



Green thumbs up for local candidate

Dickson candidates Peter Dutton (Liberals), Howard Nielsen (Greens), Fiona McNamara (Labor) and Sharon Neill (Democrats), with Pine Rivers CAN's Rebecca Stowe, had their environmental policies put under the microscope at a recent public forum in Samford.

By Lee Oliver

The candidates for the seat of Dickson have had their environmental credentials scrutinised by Samford residents in the lead-up to next month's federal election - with the local Greens member given the 'green thumbs up'.

Dickson incumbent Peter Dutton (Liberal Party) and challengers Fiona McNamara (Labor) and Howard Nielsen (Green) addressed a gathering of around 70 people at the Samford Farmers Hall on 13 October.

Australian Democrats Senate candidate Sharon Neill spoke on behalf of absent Dickson candidate Peter Kerin at the forum, organised by the Australian Conservation Foundation and the Pine Rivers Climate Action Network.

Locals at the forum were asked to rate the candidates across five key areas of climate change policy, with Mr Nielsen given the most favourable reception.

The Wights Mountain resident urged "global action on a neighbourhood by neighbourhood basis" in the battle against global warming, while looking at the social and environmental aspects, rather than just the economic impacts on politics.

"Last time I looked we were a first world country - I'm asking Australia to act like a responsible first world country," he said.

Mr Nielsen's ideas to maintain the longevity of local bushlands and water sources were well supported, stating

that the Federal Government should help revegetate farms and government owned land and give more support for community based environmental groups.

His suggestion to remove the GST from public transport received rousing applause.

While Mr Nielsen's environmental views were given approval by around three-quarters of the audience, the policies of his fellow Dickson candidates received a comparatively lukewarm response.

Both Mr Dutton and Ms McNamara's approval rating peaked at around 50 per cent.

Mr Dutton focused his attention on the government's preference for international agreements instead of the United Nation's Kyoto Protocol for reducing global emissions, adding that any climate change solutions should not be detrimental to the national economy.

Ms McNamara claimed the Howard Government were largely environmental sceptics and said the ALP would offer national leadership on the issue of climate change.

She said Labor would deliver financial incentives to make households environmentally friendly and added that a mandatory renewable energy target would be released by the party before next month's election.

The audience ratings suggested Ms Neill struggled to convince the gathering that the Democrats were "at the forefront of

environmental issues", despite her party, like the Greens, being "unashamedly pro-renewable energy" and supporting a total ban on nuclear energy.

The climate change forum, moderated by *The Westerner* editor David Paterson, also featured guest speaker Don Henry, from the Australian Conservation Foundation, and free tree giveaways courtesy of Pine Rivers councillor Bob Millar and the Kumbartcho Sanctuary.

Mr Henry said it was vital that the Australian Government to "take a leadership role" in tackling global climate change.

"It is important for Australia to be a strong international leadership voice on climate change to reduce greenhouse emissions," he said.

"We still have the opportunity to get on top of the (climate change) issue, but our kids won't.

"We need to get involved and make a difference soon."

The forum preceded the release of a national environmental report card by the ACF, which found both the major parties were failing in their policies for climate change, water and sustainable living.

The Liberal-National Coalition received a score of 21 out of 100, while Labor fared markedly better with 49.

The Greens and the Democrats both achieved scores above 90, while Family First received a 31.