

Labor promises to make aid volume commitment

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Member for Fraser Andrew Leigh and Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development Tanya Plibersek hosted a [public forum](#) on foreign aid with ANU Labor on Wednesday this week.

Most in the audience were students -- it was a friendly crowd. There was little in the way of new information (beyond points made during Plibersek's [very recent speech at the Australasian Aid Conference](#)), yet some of the questions yielded interesting comments. And it was clear from the responses that both Plibersek and Leigh have a very good understanding of international aid and development issues.

Following on from Plibersek's closing comment that Labor would be faced with a big challenge to restore both the quality and quantum of Australian aid after the cuts and AusAID-DFAT integration, I asked whether Labor would re-establish a standalone aid agency, whether they would release an aid policy before the election and whether they would make a firm commitment on aid volume before the election.

Plibersek didn't commit to a standalone agency but said Labor would be retaining or returning expertise to the aid program.

"When you talk about a standalone aid agency, I don't care who does the payroll or the computers, what I care about is the expertise of the people, so yes, we will look for aid specialists. It is specialist work, it's not the same thing as foreign affairs, it's not the same thing as trade, and we need to have a cohort who are able to do it well and most productively."

On quantity, she said we would hear more on volume before the election, reiterated that Labor is still committed to the 0.5% of GNI target, but highlighted the challenge in reaching that following the cuts.

"Yes, you'll get announcements on quantum and so on before the next election. We have never developed the skill that Tony Abbott has of sliding into government without expressing our opinions, and we're not going to start now. I think the real challenge, the real question is: how can we get to 0.5 after being at 0.18 or 0.19? Certainly it can't happen in the timeframe we had planned."