



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH**

**Address-in-Reply**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 19 February 2008**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

---

## SPEECH

<b>Date</b> Tuesday, 19 February 2008	<b>Source</b> House
<b>Page</b> 724	<b>Proof</b> No
<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Responder</b>
<b>Speaker</b> Secker, Patrick, MP	<b>Question No.</b>

---

**Mr SECKER** (Barker) (5.52 pm)—I congratulate the new member for Bonner on her first speech in this parliament. Those of us who have been in this chamber for a while have seen some very good first speeches by new members on both sides of this parliament and it certainly augurs well for the future of this country when we have such good maiden speeches.

I intend to raise several matters in the address-in-reply to the Governor-General's address. It will be quite wide-ranging. I start off by talking about some information I have received, a scientific report on aerosol plumes and the cause of droughts and El Nino events by regional dimming. I do not profess to be a scientist, but the information that I have had explained to me makes me intuitively think that this is quite correct. I think it would be very important for the new environment minister to actually take notice of this report and get it assessed. I actually think it would probably take less than a week's assessment by a competent scientist, so it is not as if there would be great expense. I did seek leave of the previous person at the table on the government side to table the report and I seek leave for tabling that report.

Leave granted.

**Mr SECKER**—I appreciate that leave being given. I think it is an important report. What it is basically saying, in rough layman's terms, is that things like volcanic ash or a lot of carbon particles in the air cause regional dimming. Obviously it will stop the sunlight coming through into the atmosphere below because it is blocked by these carbon or volcanic ash particles. Intuitively I think you can then say that it must have an effect on the climate below that smog cloud, for want of a better phrase. What I think this report will show is that there is quite a causal effect on the drought that we had, especially last year, from the regional dimming caused by the fires in Indonesia, where they have been burning down the forests to plant palm trees for biodiesel production. It can be shown elsewhere in the world, such as in the Amazon forests or in the Sahara desert or the pollution that is being caused in China by the extra development, that this is actually having an effect on the climate. So I hope that the minister has an open mind on this and will read this report and get it assessed officially. I would suggest that the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology would be two government instrumentalities that would be very useful in assessing that report. It may come back that it is a very good report or it may not, but I think it is worth going through that assessment.

It certainly was a very interesting campaign. I think anyone that gets involved in a campaign like the recent one realises that things can change, and they obviously have at the election. One of the issues that I want to address during this speech is the issue of climate change and in particular to consider scientific exposure of some of what I might call the colourful language that is being used on climate change. Perhaps we can quite reasonably challenge some of the doom-laden views often promulgated by alarmists. Again that happened today in question time when the minister for the environment talked about a four to six degree increase in global temperature. I do not think even the most rabid of the promoters of climate change or anyone in the IPCC report have even remotely suggested that we are going to increase the temperature by four to six degrees. I think at most we are talking about one degree or 1.5 degrees. Six degrees obviously would have an effect. I do not reject that we have climate change; I believe we have always had climate change. It has been going for thousands and thousands of years. If we want to look back at history, for example, around the 1300s the recorded temperatures were probably in the vicinity of two degrees warmer than we have now. As a result of that we were producing more food in Europe, where there was a much warmer period. Even if we have had a warming in the last 25 years, we preceded that by a cooling over 30 to 35 years, and that is just part of what normally happens. So I think we can question some of the statements that are made to suggest that the end is nigh.

Before I say more on that, I would like to extend my thanks to the hardworking Barker campaign team. Their dedication and assistance helped me to return to serve the people of Barker for a fourth term as a member of this House. This fantastic team has seen the electorate of Barker return my party in fine form. We did experience a swing against us, the first time since I was elected that I have had a swing against me. In fact, in the 2001 and 2004 elections I had the biggest swings in the state of South Australia. But basically that has disappeared with

this election, so I am back to about where I started. However, we did win 105 of the booths, which is more than in 2004, and did achieve positive swings in 12 of those booths.

The results in the electorate of Barker were the culmination of months of hard work by my wonderful team, both prior to and during the election. Their commitment was fantastic and their loyalty was unwavering. I consider myself most fortunate to have such a fantastic team. My campaign team worked tirelessly on this campaign. In our campaign committee we had members from all over the electorate, and my electorate covers 64,000 square kilometres—which is bigger than Tasmania, to put that in perspective. There are distances of 500 kilometres between members of my team, so you can imagine the logistics of getting them together and working through those tyrannies of distance that you have in a large rural electorate.

I would especially like to thank my lovely wife, Sharon, whose positive and vibrant approach, together with her total support and commitment not only during the campaign but also over the last few years, supported me during this long campaign. I think any of those in this House will understand what our spouses go through not only in our campaigns but also during our whole period in parliament. They certainly do give up a lot and carry some of the burden that we have as members of parliament. In fact, I am one of those people who are lucky enough not to get stressed very much, but I think I might be a carrier. Our campaign staff, our spouses and families do get a bit more stressed than we do sometimes. I think they feel it a lot more than we do.

I would also like to thank my staff members—Beth, Karen, Deb, Haley, Megan and Kylie—who worked tirelessly throughout the campaign. They worked long and hard days. That is the sort of support and loyalty that I had from my staff, and I do not think that anyone could wish for better. I would also like to thank Tim Cartledge, who was my FEC president, and Norm Paterson, our FEC treasurer. He is a treasure as a treasurer and he has certainly been a great supporter of the Liberal Party for a very, very long time.

Mr Deputy Speaker, as you would be aware, election campaigns come at a great cost. That is the price of democracy. But, then again, I think elections are the oxygen of democracy as well, and it is very important that I take the opportunity to publicly thank those who lent their financial support to my campaign. Their generosity is greatly appreciated. Just as they have demonstrated their faith in me as their parliamentary representative, I would like to express my faith in the businesses and individuals in the seat of Barker.

Lastly, and with incessant appreciation, I would like to thank the Liberal Party branches of Barker. I have 24 branches, which is in anyone's terms a lot to deal with. Certainly they are absolutely fantastic in the support they give to the Liberal Party both financially and on the ground. They are the lifeblood of the campaign. As I said, Barker is a very large electorate—it has more than 120 polling booths—so we rely heavily on the loyalty and commitment of our volunteers and party members. That I was returned to this House for a fourth term is a result of the dedicated support from all our supporters, and I thank them sincerely.

Being in opposition is new to me, indeed to many of us here. I have made a promise to the people of Barker that I am coming out to fight for them. I will not allow the Rudd government to make them easy targets in funding cuts. Regional and rural constituents are a resilient and determined group. The nature of their environment endows them so, and I commit myself to standing up for them over the next three years as we regroup to ensure that we are elected to government at the next election.

Nearly 12 months ago, when opening Labor's climate change summit in Canberra, Mr Rudd said that his aim was to harness the nation's best and brightest talent. On gaining office, he appointed Senator Penny Wong as Minister for Climate Change and Water. Minister Wong, since being nominated, has been to Bali and to Honolulu, which is probably quite nice, while steadfastly telling the water-desperate residents of my electorate that it will be the end of the year before she can see for herself the issues they face—and this is in her own state. The Minister for Climate Change and Water confirmed this view with her inauspicious start to question time last Wednesday by refusing to answer whether or not she had input into the 'razor gang' cuts to environmental funding and then giving contradictory answers as to the nature of the cuts. If that is the brightest and best talent, I share the fear of my constituents for the outcome.

We have a \$10 billion plan to fix up the Murray-Darling Basin. About \$6 billion of that will be to provide better infrastructure, mainly in areas where we have open channels so that we can reduce quite drastically the amount of seepage and evaporation from those open channels throughout the Murray-Darling Basin. Another \$3 billion of that will be used to buy back water licences. But after three months, unfortunately, we have not seen any of that funding spent. That is a very large concern to me, because it is not until those infrastructure

improvements are made and those overallocated water licences are bought back that we will really receive the great benefit to the Murray-Darling Basin.

To put this into perspective, that plan is designed to save between 2½ thousand and 3,000 gigalitres of water on an annual basis—up to 3,000 gigalitres a year. To again put that into perspective, the whole of South Australia—Adelaide and irrigators—uses about 750 gigalitres out of the Murray River. So we will be saving up to four times what we are using in the whole of South Australia. It is a very significant measure that needs to be taken. I was very pleased that we made that commitment last year. Unfortunately, we were held back for six months by Victoria and, in the end, we just said that we would go along without Victoria. We still have not, after three months, seen any great change to that suggestion that they come on board.

I, and members of my party here, recognise that climate change is a complex subject. There are genuine areas of uncertainty and scientific controversy. There are also a number of misunderstandings and myths, which are recycled, often by non-climate scientists, and portrayed as scientific fact. One of the factors which have complicated the public and political response to the climate change issue has been a widespread misunderstanding of uncertainty in science. The issues surrounding the greenhouse effect, global warming, climate change and their potential consequences have been vigorously debated among scientists, politicians and the general public in Australia and around the world since the 1980s. In fact, I remember that in the seventies the same scientists who are now saying that we have global warming were saying that we were going through a mini ice age. I wonder how they can change their views so quickly. The challenge was then and is now to identify and attempt to measure the elements of climate change, examine the possible and likely results and agree on policies that attempt to reduce the identified serious problems.

In November 2004, the then New South Wales Labor Premier, Bob Carr, launched a report his government had commissioned from the CSIRO on the future regional climate of his state. His press release stated:

NSW can expect fewer frosts but more-frequent droughts, heatwaves, rainstorms and strong winds.

Ironically, the CSIRO report contained an important, explicit and up-front caveat which essentially stated that the report related to climate change scenarios based on computer modelling and that the models involved simplifications of the real physical processes that were not fully understood. That caveat went on to say that no responsibility would be accepted by the CSIRO or the New South Wales government for the accuracy of the projections in the report or the actions on reliance of the report. That did not stop Bob Carr from making his definitive unsupported scientific conclusions.

It is fairly generally agreed that, in science, it is only possible to prove the falsehood of a proposition and not its truth, and that there is no such thing as absolute certainty. In the face of scientific uncertainty, Mr Carr's unequivocal conclusion represented a serious overstatement, and this continues to be the case with the Rudd Labor government. If we are going to have problems as a result of climate change, which we have always had, I think the most sensible approach would be to adapt. In the end, some of the other suggestions that have been put forward are going to come at a great cost to the Australian economy.

As I said, I do not deny that climate change is occurring. The fact is that climate is always changing; change is what climate is. History tells us that the rates and magnitudes of warming during the late 20th century fell within the limits of earlier natural climate change and it follows that it cannot be attributed solely, or even partly, to human origin. It is also a fact that the average global temperature has not increased during the eight years since 1998—which was a warm El Nino year—despite an increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide of four per cent over the same period. The recent rate of average global temperature rise has been between one and two degrees Celsius per century, which falls squarely within natural rates of climate change for the last 10,000 years. Average global temperature has been several degrees warmer than it is today many times in the recent geological past.

There is also room for uncertainty in inferences drawn from the recent rise in global temperature. The recent rise in itself is real enough, but that does not necessarily mean that human activity is to blame. There you have it, Mr Speaker. I will be speaking more in this the 42nd Parliament on climate change and how we should be responding to it. I thank the House.

**The SPEAKER**—Order! Before I call the member for Dobell, I remind honourable members that this is the honourable member's first speech. I ask the House to extend to him the usual courtesies.