

## No reason for AusAID-DFAT merger: Plibersek

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Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development Tanya Plibersek slammed the new government's decision to integrate AusAID into DFAT and restated Labor's commitment to the 0.5% of GNI target for aid in a [speech](#) at [ACFID Council](#) on Thursday.

"The danger of losing AusAID is, of course, the danger of losing dedicated staff with specialist expertise and contacts in developing countries, but it's also the danger of a loss of focus and quality in our aid program."

In the tough-talking address, Plibersek questioned the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister's reasoning for the merger, which has been based on the argument that Australia's aid policy needs to be better aligned with our diplomacy, countering that she would "like them to point to one instance when aid and diplomacy have been in conflict."

"Of course we consider issues such as our responsibility to our near neighbours being more acute and demanding than our responsibility to more distant friends, but our aid policy already reflects this."

"Aid versus diplomacy is a false dichotomy."

She also criticised the government's pre-election decision to curb the growth of the aid program.

"Labor remains committed to meeting the 0.5% target and will hold firm on working towards the longer term target of 0.7%," Plibersek said.

"The Coalition's decision to slash \$4.5 billion from Australia's aid budget, announced at one minute to midnight in the dying days of the election campaign, is a severe disappointment to millions of Australians who agree that we have an ethical responsibility to help, and it's a betrayal of the poorest of the poor in our region and around the globe."

The contribution of Australian aid to areas such as gender equality, reproductive health and disability was under threat, she added.

"Let me say this very clearly – I will fight any effort by Tony Abbott to strip aid from family planning services in developing countries."

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop also spoke at ACFID Council, but her speech has not yet been released.

*Note: Julie Bishop's speech is now available, we have analysed it [here](#).*