

Emissions poll a tax showdown: Abbott

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AN ELECTION fought over the Government's emissions trading scheme would be about tax, not the environment, Opposition leader Tony Abbott says.

As Prime Minister Kevin Rudd arrived in Copenhagen to a barrage of international criticism, Mr Abbott played up his own environmental credentials.

He said he was "more than happy" to match these against those of Mr Rudd.

"My first big local campaign as an MP was to prevent Telstra from installing a mobile phone base station next to a kindergarten," he said.

He told a Millennium Forum function in Sydney: "My first public disagreement with the former prime minister, Mr Howard, was over my proposal to drain Lake Pedder.

"Our second spat was over my proposal to bury the overhead cables which are such an eyesore - and which, incidentally, make a significant contribution to greenhouse gas emissions."

Mr Abbott said his first big initiative in government was the Green Corps, a traineeship scheme that gave tens of thousands of young people work in restoring the environment.

"I have always thought that there was a natural fit between the conservationist movement and a conservative political party. Both appreciate what we have and understand that we trifle with it at our peril."

He said he had a clear message for Mr Rudd about an early election: "Bring it on and we will be ready for you."

Mr Abbott said he would welcome any poll the Prime Minister called as a referendum on his ETS "because Australians have always been suspicious of governments that try to bully people into change on the argument that it's our one and only chance to get things right".

He said he had always been an "enthusiastic supporter" of responsible measures to improve the environment.

"As a local surf lifesaver and volunteer firey and as a keen cyclist, let alone as the father of three daughters who one day will want to have children of their own, how could I be indifferent to the fate of the planet? I have reserved my scepticism for Mr Rudd's emissions trading scheme that is basically a great big tax to produce a giant political slush fund, to generate endless wealth transfers to the Labor Party's favoured constituencies, supervised by a newly minted carbon police."

He said that when the Prime Minister boasted that most low income earners would get 120 per cent compensation for their increased costs he demonstrated this was "redistribution policy dressed up as climate change policy".

The Opposition Leader also went out of his way to say he was not a Liberal "to the manor born".

He said his maternal grandfather was a lifelong unionist. "My father reckons that, as a child in the north of England during the Depression, he went to a kind of communist Sunday school where they sang *The Red Flag* instead of hymns."

Mr Abbott said that when he was a journalist at the *Bulletin* he once moved a strike resolution after the photographic department had been sacked at a moment's notice.

This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/environment/emissions-poll-a-tax-showdown-abbott-20091216-kxhv.html>