

MEET THE PRESS

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INTERVIEW WITH MARK BUTLER

KATHRYN ROBINSON, PRESENTER: Well, we have heard a lot this morning about the chaos within the Labor Party campaign. Outgoing Climate Change Minister Mark Butler saw things first-hand. He was called in to join Kevin Rudd's travelling party to offer advice and to strengthen ties between the Rudd camp and Labor's HQ in Melbourne. Was it too little, too late? Mark Butler joins us now from Adelaide. Good morning, Mr Butler. Thank you for your time today.

MARK BUTLER: Not at all.

KATHRYN ROBINSON: Will Labor block the Coalition's plans to repeal the carbon tax in the Senate?

MARK BUTLER: Well, if it's the plan that Tony Abbott took to the election yesterday, we won't be voting for it. It is so fundamentally inconsistent with our views about proper action on climate change – views that we have put before the electorate now on five successive occasions. That we will be voting in a way that's consistent with our policy platform. Now, if Tony Abbott modifies the proposals that he took to the election - and obviously we would look at that legislation – but as it stands this is so fundamentally inconsistent with strong and sensible action on climate change that he won't be getting our support for it.

STEVE LEWIS: Mark Butler – Mark Butler, Tony Abbott's had a thumping election victory. Why can he not argue that he has got a mandate from the Australian people to repeal the carbon tax and put forward his direct action plan?

MARK BUTLER: Well, he does have a mandate to form Government. He has got a mandate to appoint a ministry and a mandate to bring legislation to the Parliament. But I was elected by the people of Port Adelaide yesterday on the basis of a Labor Party platform. If the people of Port Adelaide wanted someone to go into the Parliament and vote for Tony Abbott's climate change policy, they would have voted in a Liberal Party candidate. Not me. I'll be going in and voting on the policies that we took to the election, and I think that that is what the people of Port Adelaide would expect me to do, as would be expected of my other colleagues. But, equally, this idea that an Opposition should go in and simply roll over and vote for whatever the government of the day, the incoming Government, takes to the Parliament, is frankly an unhealthy idea from parliamentary democracy's point of view. The Opposition's role is to hold the Government accountable, to put a counterpoint in the Parliament and in the community to ensure that we get the best public policy. Now, if Tony Abbott still wins the day in the Parliament, so be it. But we won't be rolling over, we won't be throwing overboard positions we have held on climate change for a very, very long time.

HUGH RIMINTON: Do you think, on - as the Labor Party goes through now a period of reflection, do you think that your position on pricing carbon was in any way a factor in the vote result we saw last night?

MARK BUTLER: Look, I think it was a factor in some parts of the country. And there were other parts of our policy platform that were probably a factor as well, to some degree or another. But it's very clear to me that the overwhelming reason why a number of people switched from voting Labor to voting Liberal was their sense that we were disunited, that we were unstable as a Party, and focused too much on ourselves rather than on them. I mean, I have seen the Party research and the Party polling over the last several weeks. And consistently it showed that that was the overwhelmingly primary reason why people were shifting their vote. And if anything over the course of the campaign that sentiment strengthened. I'm very clear in my mind that that is why we have been thrown out of Government. People have expressed it over the years in different ways. Disunity is death. If you can't govern yourselves, you can't govern the country. Our reflection first and foremost needs to be on the way in which we as a caucus have treated each other and behaved towards each other.

HUGH RIMINTON: So who do you think should lead and unite the Party from here?

MARK BUTLER: Well, think that's not something we should decide upon 16 hours after the polls have closed, and less than 12 hours since our former leader has stepped down. And I think that's something that we will all reflect upon over the coming days, and we will reach a proper decision. This is an incredibly important decision - the person to lead the rebuilding, to start to restore trust with the Australian people that we are focused on them and not on ourselves. So I don't have a view today. I think we will do that very carefully over coming days.

SAMANTHA MAIDEN: Mr Butler, you were on the campaign plane and were brought in to try and smooth things out a bit. Was there a disconnect? Was Kevin making policy up on the run? Why were people finding out about policy when they were watching Sky News instead of a clear communication line?

MARK BUTLER: Well, I think a lot has been written about this, and much of it inaccurate. But I think we will reflect on the campaign, as we have done for the last several campaigns that I've been involved in, over the coming weeks, and look very carefully at what we did well and what we didn't do so well. So, I'm going to wait for that process to unfold. But can I say generally that we went into this campaign really with an extraordinary array of things mounted against us. We had a leader and a team who had only been there for four weeks, had not had the ability to run a mock campaign and things like that. We had a vast array of interests stacked against us. A Liberal Party that had an extraordinary war chest to engage in the sorts of avalanche advertising that we saw, particularly over the last week or two. So this was always going to be a tough campaign. I think Kevin did an extraordinary job. Working with him on the plane for the last three and a half, or four weeks, seeing the energy and the enthusiasm he brought to the task every morning and throughout the day in the face of very significant attacks, I think was quite extraordinary. We are very grateful for him, for the work that we've done. But having said that, we need to look very carefully at the details of our campaigning and see what elements we can improve upon next time.

KATHRYN ROBINSON: Mark Butler, I'm afraid we are out of time, but thank you very much for your time today.

MARK BUTLER: Thank you very much.

KATHRYN ROBINSON: Coming up on Meet The Press - the doctors of spin. But first, a look at why some Aussies gave their vote to the minor parties.

MAN: Clive Palmer. Actually.

REPORTER: Oh, okay. What led to that decision?

MAN: I think there's - for me, it's a bit of a, there's nothing really to divide both Liberal and Labor. I think it's better just mix it up a bit.

WOMAN: I don't like the two major parties. And they are certainly far too right wing now. The Labor Party were okay, but I think they are too right wing now. So if they moved further to the left that would be better. So, having the Greens there is a good thing, I think.

REPORTER: Was there any policy there that got you over the line this year? Or was it just more a staunch Greens supporter, always going to vote Green?

WOMAN: No, I think the policy that made me turn away from the Labor Party was the asylum seekers. Moving them to Papua New Guinea - I think for such a wealthy nation we should be ashamed of ourselves to be doing that.

MAN: Ah, Tony Abbott.

REPORTER: Why?

MAN: Border controls and, I don't know, I'm just sort of sick of the disease that is sort of coming off the boat straight in the community, as well as the rapists. I just think they got to do something about it.