HAMISH MACDONALD, HOST: The Labor Leader Anthony Albanese will commit the Party to net zero carbon emissions by 2050 in a speech later today. The promise does appear to come with little detail at this point, with no short-term target. The Party’s stance on climate change was one of the major problems flagged in the Party’s review of their disastrous 2019 election loss. Mark Butler is the shadow spokesperson for climate change. He joins me from Adelaide this morning, a very good morning to you Mark Butler.

MARK BUTLER, SHADOW MINISTER FOR CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY: Good morning Hamish.

MACDONALD: What exactly is Labor committing to today?

BUTLER: What we are doing is reaffirming two core principles in our climate policy. Firstly, perhaps most importantly, is our commitment to the goals of the Paris Agreement to keep global warming below the very dangerous threshold of 2C degrees. And, to do that, it is clear you must be a net zero emissions economy by the middle of the century. That’s why so many economies around the world, and all state governments here in Australia have
made this commitment. We are making that commitment today.

We are also committing to no taxpayer funding for coal-fired power, really as a reflection of our commitment to see Australia transition to clean energy; two very important pillars to guide our development of more detailed climate policy over the course of this term of Parliament.

MACDONALD: So you are specifically saying it is a target. Reading the speech that Anthony Albanese is going to make he says “a Labor Government will adopt a carbon neutral target of zero net emissions by 2050” how will you get there?

BUTLER: We will work on that over the course of the rest of this term of Parliament. We will have a detailed climate policy over the course of that term, well before the election, for the Australian people and business community and others to look at. We are still early in the term, we are only a quarter of the way through this parliamentary term. It is important to set down the core principles, particularly given the heightened awareness of this debate after the bushfire emergency that occurred over the course of this summer.

MACDONALD: Climate change doesn’t observe parliamentary terms, why not have a plan for how you are going to do this?

BUTLER: We will have the opportunity to implement a plan at the election in 2022 and I think all stakeholders and the general community would expect us to go through a detailed process of engagement and consultation and research with them. As Anthony Albanese has said after the last election, all of our policies are up for review. After you lose three elections in a row it is important to have a root and branch look at all of your policies. We are doing that in my area as we are all in others.

You go through a process, Hamish, of setting down those core principles, which we are doing today; and then talking to business, talking to communities about the detail so that there is an evidence-based approach to a detailed policy that the Australian voters have well before the next election - which is the first opportunity we are actually going to have to implement a climate policy.

MACDONALD: Let’s be clear this is a target without a plan at this point?
**BUTLER:** It's been very clear from businesses, the biggest mining company, the biggest airline, the biggest bank, the biggest telecommunications provider, the Business Council, so many different financial institutions have all said this is the path Australia must chart along with the rest of the world –

**MACDONALD:** Sure but crucially amongst that the BCA says the how is the important bit. I'm just wondering what you have to say about the how – how do we get there?

**BUTLER:** We will have a lot to say over the course of this term of Parliament but Hamish we are currently a quarter of the way through a parliamentary term in opposition. There is a process of developing policy. You start with core principles, you then start talking to organisations like the BCA and so many other businesses and stakeholder groups about the detail, so that well before the election there is a detailed policy that we as the alternative government can put forward to the Australian people. I make that commitment to the Australian people, there will be that detailed policy well before time.

**MACDONALD:** Do you have any idea at this point how much it would cost Australia to meet those targets?

**BUTLER:** What is clear, particularly after the summer that we’ve had, is the cost of doing nothing. We’ve seen more and more evidence of that in our own backyard, through the bushfire emergencies, and yesterday we saw there is a heightened risk of a third mass bleaching event on the Great Barrier Reef, the third in just five years. We didn’t see them before the last five years, impacting 64,000 jobs up on the Great Barrier Reef –

**MACDONALD:** With respect that was not the question, the question was do you have any concept of what it would cost to get to this target by 2050? Not the cost of inaction.

**BUTLER:** Hamish, I promise I will come to that but the idea that we can talk about the cost of taking action without talking about the cost of not taking action is part of the problem about the debate over climate policy in this country.

We’ve seen evidence of the cost. Only this week Melbourne University said the benefits of taking action are 20 times the cost – a benefit to cost ratio of 20:1, an extraordinary
number. What we’ve also seen over the last 12 months is the CSIRO say that a net zero emissions path to 2050, compared to the path we are currently on, will deliver stronger economic growth, would deliver higher wages, and would deliver lower energy bills. That is Australia’s pre-eminent agency that has modelled net zero emissions by 2050. Modelling relied upon by Gladys Berejiklian’s Government in declaring this policy. That is the sort of modelling that Scott Morrison should be looking at.

We’ve also seen the Business Council say this would unleash $22 billion of investment every year over the next thirty years. Investment creates jobs, it drives economic activity, it drives innovation and it broadens consumer choice. This is the sort of thing that has always spurred economic growth in this country and we should be embracing it. It’s not only good for the planet and good for our environment - it will be good for our economy.

MACDONALD: I understand that but this is a question of the cost of transition, no one disputes that transition will cost the taxpayer quite a lot of money. Do you have any idea of what that will be?

BUTLER: I’ve just said that the Melbourne University has said that the benefits of action compared to our current trajectory will be 20:1. People will have to buy new cars over the next thirty years whatever happens; we are going to have to build a new electricity system over the next thirty years whatever happens. What the CSIRO has said is adopting a clean energy pathway will deliver stronger growth, higher wages and lower energy bills than building new coal-fired power stations, or sticking with petrol cars over the next thirty years. Of course there is a cost in running the economy whichever pathway you take. The modelling is clearly showing that the cost of a clean energy pathway, replacing our transport fleet, replacing our energy will be cheaper, will deliver better economic benefits than a pathway that continues on the 20th century journey.

MACDONALD: So would you be looking at packages for communities that might lose a lot of jobs, areas where industries might be removed as a result of this. What would be the cost of delivering for those parts of Australia?

BUTLER: Those are the things that I think the Australian community would expect us to engage with them about over the next year and a half or so, well before the next election, to have a detailed package. As I said, we are a quarter of the way through the
parliamentary term Hamish and I don’t think anyone out there would want me to simply sit down with a pad of paper and write a policy without talking to them. That is my job over the next many months, with shadow ministers in the resources sector, the transport sector, the industry sector, to sit down as we have in the past, and come up with a policy that reflects what businesses and communities and stakeholders are saying to us, what research says to us. That is what people expect of their alternative government.

MACDONALD: But you would imagine that an eventual Labor policy might come up with some schemes and packages that would enable such communities to transition?

BUTLER: Absolutely, we are very focused on making sure that no one is left behind in the transformation of our economy as we have done all throughout our economic history. That is core to the Labor DNA to make sure that no one is left behind as global economic transformations take place. Many of these decisions are not going to be made in Canberra, many of these decisions are being taken in the capitals of our major trading partners, by board rooms across the world, by innovations in technology like steel-making. Our job as an alternative government is to be honest with the Australian community about what is going to happen and to be there to support communities that are impacted by those decisions taken overseas.

MACDONALD: Would having a price on carbon be a way in which you could achieve the sorts of targets you are talking about?

BUTLER: I think a price on carbon was important 10 years ago when some of those new technologies needed to, I guess, have a level playing field against some of the fossil fuel technologies. But what is clear now is those new clean technologies are cheaper than their fossil fuel equivalents, particularly in the electricity sector. Renewable energy doesn’t need a price on carbon to compete with, and beat, fossil fuel electricity. It just needs some rules for investment which this Government hasn’t delivered. We will see, within only a few years, electric vehicles beating petrol and diesel vehicles on price in the showroom as well. I don’t think a price on carbon is as important as people thought it was 10 years ago. You just need the sort of investment guidelines that a net zero emissions commitment by 2050 gives to all of those businesses that have told us they have billions and billions of dollars ready to invest, creating jobs. They just need this Government to get on board with decisions taking by Boris Johnson, Angela Merkel, by conservative Prime Ministers and
Presidents across the developed world.

**MACDONALD:** The working assumption from industry seems to be, from my reading of it, that if you are going to move to net zero emissions by 2050 then the current emissions reduction targets for 2030 that Australia has, 26-28 per cent on 2005 levels, is insufficient. What should our targets be for 2030 if the longer term target is net zero by 2050?

**BUTLER:** I’ve been very consistent, since Tony Abbott announced these 2030 targets that Scott Morrison has, in saying that they are inadequate.

**MACDONALD:** But what should they be?

**BUTLER:** We said they should be 45 per cent at the last election. That reflected advice from the Climate Change Authority –

**MACDONALD:** But is that still your position?

**BUTLER:** We are going to have to go through a process of taking advice about those things. What we have said is that our medium-term targets must be consistent with that net zero emissions target by the middle of the century. It must be informed by scientific advice.

**MACDONALD:** 45 per cent is consistent with that?

**BUTLER:** It was some years ago when the Climate Change Authority gave that advice but the point I’ve made and other stakeholders have made on your program I think Hamish, is that by the time of the next election in 2022 the world will be discussing targets for 2035 not 2030.

**MACONALD:** Sure but I’m just trying to get out of you what Labor’s position is on 2030? What is your current 2030 target?

**BUTLER:** By the time of the next election the 45 per cent target will be seven years old. It was recommended in 2014 on the basis of a 15 year implementation time frame and we would have lost half of that time frame. It would be seven or eight years beyond the 2014 release of that target. So obviously, with the effluxion of time we are going to have to take
advice about what a proper, responsible medium term target to release in 2022 is going to be. I make this commitment - it will be consistent with the pathway set out in the Paris Climate Agreement, consistent with net zero emissions by the middle of the century, and not plucked out of the air like Tony Abbott’s Government’s target. It will be a target informed by the best available scientific advice.

MACDONALD: Mark Butler thank you very much for your time.

BUTLER: Thanks Hamish.

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MEDIA CONTACT: LUCY CARUSO 0408 803 428

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.