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THE VULNERABLE WILL BE HIT HARDEST BY THE CARBON TAX

The carbon tax debate, raging in Australia for many months, has until now been largely focussed on the tax's impact on particular sectors of the economy. Notably, the tax's hit on manufacturing and other goods production sectors has been a dominant thread for some time. The Government has expended much energy assuring these sectors that their businesses will not suffer under a carbon tax.

Yet there are other sectors about which the government has largely been silent during this debate. These sectors reside in the portfolio which I shadow—the portfolio of disabilities, carers and the voluntary sector. There are four million Australians who have a disability of some form. There are also 2.6 million carers. The Government claims that people with disabilities and carers will be looked after through direct compensation to disability support pensioners and people who receive the carer payment. But even if you accept that those increased payments will be sufficient to offset the cost increases as a result of a carbon tax—which I do not—there are still thousands of Australians with disability and thousands of carers who will miss out.

There are 800,000 plus people on the disability support pension. Compare that to the figure of four million Australians with a disability. There are 180,000 plus Australians on the carer payment. Compare that with the 2.6 million Australians who are carers. That means there are 3.2 millions Australians with a disability who will not get any direct benefit in recognition of the additional costs they face as a person with a disability. It means that there are 2.4 million carers who will not get any compensation, above and beyond anyone else in the community, in recognition of the additional costs that they face.

It is very clear that Australians with a disability and their carers have been largely forgotten in the formulation of this carbon tax.

The Government has similarly forgotten the not-for-profit sector. Charities and volunteer organisations have been completely neglected in Labor's carbon tax package. Everyday voluntary organisations - the local footy club, the surf-life-saving club, community-based charities - will all have increased cost pressures as a result of the carbon tax.

Electricity prices alone will go up by 10 per cent at least under a carbon tax. So the power bills of these non-profits and charities are likely to go up by thousands of dollars a year. These organisations are going to have to make a choice. They will either have to do more fundraising—and they will be fundraising at a time when people have less money in their pockets to donate—or they will have to cut back some of the activities and services that they provide. That is a grim option facing the not-for-profit sector.

Surely, if you were designing such a far-reaching, economy-wide change as the carbon tax, that one of the first things you would think about would be the effect on some of the most vulnerable Australians and the effect on those organisations that seek to lend a hand to them to make life easier. On this account, Labor has failed miserably.

The carbon tax will put pressure not only on Australia's most vulnerable citizens, but also on the organisations that exist to provide those citizens with support. This will be the very real, very human cost of the carbon tax; a cost which the Government refuse to admit.

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