



## **MEET THE PRESS**

**22 JULY 2012**

### **INTERVIEWS WITH COMMUNICATIONS MINISTER STEPHEN CONROY AND GREENS DEPUTY LEADER ADAM BANDT**

PAUL BONGIORNO, PRESENTER: Hello and welcome to Meet the Press. Unusually, a state by-election in Melbourne has been dragged into the national political debate. For some, it's a litmus test of Julia Gillard's leadership, and a pointer to Labor's vulnerability to the Greens. As the Prime Minister went west to sell her carbon-pricing package, one of her senior colleagues went on national television to set a benchmark for her survival.

*JOEL FITZGIBBON: Populism matters in politics, and no matter what political party you're talking about. If leaders remain unpopular long enough, they'll inevitably stop leading the party.*

*CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Now, we all know Julia Gillard is about as popular as anthrax in Australia right now, and therefore he was saying that it's time for Julia Gillard to go.*

*JOEL FITZGIBBON: I believe Julia Gillard's poll numbers will improve.*

PAUL BONGIORNO: Leaked polling suggested that the Gillard factor, and Federal Labor's performance, was playing badly in the by-election.

*REPORTER: What implications will it have if you lose the by-election in Melbourne on the weekend?*

*WAYNE SWAN: Well, it's a state by-election. It has none.*

*ADAM BANDT: All they run is a negative campaign based on dirt, and based on preference deals with parties like Family First.*

PAUL BONGIORNO: Communications Minister, and Labor's deputy leader in the Senate, Stephen Conroy is a guest. Later, Greens acting leader Adam Bandt joins us. You can follow the conversation on Twitter #MeetThePress10. But first, Emily Rice has what's making news this Sunday, July 22.

EMILY RICE: Thanks, Paul. Good morning. Police have defused explosives in the apartment of the gunman who shot dead 12 movie-goers at a Batman film screening in Colorado. Authorities say alleged shooter James Holmes carefully planned the rampage, spending the

past few months receiving arms deliveries and rigging his home with explosives designed to kill the first person on the scene.

Labor looks poised to hold the state seat of Melbourne after yesterday's by-election, despite a significant swing to the Greens of up to 6%.

*ADAM BANDT: We can all, knowing what we know now, hold our heads extraordinarily high, as Greens.*

EMILY RICE: At close of counting last night after preferences, Labor led 51.4%, with the Greens 48.6%.

And two navy vessels have gone to the assistance of a boat carrying 144 asylum seekers intercepted north-east of Christmas Island. It's the 11th boat arrival since Sunday. The Opposition says people-smugglers are using the sea route as a twice-daily shuttle service. And those are the top stories this morning, Paul.

PAUL BONGIORNO: Thanks, Emily. It's welcome back to the program, Stephen Conroy. Good morning, Minister.

STEPHEN CONROY: Good morning, Paul.

PAUL BONGIORNO: Let's go to that by-election. Labor's a nose in front - are you going to win it?

STEPHEN CONROY: Look, all the indications are, we believe we'll get across the line. We're very pleased about that. This has been a tough campaign. The Greens have been on a resurgence in, particularly, the inner-city areas. But I think they'll be very disappointed that their vote only really increased a little more than 4% when there was 30%, just about, from the Liberals available, and our vote went down by 2%. I think they will be very disappointed that they didn't take the seat, as they expected.

PAUL BONGIORNO: Nevertheless in an inner-city seat there was a swing to the Greens. What are the implications? Are they as the polling suggested a couple of weeks ago, a judgement on Federal Labor?

STEPHEN CONROY: I think firstly, the polling that took place earlier was largely a snapshot taken at the beginning of the campaign. During the campaign, I think the Greens were exposed for being the economic vandals that they are, being exposed for not being able to add up budget numbers. I think the sort of scrutiny that you saw, probably for the first time, demonstrated why Labor is the only viable alternative to Ted Baillieu. This is a campaign that was fought on state issues. That's what was said on Friday. The ballot was yesterday. And today, it was still fought on state issues, and had no federal implications at all.

PAUL BONGIORNO: Someone in Labor wasn't being very helpful. There's a report in the 'Sunday Telegraph' today that the Prime Minister has asked George Wright, the national secretary, to find out who leaked that polling. First of all, did it even exist, and does the party have any idea who leaked it?

STEPHEN CONROY: Well, I'm not on the campaign committee. I'm not aware of the conversations that took place. It's always frustrating when people like to big-note themselves by giving information to journalists to try and make themselves look important.

But the poll was about state election issues. Daniel Andrews ran a good, tough campaign. He's won the by-election in Niddrie when former deputy premier Rob Hulls resigned. Now he's won a very tough by-election. I think people are going to start reassessing Daniel Andrews as a tough and credible leader.

PAUL BONGIORNO: Well your colleague, South Australia Labor MP Nick Champion wrote in 'The Drum' yesterday: "... Labor's standing in the opinion polls utterly terrifies me.... The Labor Caucus waits on an empty beach ... with an electoral tsunami surging towards us." If we put those comments together with whoever leaked the polling, do we not begin to see that there's some rumbling go on?

STEPHEN CONROY: Labor has introduced, in the last two years, some of the biggest, toughest and, at times, unpopular reforms. But reforms that Julia Gillard and the Government believe are necessary for this country. We're not going to be deterred by bad polling because it's only just now when the carbon tax has come into place and the great hype about the python squeezing us is shown to be just not true.

PAUL BONGIORNO: We know Nick Champion was a Rudd supporter back in February. He steered away from this. But it does seem that his idea of a tsunami might suggest that maybe Kevin Rudd can hold back the tsunami?

STEPHEN CONROY: Look, I've read Nick's article. I think he made some good points. But in terms of why we introduced the National Broadband Network - a big, structural reform -

PAUL BONGIORNO: You're saying Kevin Rudd would be more like King Canute?

STEPHEN CONROY: Look, Julia Gillard is the Prime Minister. She's going to be the Prime Minister at the next election. Commentary about Kevin Rudd - I'll leave that to the commentators.

PAUL BONGIORNO: Would you be prepared to serve in Cabinet with Kevin Rudd again?

STEPHEN CONROY: I've said consistently that if Kevin returned, I'd be on the backbench, and I stand by that position.

PAUL BONGIORNO: You wouldn't be alone there, would you?

STEPHEN CONROY: You'd have to ask other ministers. They gave an indication last time. But what's relevant is that Kevin Rudd is not going to be the prime minister, that Julia Gillard will lead us in the next election. She will keep pushing on with the National Disability Insurance Scheme - a massive, massive reform for families that are having a tough time that really need this sort of major structural reform; the National Broadband Network - a massive structural reform; the carbon tax - a massive structural reform. You're going to lose paint when you introduce reforms like that.

PAUL BONGIORNO: Time for a break. When we return with the panel - the National Broadband Network - is it a white elephant running behind schedule? And Washington, Tony Abbott shared his experience of what can happen when things get lost in translation.

*TONY ABBOTT: I'd just been elected as a Liberal Party MP, and had previously been one of the leading opponents of Australia becoming a republic. Something happened in translation,*

*though, because my US hosts had been told that I was very liberal, and strongly anti-Republican. So I spent most of my fortnight in America being introduced to virtual communists.*

## **Segment 2**

PAUL BONGIORNO, PRESENTER: You're on Meet the Press with Communications Minister Stephen Conroy. Welcome to the panel Christian Kerr, 'The Australian', and Latika Bourke, ABC News 24. Good morning to you both.

LATIKA BOURKE: Good morning, Paul.

CHRISTIAN KERR: G'day.

PAUL BONGIORNO: Last week, Nationals leader Warren Truss was on the program. He didn't notice our pictures of fibre optic cable being rolled out in Townsville, but he strongly backed Tony Abbott's challenge that the NBN is an expensive white elephant.

*WARREN TRUSS (July 15): So, in reality, Labor's promise to provide fibre-optic services to 95% of the Australian population is in tatters. The NBN is way behind schedule. It's way over cost, and it's not going to deliver fibre-optic services to anything like the number of Australians that Labor promised.*

LATIKA BOURKE: Stephen Conroy, are you worried that the delays in the roll-out of the NBN will make it easier for the Coalition to unwind if they get into government, than if it was on schedule?

STEPHEN CONROY: Can I firstly deal with what Warren Truss said last week, where he lied. Bare-faced lied to the Australian public on this show. He said that we were no longer rolling out fibre to the home in Townsville, Mackay, because Julia Gillard had said so. This is just a complete lie. The press release from Julia Gillard was that we are rolling out to the areas around Townsville and Mackay. We are already constructing 14,000 homes in Townsville. We've got a 22% take-up rate. We've got thousands and thousands more to be done over the next 12 months. So, Warren Truss should stop lying to the Australian public. It's a very serious charge to say. He completely misled the Australian public, and he should come clean. On the question of a delay - we said, as the negotiations with Telstra took place, they took about nine months longer. So the start date for the NBN's volume roll-out has moved back. We'll be releasing the corporate plan in the next few weeks. We've been considering it since we received it a little while ago. You will see exactly where the comparisons are. But let me be really clear about this - we are on target to meet what we announced last November - 750,000 homes, under construction or completed by December of this year. And the 3.5 million by 2015 - our 3-year plan which we announced in March. They are on target. They are the basis of the corporate plan, after the deals have all been calibrated, after the delay due to the Telstra negotiations.

LATIKA BOURKE: So you're confident the NBN will survive the Coalition?

STEPHEN CONROY: Well, Malcolm Turnbull has said we are on a contract, as he should. This is a country that doesn't walk in and repudiate a contract for no reason. So we've got a situation where there'll be some component of the fibre to the home will already be constructed and will still be being constructed. We've got the satellite deal - we've bought

two satellites. That will be honoured. And the fixed wireless network will be built. So all of these aspects are going to be built by about 2015. If Malcolm Turnbull and Tony Abbott are good to their words, then about 30% of the National Broadband Network will be constructed.

PAUL BONGIORNO: Could they regulate it out of existence, or would they need –

STEPHEN CONROY: They can sabotage it, no, no, there's no question they could sabotage it. They have said they would end the cross-subsidy between the cities and the regional and rural Australians. This would send the price of average internet connections on the NBN through the roof for people in regional and rural Australia. And so, they can sabotage the business plan still, no question. Can they physically stop the roll-out? That's harder, because of the contracts. But they can sabotage the service that ordinary Australians - 15,000 Australians are today using the National Broadband Network, and they could sabotage that, absolutely, for them.

CHRISTIAN KERR: With your focus on the regions with the NBN, isn't this a tacit admission that Labor is terrified that, at this election, it might be left only with regional seats in, say, the Illawarra and the Hunter, that your independent allies will go and you'll lose that handful of regional seats you still have?

STEPHEN CONROY: We have always been committed to delivering genuine broadband, fast broadband, to regional and rural Australians. Malcolm Turnbull, Tony Abbott, Warren Truss, talk about building a big wireless network to them. We are delivering to 70%, seven-zero percent, of all regional and rural homes, fibre to the home. This is the biggest investment in regional and rural telecommunications in 50 years. So the pitiful \$2 billion patchwork that the Nationals negotiated when the Nationals agreed to sell Telstra, to privatise Telstra - that's already been committed, and we've committed billions of dollars more to regional and rural Australians.

PAUL BONGIORNO: Minister, you're considering tighter regulation of the media, especially the print media. The Opposition rejects any need for a public-interest test. Here was George Brandis talking about it.

*GEORGE BRANDIS (Q&A): Who was that person or that body to decide what the public interest is? Why is their view of the public interest to be privileged over the variety of different views about the public interest that might exist?*

CHRISTIAN KERR: What are we actually going to get here? Are we going to get a public interest test or are we going to get the full Finkelstein? In the absence of any clear plan, Minister, isn't this just as George Brandis is saying, really an issue of freedom of speech?

STEPHEN CONROY: Look, not at all. The Cabinet is considering the recommendations of the convergence review, one of which was a public interest test. The Cabinet is considering the Finkelstein view on the Press Council and regulation of the Press Council. I'm very strongly in support of a public interest test.

CHRISTIAN KERR: You've been very vague, though, about the overall package.

STEPHEN CONROY: That's because usually you try not to pre-empt what a Cabinet is going to decide. Not an unusual thing. Cabinet will be deciding, over the next month or so, exactly

what we want to do. We've got conflicting views from Finkelstein and the convergence review. We've got two really good reports, but they have a different emphasis. We will consider all of those and make an announcement about those over the next month or so.

CHRISTIAN KERR: What's your personal preference here?

STEPHEN CONROY: As I've said, I believe that the public interest test is vital. I think that just leaving the diversity of voices in this country to the competition laws will not lead to a diversity of opinions and voices. I've been on the record on this from way back when the Parliament first supported change and abolished the cross-media laws. So I've been campaigning on this for a long, long time. It has nothing to do with recent media flurries, Gina Rinehart or others. I've been campaigning for this, the party has been supporting this for a long time.

CHRISTIAN KERR: Would Gina Rinehart pass a public interest test?

STEPHEN CONROY: In my view, yes. My view is she would pass, unless she moved to take control of Channel Ten and she wanted a control of Fairfax, because Channel Ten also has the radio stations. She would probably be in breach of almost the existing laws if she tried to go that far. In my view, on the sort of test we're considering, this is not aimed at Gina Rinehart. It's never been aimed at Gina Rinehart. It's about stopping a concentration. And Gina, because she's got only a relatively small holding in only one company at the moment, would pass a public interest test. This is not a fit and proper person test. There's a lot of confusion about this. A fit and proper person test is what we used to have, and Alan Bond passed it, so I'm not if a fit and proper person test is worth the legislation it would be written on.

LATIKA BOURKE: Minister, on another issue, the Attorney-General, Nicola Roxon, seems very lukewarm on this idea of spy agencies retaining internet data for two years. What are your views?

STEPHEN CONROY: Organised crime around the world has taken up the benefits of the internet very, very fast. You see all sorts of scams taking place. You see the ability to manipulate, steal identities, and more and more Australians are encountering this. So I think there's a need for a revision of the law. I think that the argument that the internet should be completely unregulated - I mean, just because you go online doesn't mean you get to abandon all laws. A civil society relies on some agreed forms of regulation. So I think there is an argument, in both directions, on this. But if we want our law enforcement agencies to be able to deal with organised crime. If we want our intelligence agencies to be able to deal with the threat of terrorism, we need to have some changes in the laws.

PAUL BONGIORNO: Minister, just before we go, does the Victorian branch of the Labor Party support putting the Greens last at the next Federal election?

STEPHEN CONROY: Look, I can't imagine that the Victorian branch would want to elect more Liberal senators. I mean, let me be clear about this. If we were to put the Liberals ahead of the Greens in the Senate, then this would mean that we'd have an extra vote to abandon and destroy the National Broadband Network, to repeal the carbon tax, and to oppose or repeal all of key Labor reforms. I can't imagine an argument in the room which said, "Let's put the Liberals ahead of the Greens in a Senate preferencing."

PAUL BONGIORNO: One would imagine that they'd even think that way in New South Wales.

STEPHEN CONROY: Look, I think common sense, in terms of, "Do you want to elect a majority Liberal-National Coalition to be in charge of the Senate and give it a majority in the Senate?" I can't imagine that that would be a sensible outcome.

PAUL BONGIORNO: Thanks for being with us today, Stephen Conroy. Coming up - Greens MP Adam Bandt.

Cartoonist Warren in the 'Daily Telegraph' believes Kevin Rudd is about to become a member of the Lazarus, rising from a political dead club.

*VOICEOVER: You're back on, Kevin. Joel Fitzgibbon's just been on 'Q&A'.*

### **Segment 3**

PAUL BONGIORNO: Welcome back to Meet the Press. Adam Bandt, the Member for the Federal seat of Melbourne, took great heart from yesterday's by-election. He says the seat is turning greener. For Labor, it was a night of great relief, finishing up a nose ahead and confident of retaining the seat, none happier than the State Opposition Leader.

*DANIEL ANDREWS: Many, many people did not think we would be in this competitive a position, this late into this evening.*

PAUL BONGIORNO: It's welcome back to the program, Greens acting leader Adam Bandt. Good morning.

ADAM BANDT: Good morning.

PAUL BONGIORNO: Well, I don't want to be too hard, because you did perform fairly well, but going on precedent in the state seat of Fremantle in the west, and Cunningham, the Federal seat in NSW, shouldn't you have won this by-election?

ADAM BANDT: Well, it's going to be close. There's probably another 1,000 votes to be counted and, we won't have any more information from the VEC until tomorrow night. What we do know is that, on the results we've seen so far is that Melbourne has turned green for the first time ever - we have won the primary vote. More people voted Greens than any other party. Our vote went up significantly. Labor's went down significantly. And we are in a position now where, if Labor does get over the line on Monday night, it'll be because of preference deals with the likes of Family First.

LATIKA BOURKE: Adam Bandt, in your view, was it State or Federal issues that were the decider?

ADAM BANDT: I think it was primarily state issues. Everyone was clear right across the spectrum that it was state issues. It's a very sophisticated electorate. People understand which are state issues and which are federal issues, and that's the basis on which all of the candidates fought the campaign.

CHRISTIAN KERR: Haven't you lost some vital momentum by not winning the seat of Melbourne? I mean, so much of the Greens' appeal, so much of their electoral growth has

really been from this whole sense that the Greens are the coming force, that they are an unstoppable force. Even your posters and banners say, "This time I'm voting Green." Not enough people have done that. So has the party been robbed of something now that there's a new and intense level of focus on the Greens?

ADAM BANDT: No, I think the opposite. I think there's been a seismic shift in politics over the weekend. Thousands of people have voted Greens for the first time and put issues like prioritising public transport on the map. We now have a situation where we are the lead runners in these seats, and parties like the Labor Party are only able to get into these seats through deals with the likes of Family First. Labor has to come clean, I think, about what was involved in their preference deal with the Family First.

PAUL BONGIORNO: Mr Bandt, on the issue of asylum seekers, the political impasse continues, as do the boats continuing to arrive. The Opposition wants a return to Nauru and the Howard Government policies. Here's Michael Keenan:

*MICHAEL KEENAN: This suite of policies worked to achieve what we need to achieve, which is stopping people-smugglers from being in charge over who's coming to Australia.*

LATIKA BOURKE: Adam Bandt, this week alone, 11 boats came, delivering more than 600 people to Australian shores. Don't you think your refusal to compromise on this policy issue is actually helping Tony Abbott? He can point to this as a Labor failure, and if he becomes prime minister, you're looking at perhaps tougher measures for asylum seekers than what Labor might compromise with you.

ADAM BANDT: We need a fix for refugees, not a fix for politicians. We need to go back to the model that Malcolm Fraser had, where you take more people directly from the camps, process them there - that way they don't feel so desperate that they have to take boat journeys where they risk their lives. That policy approach, under Malcolm Fraser and then later under Hawke, stopped the boats. It saved lives, and I think Australia is the better for it. In those camps, in place like Indonesia, you've got 8,000 people where we take 60 a year. Some of those people have been waiting there for years, even though they're found to be genuine refugees. It's no wonder they get desperate and take to boats. It's that regional solution that we are putting on the table. We've put it on to the table to the Angus Houston committee. We don't need legislation to take away people's rights, which is what's been proposed by the Government and by Rob Oakeshott. We need a post-Vietnam-style solution, and we can implement that now.

LATIKA BOURKE: If you look at what Labor has done on this issue, they don't like a lot of what they've had to put up, but they're willing to compromise. Isn't that the art of political success?

ADAM BANDT: What we've got now, effectively, is a compromise. At the moment, we've got mandatory detention and we've got some offshore processing going on. What we need is to have a sensible debate in this country about how to deal with what is, in effect, a global problem. When you've got these massive pressures in the camps in places like Indonesia and places like Malaysia, the solution is to start processing more people and taking them out there. There's two United Nations officials processing all the people in the camps in Indonesia. It's no wonder they get desperate and take to boats.



CHRISTIAN KERR: State Melbourne, in the Federal seat of Melbourne's got a pretty large African community. They're very visible in places like the tower blocks of Carlton, in Flemington. These people arrived here legitimately through humanitarian programs. We saw them, though, come out in support of one of their community leaders, who got about 5% of the vote yesterday, and whose preferences flowed very, very strongly to the ALP. Now, this is a group you might think would have some sympathy for the Greens' stance on a whole lot of issues like asylum. But because they see that the Greens are actually damaging legitimate people, like themselves, who are going through the proper procedures, are you afraid that your standing has been damaged amongst these communities?

ADAM BANDT: No, I don't accept that analysis. I've spent a lot of time with people living in the Housing Commission flats and with the leaders of the African community. I've got a lot of respect for Bernard Ahmed, who ran in this election. I know him and have dealt with him quite well. One of the things that they had said to me very clearly is that we need to strengthen the family reunion program. In fact, that's part of the driver for people getting on boats - not necessarily from the African communities, but from other communities - is that you've got a lot of single people living in Australia, in Housing Commission flats, wanting to get their families out here to support them. At the moment, until we decouple the family reunion program from the other broader humanitarian program, those issues are going to continue to exacerbate. So, I think we are singing from the same song sheet.

PAUL BONGIORNO: Mr Bandt, before you go, your vote is a vital vote supporting the Gillard minority government. If Labor dumped Julia Gillard, would you dump Labor on the floor of the House of Representatives?

ADAM BANDT: Our agreement is with Julia Gillard. I signed the agreement with Julia Gillard. It's to run a full term of Parliament, with her as prime minister. I expect that that's what will happen. When you look at some of the comments from crossbenchers in recent days, they're responding to ALP right powerbrokers who are effectively white-anting the Prime Minister and destabilising. I think they've sent a clear message that they also want it to run full term with Julia Gillard as prime minister.

PAUL BONGIORNO: Was she a factor in the by-election, just briefly?

ADAM BANDT: No, I don't think that you can read the tea leaves that much and say she was a factor at all. I think it was really fought on state issues.

PAUL BONGIORNO: Thank you very much for being with us today. Acting Greens leader Adam Bandt. And thanks to our panel, Christian Kerr and Latika Bourke. A transcript and a replay of the program will be on our website, and Facebook page. Until next week, with Hugh Riminton, goodbye.