

**Speech at the
Green Capital “What’s Next”
Forum**

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Check against delivery

Thank you for the invitation to address you this morning.

Eighteen months ago, during his first speech to environment groups, including the Total Environment Centre – Premier Iemma observed that the relationship between the environment movement and environment-minded Members of Parliament has been extremely important in the history of this State.

It's a relationship Labor's always taken seriously, and always will – it's one that I have especially taken seriously during the last eight years I've had the honour to serve as the State's Environment Minister.

On March 24, voters who care about the environment have a clear choice.

Their decision will, in no small measure, help decide who forms the next government in New South Wales.

The Greens, and perhaps other smaller parties, will, I'm sure, attract support, and win seats in the Legislative Council, just as some Independents will in the Legislative Assembly. But they won't be governing the State.

There can only be one winner.

Either Morris Iemma's Labor Government will be re-elected or Peter Debnam's Liberal – National Party Coalition will govern this State for the next four years.

So why should Labor be supported on March 24?

One of the features of this campaign is that, from Labor's perspective, we can point to our environmental achievements, and we can lay out plans for the future.

We've achieved a lot. But we are not resting on our laurels.

Some of today's environmental problems – such as species loss, landclearing, contaminated land – have taken many decades to come about.

Many of them – climate change is perhaps the best and most obvious example – are global in nature.

And climate change is certainly the most pervasive in terms of its potentially devastating impacts and the policy responses that are required to effectively deal with it.

Self evidently, problems such as these can rarely, if ever, be solved by making just one or two decisions.

Rather, they must be solved incrementally. And whether we like it or not, it's slow and hard work.

But I can assure you of this.

The Labor Government's energy, and its commitment to make the environmental decisions that matter is as strong as it's ever been.

As a Minister, you make decisions, some significant, many of them are relatively minor, but collectively they contribute to progress – to building a more comprehensive reserve system, to cleaner air, to cleaner water, to remediating an area of contaminated land, to sustainability.

And it's those decisions – the many thousands of them made over the last 12 years – that **have** made a difference.

Forgive me now if I therefore quickly run through Labor's environmental record since March 1995.

The record is often glossed over as people move onto the next issue, but it is important to state it here today.

Under Labor, nearly 450 new national parks and reserves have been created – covering more than 2.6 million hectares.

In March 1995 there were 328 national parks. Today, there are 770.

Labor has created more new national park than any other government in the State's history – by a long way.

And we're not only creating new national parks, we're making sure they're properly funded, resourced and managed.

The Coalition often accuses Labor of not providing enough resources to manage these new parks.

They think if they say it often enough, people might believe them.

But let's look at the facts.

The Coalition's last budget allocated just \$15 to manage every hectare of national park. Today, it's around \$35 per hectare.

This record funding is helping to eradicate feral animals and weeds and to better protect threatened species. More money is being provided for park visitor facilities, \$37 million for iconic parks in the Sydney area alone.

Take recycled water, an issue of obvious importance in this election campaign.

In March 1995, the former Coalition Government left us with a system that recycled and re-used only around six billion litres of water in Sydney every year.

Today, we've nearly quadrupled that to around 22 billion litres, and decisions made in recent weeks will see it go to 70 billion litres a year by 2015.

And Labor's plans to build a recycled water grid will boost that further to 100 billion litres in the next 25 years.

From six billion to **one hundred billion litres** of water recycled every year. And yet you still hear it said that we don't support recycling!

Moving on to air quality.

Before March 1995, Sydney's air quality was often very poor.

Toxic lead emissions stood at 310 tonnes every year and harmful carbon monoxide emissions stood at 768,000 tonnes a year.

Today, lead emissions have been slashed by 97% and carbon monoxide emissions by 29%.

Other air pollutants have either fallen or remained steady, despite the growth in population and car use.

The plans are in place to do even better, and further reduce air pollution.

In 1995, we inherited a plethora of out-of-date and overlapping pollution control laws, some dating back to 1961. There were no laws to remediate contaminated land whatsoever.

Today, we have modern, streamlined pollution laws, including the toughest penalties for polluters in the country.

The State's first ever *Contaminated Land Management Act* was passed in 1997 and it's working.

It's being used to clean up 100 year old industrial sites and contaminated sediments in Sydney Harbour.

Before Labor's laws, little or nothing could be done, except put up a fence around the contaminated site to keep people out.

Turning to waste.

In 1995, 430 kilograms of waste was being generated by every Sydney resident each and every year, and only 60 kilograms was being recycled.

Today, following Labor's successful waste reforms, waste generation has fallen by 35% to 278 kilograms and recycling has increased to 102 kilograms per person.

Waste is going down, and recycling is going up.

There are literally dozens of other examples I could use.

But as I said before, many of the environmental challenges we face today result from many decades of inaction.

Others, like climate change, have come to the public's attention only fairly recently.

Given the obvious importance of climate change, and the immense policy challenge we face to successfully address its impacts, I'll take a few moments to explain Labor's policy.

First, the facts. Eleven of the last twelve years have been the warmest years of global surface temperature.

On current trends, average global temperatures will rise by 2 – 3 degrees within the next fifty years or so.

It's no longer might rise, it's **will** rise.

For many of us, the imperative for action in the face of devastating drought and climate change is ethical, spiritual, or just sheer common sense. The need to care for our environment is accepted as an intrinsic good; as is the need to make major lifestyle changes.

But others need some convincing.

In my view, the arguments can't get any more compelling than they are today.

Managing climate change is about managing risk. Scientists tell us that there is a real risk that unless we take early action, we could trigger 'runaway' climate change events which compound into an even more serious crisis.

There is an analogous risk in business terms. Without action, NSW risks missing out on significant business and economic opportunities as the markets for new technologies, and efficient goods and services expand.

We need to position NSW and take full advantage of the opportunities that will arise in what will likely become a global carbon-constrained environment.

A re-elected Lemma Government aims to do just that.

NSW has already been the first State to set strict targets to reduce greenhouse gases – to cut back to 2000 levels by 2025 and reduce our emissions by 60% by 2050.

NSW established the world's first mandatory carbon emissions trading scheme which has prevented the release of 38 million tonnes of greenhouse gas – the equivalent of taking 8 million cars off the road.

In the absence of Federal leadership, NSW and other States have led the national agenda on key areas such as emissions trading and mandated targets for renewable energy use.

The key feature of the climate change package announced by the Premier only this week is a \$310 million Climate Change fund.

The fund includes a dedicated \$100 million fund to provide rebates of up to \$3,000 for households that become more energy and water efficient, including:

- Up to \$1,500 for an approved rainwater tank plumbed in to a toilet and/or washing machine,
- Up to \$1,200 for an approved solar hot water system,
- Up to \$300 to convert from an electric to an approved gas hot water system, and
- Up to \$300 to install energy efficient home insulation,

These initiatives will all help individuals and families to do their bit in reducing greenhouse emissions.

But we need to do more.

A re-elected lemma Government will also foster new relationships that will bring about co-operative approaches to combating climate change.

Our proposed investments include:

- A \$40 million Renewable Energy Development Program for pilot and demonstration projects, such as solar and geothermal power stations,
- A \$30 million Public Facilities Fund to help schools, hospitals, libraries and playing fields save energy and water,
- A \$20 million program to provide all NSW schools with a rainwater tank for non-drinking purposes, and
- A \$20 million Energy Efficient Schools Program to install efficient lighting and grants for solar, gas, heat-pump hot water and similar projects.

It's not that long ago that the environment debate was characterised by simple concepts of "green versus brown" issues – the call to arms to save a magnificent stand of rainforest or fight a big polluter.

The debate is now far more sophisticated than that.

Challenges like climate change have forced us to think differently.

Let me conclude with this thought:

Labor's commitment to protecting our environment and combating climate change remains as deep as ever.

On behalf of the lemma Labor Government, I re-affirm that commitment here today by saying that more must be done, and, more importantly, more will be done if the lemma Government is re-elected on March 24th.

Thank you.