to hold \$2.5 billion invested in fossil fuel industries. The Fund should move this money into less damaging industries. Divestment will discourage further expansion of this sector. The Greens will block expansion of existing coal mines or establishment of new ones. We will block CSG and shale gas exploration and extraction.*

The \$2/tonne tax on coal exports is my favourite Greens policy because for the first time a political party has proposed that Australia acknowledge, measure and at least partially account for its exported contribution to climate change.

A carbon price allows industry to phase out fossil fuels as they become too expensive and renewable energy becomes competitive. A price also acts to reduce demand. Investors will then move toward renewable energy stimulated by the Greens measures outlined above.

8. Households and business can reduce their carbon emissions through increased energy efficiency, solar water heating and generating their own renewable electricity by installing solar panels. Do you support these measures and if so, what are your policies to ensure these measures become widespread? Do you personally use solar hot water and/or solar panels or buy Green Power?

A) *I strongly support measures to reduce demand for gas and electricity and to increase power generation at the point of consumption. See the proposed Energy Savings Agency above. The very expensive Royal Commission into the 2009 fires called for power lines to be put underground without considering the benefits of doing away with them altogether in many isolate communities that are able to generate power on their rooftops and with local windturbines.*

Yes our house has solar hot water, solar panels and green power.

9. Some councils, including Moreland City Council, have announced that they are carbon neutral. However, this has been achieved partly through the purchase of offsets from overseas projects. What is your position on councils, businesses etc using offsets to claim carbon neutrality?

A) *As in Q2 above, there is an important international role for verifiable offsets that result in real emission reductions. These need to be capped so that local organisations are compelled to achieve reductions from local efficiency and from using renewable energy. Offsets are an essential component of an emissions trading scheme. Since responding to climate change is a global endeavour, we need to consider this type of market-based mechanism that is likely to appeal to large economies such as the US and China.*

10. Food waste is a major source of carbon and methane emissions. What are your policies to reduce food waste and reduce emissions from food waste? Do you personally compost waste food?

A) *Our compost bin houses a vibrant and diverse community of slugs, worms and those little fruit stickers. The Greens support the use of levies to discourage unnecessary use of landfill and would like to use the funds raised to encourage alternative forms of waste disposal. We also support active management of greenhouse gas emissions from current and legacy landfill sites, capturing and using methane to generate power as already happens at Werribee.*

11. Do you know that in Wills we have platypus in Merri Creek? Eastern Grey Kangaroos visit the Fawkner grasslands? We have rare plant species along our creek corridors? Funding for biodiversity has recently been slashed by the federal government. What is your policy on federal government biodiversity funding and species and eco-system conservation?

A) *Most plants and animals in Australia are found nowhere else. Many are under threat from habitat-loss, feral animals and climate change. The Greens want to reverse Labor's recent \$470 million cut to the Biodiversity Fund which came from the Clean Energy Package and spend an additional \$40 million per year to map important habitat across Australia and urgently list currently unlisted endangered species. The Greens want the Federal government to retain veto powers over Australia's most environmentally damaging projects, rather than giving them away to the state. More details: <https://greens.org.au/policy-platform>*