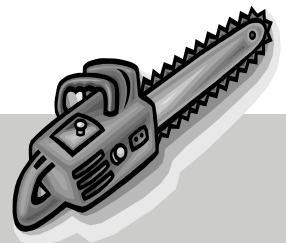


CHIPSTOPPER



Was Labor's forest policy a vote loser?

While all eyes in the forest debate have been on Tasmania, results in the indicator marginal seat of Eden-Monaro show that backing forest conservation was not a vote loser for Labor there.

Labor candidate, Kel Watt began wooing The Greens many months before the election, knowing that if he were to win, he would need their preferences.

The Greens in the far south coast seat have taken a tough line in recent elections and know the strategic value of their preference.

Sitting Liberal, Gary Nairn, no friend of conservationists, held the seat by a margin of 1.7 percent and at best could expect an open ticket or even a split ticket from The Greens.

About a month out from election day, The Greens formally put to Kel Watt that he would get their preference if he could obtain Labor Party backing for a plan to relocate the Eden chipmill to an area where it

would use only plantations. Labor in Gippsland could expect a similar result.

The Greens plan was based on moving the woodchipping industry out of native forests and into existing plantations in western Victoria.

NAFI Director Kate Carnell advised Watt to tell the Greens to "go to hell."

It also included support to develop of a value added softwood industry using existing pine plantations in the nearby Bombala district. This would, according to The Greens, employ many more people than those displaced by ending native forest woodchipping.

Senator Bob Brown launched The Greens plan on 8 September and Eden-Monaro candidate, Cecily Dignan soon made it very clear that preferences would depend on "significant progress" being made by the Labor Party endorsing the plan.

Watt did not immediately respond, but fudged his replies with comments such as ... "we will never compromise on jobs and people need to be aware of that"..... "what I'd like to see is the protection of the environment and more jobs, better paid jobs, more jobs in the region and a sustainable future for the timber industry"...

His comments fell short of full support for native forest woodchipping.

"I thought that no one now argues that we must protect the environment and find a way forward from outdated work practices," he said.

Nairn attacked him, and loggers' union, the CFMEU announced it would spend \$15,000 in the electorate campaigning against any candidate who did not promise a satisfactory policy to protect loggers' jobs.

Chipmill Public Affairs Manager Vince Phillips predicted that 371 jobs would be lost under The Greens 6-point plan and that Labor would lose 1,000 votes.

The National Association of Forests Industries (NAFI) and Timber Communities Australia all attacked the Greens plan and warned Watt not to touch it.

NAFI Director Kate Carnell advised Watt to tell the Greens to "go to hell."

He did not tell the Greens to go to hell, but neither could he deliver them the chipmill.

As the campaign progressed, it became clear that he could end up with the worst of both worlds, the loggers wanting his scalp, but no formal endorsement by The Greens.

This struggle was all played out openly in the local media with Kel Watt at no stage coming out and flatly expressing support



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Gary Nairn
LIBERAL FOR EDEN-MONARO



Working with the
Bega Valley communities to

DELIVER MORE

WOODCHIPS

The Woodchipping Workforce

On 20 September Mr Vince Phillips said 371 people (including 71 directly at the chipmill) would lose their jobs if The Greens' forest policy were adopted. Three days later, this figure had grown to 450, of whom 77 were employed directly at the chipmill.

This shows what a tiny part of the local economy the woodchipping industry is.

It also raises the question of whether it is right to allow wholesale industrial destruction of our forests and their wildlife on a massive scale to keep a handful of workers "gainfully" occupied.

A union source says that there are 41 workers at the chipmill.

The remainder are logging crews and truck drivers, all of whom would be readily transferrable to an expanding softwood processing industry within our own region under The Greens' plan, which estimates 235 direct jobs in logging, processing and transport of softwoods.

Assuming that 55% of Mr Phillips' first workforce figure resides in the Bega Valley Shire (a reasonable assumption since the total also includes workers in Eurobodalla Shire and Victoria), this represents approximately one sixth of one percent of the workforce.

Eurobodalla, we assume 5% of the woodchipping workforce lives there. This makes the woodchipping workforce in that shire just 0.001% of the workforce.

Jobs are not threatened by The Greens' plan; indeed, it will produce more secure, safer and better jobs in the long run. ◀

combined Labor vote in the four loggers' booths was up on the previous election. One booth, Wolumla, actually had a 4% swing to Labor. The Greens vote went up in all of them.

Moreover, several booths where few if any loggers vote recorded bigger or similar swings to Eden: Bega Central (4%), Jindabyne (4.24%). Queanbeyan north (3.46) and Cooma north (2.88).

And Greens, will they be going to hell? Time will tell, but they got their best ever vote in a very conservative electorate. ◀



"Timber men salute PM" This now infamous photo was taken at the Liberals' forest policy announcement by AAP and published in The Canberra Times on 7 October. If you can't quite read the words on the logger's arm, the tattoo on his left forearm reads: "white power."

Election snippets

- In Gippsland the Greens polled higher than the logger candidate who didn't even get his deposit back.

- ALP Tasmanian Secretary David Price has revealed that it is by no means clear that Labor's forest policy cause the loss of Bass and Braddon. "Postal votes lodged before the Labor and gov-

ernment policies were known showed similar voting trend to the final result," he said.

- The "timber industry" allocated \$15,000 to campaign in Eden-Monaro. The CFMEU announced it would book full page ads in local newspapers.

The Union also announced that it had produced its first TV commercial to use in Eden-Monaro. ◀

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for native forest woodchipping, as Gary Nairn was quick to do.

Watt went on the attack, accusing Nairn of wanting to destroy the region's forests, when "we should be proud of them."

Labor Shadow Ministers Joel Fitzgibbon and Kelvin Thompson had shown some interest in the plan and were attracted by its positive aspects.

This, in the end, was not enough for The Greens. Just when agreement looked likely, Mark Latham's Tasmanian forest statement got a torrid reception and Labor lost its nerve. It was not prepared to risk another forest policy statement.

On the Thursday morning before the election, candidate Cecily Dignan announced an open ticket. Kel Watt had lost his fight for the crucial Greens preferences.

Within hours this was reversed. The Howard sleight of hand on the Tasma-

nian forests the day before was too much for Bob Brown, who announced that all Greens groups in marginal electorates who were not already preferring Labor, would now do so.

Eden-Monaro was one of these. What Kel Watt had failed to achieve in six months was done within hours. The Greens not only preferred him, they incurred the cost of reprinting their How-to-Vote cards to do so.

Watt lost the election, but with honour and Eden-Monaro is still as marginal as it was before the election.

What of Vince Phillips' claim that Labor would lose a thousand votes? Well, Labor did not have 1,000 votes to lose in logging seats anyway, so it did not happen. Most loggers vote in Eden, Bombala, Towamba, Wolumla or Pambula.

Eden polling booth recorded a 3% swing against Labor, but it was by no means the biggest swing in the electorate. The



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