

# Shade of green could spoil Labor's colour

[Food & Environment](#) | [Alan Moran](#)  
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Opposition leader Kevin Rudd and his party's environment spokesman, Peter Garrett, first said Labor would agree to Australia reducing greenhouse gas emissions even if the king-hitting emitters such as China and India didn't join.

Mr Garrett was later forced to issue a retraction.

Green groups often maintain that if Australia reduced its greenhouse emissions this would be good both for the planet and the economy.

They argue that we'd be better off reducing our energy use because this saves money on fuel bills.

That's like arguing that we'd be better off saving money by not going to the footy!

Green activists also say that if Australia takes the lead we'll be the focus of a vast new clean green energy industry.

This is doubtful. Victoria's only wind turbine facility, Vestas in Portland, having promised 2000 jobs has opened, then closed.

In any case, opting out of conventional energy production that uses modern technology is costly.

Exotic renewable energy sources, such as windfarms, will always be twice as expensive.

Requiring increased renewable energy shares means higher fuel bills for consumers and reduced competitiveness for key Australian industries.

Denying ourselves the cheapest energy sources constitutes job losses, especially if Australia takes the lead.

ALP's initial policy on greenhouse committed another error.

It jettisoned a diplomatic achievement from September's Asia-Pacific Economic Co-Operation meeting in Sydney.

At the APEC conference for the first time China appeared to agree to act in concert with other countries in reducing emissions.

The ALP policy approach overlooked this, thereby neglecting seemingly favourable outcomes stemming from skills that are uppermost in Mr Rudd's personal credentials.

The gaffe illustrates a vulnerability that is endemic within the ALP. The leadership seeks to promote itself as the Liberal Party with a compassionate face.

But many of its foot soldiers are, as in the past, far more radical.

In previous eras many activist ALP members promoted extreme forms of state planning or income redistribution.

Wiser heads held them in check, knowing these policies would severely damage the economy and make them unelectable.

Labor's contemporary zealots have a deep green, anti-development hue.

Peter Garrett has long been associated with these views. He was president of the Australian Conservation Foundation and prior to that favoured a related single issue cause, unilateral nuclear disarmament.

Labor is highly electable in 2007 precisely because it has focused on pro-business economic policies.

Policy excursions that sacrifice this to the party's radicals can destroy its hard-won image of a party with a solid conservative approach.

But environmental hysteria extends beyond the ALP. Labor has foreshadowed requiring a 20 per cent share for renewable energy. The Liberals may support this.

Of a 20 per cent share only 5 per cent would be from hydro-electricity.

This means we almost treble the share, driven by present policies, of expensive exotic energy sources such as wind.

The penalty for such trendy measures is higher costs for industry and consumers and a halt to developing more efficient electricity supply sources in the Latrobe Valley coal province.

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