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STATE DEVELOPMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND WORKS COMMITTEE

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PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE PLANNING (SOCIAL IMPACT AND COMMUNITY BENEFIT) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Monday, 2 June 2025

Biloela

MONDAY, 2 JUNE 2025

The committee met at 3.00 pm.

CHAIR: We will get underway with the official proceedings very shortly. I just wanted to let you all know that we had a hearing for our inquiry in Rockhampton earlier today. We had a great turnout with a number of different witnesses. We were very fortunate to have our local members there. Donna Kirkland gave us a welcome to that area. Bryson Head wanted to come to this hearing, but we told him to stay away because he is crook and we did not want him flying on the plane with us. He sends his apologies. I asked him if he would like to say a few things, and this is what he has provided me—

Welcome to the Banana shire and, in particular, Biloela and the broader Callide electorate. The Banana shire and the electorate are at the forefront of our solar and wind developments. Communities have rightly been frustrated by a lack of genuine engagement by some components of these projects and it is important that this changes and the community becomes central to the conversations about their respective futures. I will continue to work with all stakeholders to ensure the best outcomes for our region. Thanks to the committee for bringing the hearing here today on this important legislation. I look forward to reading the transcript from today's hearing.

Good afternoon, all. I declare open this public hearing for the inquiry into the Planning (Social Impact and Community Benefit) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. My name is Jim McDonald, and I am the member for Lockyer and chair of the committee. With me here today are: Ms Jonty Bush, the member for Cooper and deputy chair; Mr Terry James, the member for Mulgrave; Mr David Kempton, the member for Cook; Mr Bart Mellish, the member for Aspley; and Mr Chris Whiting, the member for Bancroft, who is substituting for Mr Shane King, the member for Kurwongbah.

The purpose of this afternoon's hearing in Biloela is to assist the committee with its examination of the Planning (Social Impact and Community Benefit) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. The bill was referred to this committee for detailed consideration and report. This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited guests may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. I also remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee.

These proceedings are being recorded by Hansard. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and the chair's direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. I just remind everybody to turn off their mobile phones or put them onto silent mode.

After we finished the inquiry in Rockhampton, we took the opportunity to take a charter flight for an hour and a half over a number of the different sites. Glen, with your better local knowledge, would you like to give the audience a quick rundown of where we went after we left Rockhampton?

Mr GKELLY: Thanks, Chair. Welcome, everybody. It is good to see you all here. I was fortunate enough to get on the plane with the committee and we headed north. In our trip, we went over the Moah Creek project, which has the potential for 58 turbines; Moonlight Range, which has had the red line put through it as a result of the call-in process—it was to include 88 turbines; and Boomer Green, which could have up to 140 turbines. It has not yet been given SARA approval, but we are looking at a study area there of around 50,000 hectares, give or take. It is a big project. Looking at the remnant vegetation in those areas, they are crazy spots for a wind project.

The big one for the committee to see today was the Clarke Creek project. There will be 105 turbines there, of which 78 have been constructed. At Clarke Creek remnant vegetation has to be removed for not only the pads where the turbines will go but also the 120-kilometre industrial corridor for the roads. They are the big things these developers do not tell you about.

Another thing that is known to some but not to others about Clarke Creek is that for each 500-tonne turbine, which stands 207 metres to the tip of the blade, there is 560 cubic metres of concrete and 70 tonnes of steel underground that will never be seen again. That is a thousand tonnes for each turbine. When you start talking 275 to 280 to the tip of the blade, that is a pretty big structure. There are a lot of skyscrapers in and around these communities, let alone the remnant vegetation areas of the electorate of Mirani.

These are all of the things that are ahead of us. It is really good for the community to see this today. The No. 1 project up there is Lotus Creek. It has the most heavily populated koala habitat in Australia. Even though it is recognised as one of the busiest koala areas—and they have no say—we are blowing the hell out of that too. That is something we have seen. Fortunately today we flew over the Moah Creek Solar Farm and the Manly solar farm at Clarke Creek, which is huge. We flew over the top of Smoky Creek solar farm, which was important to see because of the agricultural land that is involved. Today is a great chance to have your say and to listen hard to whoever is speaking. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thanks very much, Glen. We have a number of different planned sessions, and I understand the secretariat has spoken to each of the witnesses who is on the list. We have had a couple of other people come forward—I know Colin Boyce wants to say a couple of things. Steph will be over on the side. If you make yourself known to her we will get your name down for that end session, which will only be for about 15 minutes. We are on a tight schedule because we do have to get back to Brisbane tonight.

FERRIER, Mr Neville, Mayor, Banana Shire Council

FITZGIBBON, Ms Tarnya, Acting Director, Council Services, Banana Shire Council

CHAIR: Welcome. It is great to be in your company again, Mayor. Would you like to make an opening statement, after which the committee will have some questions for you?

Ms Fitzgibbon: My name is Tarnya Fitzgibbon. I am the acting director for council services at Banana Shire Council and I speak on behalf of council. Council provided its comments to LGAQ to form part of its submission on the bill. Council did not make a separate submission.

Council has a few concerns about the content of the bill. The word 'locality' is used a number of times in the bill but it is not defined. 'Locality' needs to be defined somehow to include neighbouring towns and not just mean the closest town to the project. These projects cover expansive areas. If a project goes over two local government boundaries, the social impacts on both communities need to be considered and a community benefit agreement needs to be entered into with both councils.

Banana Shire Council has a major projects housing demand and levy policy which outlines the council's expectation that renewable energy generation or electricity storage projects that have multiphased approvals over two jurisdictions pay a levy of 0.7 per cent of the total capital value of the projects that are in excess of \$50 million to contribute to the short-term housing demand and the long-term housing supply. I have a copy of this policy for submission.

There are also concerns with the development assessment process for these renewable energy projects. Council's main concerns relate to referral agency powers and the historical treatment of councils as only advice agencies for wind farm approvals. At the moment, council can only provide comments on wind farm applications and SARA can ignore these comments. Councils cannot impose any conditions on any approvals they give.

The bill introduces a similar assessment process for solar farms, which would also be assessed by the state. Banana shire is advocating for councils to be concurrence agencies for renewable energy project applications. This would mean that the state would have to listen to us. We could direct a refusal of the project, and if we wanted to approve it we could impose conditions to mitigate the impacts on our communities.

An issue has also cropped up in relation to projects that go across local government boundaries. A suggestion from the state was that the LGA that was closest to the project would be the concurrence agency. The other council would be an advice agency, leaving it with limited ability to protect its community from adverse impacts. In the Banana Shire Council's comments to the LGAQ, it proposed that both LGAs should be concurrence agencies. For example, the Bungaban wind farm project—one of the projects near Wandoan—is in the Western Downs local government area but the proposed accommodation is in our area in Taroom. If concurrence agencies are not specified under the proposed changes outlined in the bill, or in the associated regulation, Western Downs will be the concurrence agency and able to direct a refusal or impose conditions and Banana shire would only get to comment on the impacts to the shire, which could effectively be ignored by the state. This will leave one affected community to mitigate the impacts of a renewable energy project on its community while the other local government authority can only advise SARA about its concerns.

The impacts on both LGAs are likely to be different and potentially more adverse for one community, which is not necessarily the community closest to the project. With both affected communities being concurrence agencies, each local government area would be able to address the

impacts on their LGA. Using the Wandoan project as an example, the impacts on the Western Downs will be environmental whereas for the Taroom community there may be significant social and economic impacts with accommodation being situated there.

One of the issues the council supports is a proposed cost-recovery fee for considering the social impact assessment. However, another major concern of Banana Shire Council is the recovery of council's costs for negotiating community benefit agreements. The Banana Shire Council submits that the cost of negotiating the community benefit agreement—such as legal fees and expert fees, like engineering or strategic infrastructure planning—be reimbursed by the project component. Small councils are in a weaker position than the proponents. The proponents will likely have lawyers representing them regardless of whether they are internal or external lawyers.

The local governments that will likely be impacted by these renewable energy projects are generally smaller rural councils with limited internal expertise in these matters and no legal experience. They also have limited budgets. Costs for negotiating the community benefit agreement should cover legal and other experts fees and should be reimbursed so that it does not fall on the ratepayers of the shire.

CHAIR: Thanks, Tarnya. Did you want to add anything, Nev?

Mr Ferrier: Yes. That is the technical detail of what we have been going through. We sent it to the LGAQ because we thought it might be stronger coming through there as it is a combined body. There has been some common sense. Even just having the LNP saying they will call some of these in—and they have—has brought everyone into line a bit. We have a lot to do with the solar farms when they go through, of course, and it is a lot of work. We have been doing this since 2012. In the last six years it has just about worn us out. We did not have the resources to do it, but at the beginning of last year the Labor Party sent consultants to come out and help us. At that time, I only had one planner and he was our director as well, so all the work fell to him.

We had no control at all with the wind farms, as you know. Sometimes we did not even know anything until they wanted to use our roads. We were fighting with one hand tied behind our back. I will say that some of the wind farmers have been very good and some you do not want to have anything to do with, and we do not want too much to do with some of the solar farmers either. I am not going to put them all in the one basket.

I am just glad you have come today. You have come to where it is happening. We have already pulled people into line a bit with the community funding. They know they have to have a social licence now. It is good when they come in and that is the first thing they want to know about.

We developed our housing policy in 2023. I presented that to the last premier—I did not give it to the then housing minister—but nothing happened. I saw him a couple of times. We wanted it so everybody could have a crack at getting something lasting out of it. We came up with a housing policy. They own the house. It is only 0.7 of one per cent of their capital bill. They own the houses so they can put their people in them while they are working. Some of them said they were going to get all local people to work on the project, but we know that is impossible. We could not do all of that anyway. It is just something that will be there. There will be something left at the end and they can sell the house straightaway or whatever—the house will last 100 years. There will be something at the end of this.

This is generational. As a council, we have tried to make the most out of it. When they come in here with their big ideas we keep telling them that our ratepayers are not going to subsidise their shareholders, and if they are fair to us then we will be fair to them. I will say that some of them have been very good but others we have hunted out of the place, to tell you the truth.

I am glad you are here. You can see from the people who are here how much thought has gone into all of this around here. We have been battling this for a while. I am glad you turned up. There will be a difference. If we can work together, we will achieve something out of it.

CHAIR: Thanks, Mayor and Tarnya.

Ms BUSH: Thank you for coming along today and for your submissions, both oral and written. You have touched on some concerns about the increased responsibility under this bill without adequate resourcing. What kind of resourcing and support from the Queensland government would help offset some of that for council?

Ms Fitzgibbon: We need support in how these things come through to us. If we were concurrence agencies, I do not think we would need extra funding but there might be support documents that the state could provide us with to give us guidance. I think the major project housing policy would also get comments from the state that might be beneficial and form the basis of some community cost agreements.

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Ms BUSH: You mentioned that having a concurrent agent would help a little bit. Could you explain that a little bit more?

Ms Fitzgibbon: In planning there are two ways an agency can be part of the development application process. One is as an advice agency. Basically, we are given an application and we get asked to comment on it. That is the extent of it. The state can ignore our comments. If we are concurrent agencies we get a say; the state has to listen to us. We can direct a refusal and we can also impose conditions on the approval. We get a lot more say in the process when we are a concurrence agency than what we would if we were an advice agency.

Ms BUSH: In terms of resourcing, though, does that change things?

Ms Fitzgibbon: No.

Ms BUSH: You prefer more of a say, but resource-wise you do not feel you need any more resources either way?

Ms Fitzgibbon: No, we have a town planning team. That is taken care of.

Mr KEMPTON: Mayor, you talked about social licence from these large companies. I am wondering what your thoughts are—and this is really relevant to landholders—of a performance guarantee during the community benefit agreement stage and the decommissioning at the end. If they default on the CBA or do not clean up the mess at the end, your small operators come up against big companies—big noise. Do you as a council think there should be performance guarantees for each stage of those CBAs and for decommissioning at the end of the term?

Mr Ferrier: With the solar farms we put a bank guarantee on the end of it so that there is something there. We did that a couple of years ago but we have not had any of them come to that stage yet of course. We are very worried about the landholders who have signed up to these wind farms to start with, whether or not they really got the legal advice. I was on the radio all the time trying to warn everybody and I was even talking to New South Wales Farmers. They had the first one out with a pretty good policy to follow. We do not know if they have signed up themselves and who is going to be at the end of it because we do not know anything about that; that is all private business. I just hope they have covered themselves because we hear some of the figures it costs to pull these things down, and that is another thing. We have no idea of any of that because when they signed up, they could not tell anybody and a lot of them would not speak out.

Mr KEMPTON: Out of all the people who came to me with agreements, no-one ever signed one once they got legal advice.

Mr Ferrier: I hope that has not happened here, but it probably has in some places.

Mr MELLISH: Thanks for coming along and outlining a bit about the recurrent versus advisory roles that council sometimes has. Thanks for explaining a bit about the solar versus wind project and how that assessment and approval works. I was wondering if you could run us through a little bit about how the recent solar approvals process has gone to compare to what we are hearing about with wind processes as well.

Ms Fitzgibbon: Solar farms are assessed by council. The development applications come to us. In Banana shire we are very stringent on agricultural land. If a solar farm is proposed on agricultural land they need to demonstrate that there is no productivity left in that land. If there is, it does not get approved. It is assessed against codes in our planning scheme and effectively they have been tailored to that agricultural land aspect of it to try to prevent them from going on good quality agricultural land.

Mr Ferrier: We changed our policy on that halfway through this to try to keep the good agricultural land free. We had a change and it took us a long time to change it over. Some of the first ones got through on the agricultural policy we had previously.

Mr MELLISH: Thanks for explaining it.

CHAIR: Thank you both and thank you for the contribution you have made to the LGAQ as well as the development of that policy in 2023. Often if you are at the coalface you can come up with some solutions, but a lot of people do not put it in to help others, so well done on that. What gets measured gets done and until this legislation came about there has been no requirement for social impact or community benefit. From your experience, will this provide a benefit to all councils when the legislation comes in?

Ms Fitzgibbon: I think it will. The only thing, as I pointed out in my submission, is the concurrence agency part of it so that if it does go across local government area boundaries, both communities get to have a say in what happens and get the cost-benefit agreements.

CHAIR: That is a great suggestion.

Mr Ferrier: They are probably going to have four or so wind farms cross boundaries at Western Downs, Rockhampton, Gladstone and North Burnett. With our housing policy we have to work out how to bid with those councils as well. We are going through that now. At Boundary Hill the wind farm has started. That is between Westwood and Mount Morgan. We will see what happens with that one. They are on the ground now and that is the first one that has started to do with our shire.

CHAIR: Tarnya, you did say you had a policy that you would like the committee to have a look at.

Ms Fitzgibbon: Correct. It is our major projects housing demand and levy policy.

CHAIR: Is that included in your submission?

Ms Fitzgibbon: No, it is not.

CHAIR: We will have a conversation about that at the end. We just have to get approval from the committee to table it. Thank you for being with us this afternoon. There were no questions taken on notice and we will deal with the request for tabling the document shortly. Thank you again for being here and answering questions of the committee.

Ms Fitzgibbon: Sorry, Mr Chair, is now an appropriate time to make some comments on other submissions? There are a few issues that were raised about council's procedures and things that were not quite accurate.

CHAIR: Is that a part of this bill?

Mr WHITING: It is probably a good idea seeing we will be hearing from these people later on.

CHAIR: Sure.

Ms Fitzgibbon: The first one is in relation to workforce accommodation. There was a comment made that it is no longer impact accessible. It is still impact accessible, so communities will obviously get a say and have appeal rights if something happens. Council does have a temporary local planning instrument to make these code accessible, meaning there is no public notification, but there are no properties mapped for that around the wind farms that we have.

There was another comment about the battery storage component for Smoky Creek. I just wanted to let everyone know that council has not received any information about that BESS at this stage. I do not know. Council does not know what is going on with it. We have not been approached yet.

CHAIR: Thanks. There seem to be a lot of those projects happening in the community—a number in mine as well—that are really prospective and they have not lodged with council. Was there anything else that you wanted explain?

Ms Fitzgibbon: That is all, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: Once again, thank you very much for being here today.

Whereupon there was a round of applause from the public gallery.

LEATHER, Ms Melinee, Barfield Road Producer Group

SHANNON, Ms Melanie, Facilitator, Barfield Road Producer Group

CHAIR: Welcome and good afternoon. Would you like to make an opening statement before we have questions?

Ms Leather: I would like to thank you very much, Chair, and good afternoon, committee. On behalf of the Barfield Road Producer Group, I say thank you for the opportunity to appear today.

The Barfield Road Producer Group is a collective of beef- and grain-producing families who share resources, knowledge and best practices to address the challenges and opportunities within agriculture. We are a solutions focus group who understand the Queensland government's commitment to provide long-term, sustainable energy. We also understand the Queensland government's goal to increase the value of Queensland's primary industries to \$30 billion by 2030, as outlined in the draft *Primary industries prosper 2050: a 25-year blueprint for the Queensland primary industries*.

Central Queensland is renowned for its extensive grazing, cropping and intensive production systems. It contributes almost 25 per cent of Queensland's gross value of production and nearly 40 per cent of beef output, 30 per cent of sugarcane and 10 per cent of the state's horticultural production. It is imperative that the government ensures we have an integrated energy strategy that protects agriculture and rural livelihoods. This will require careful planning, transparent communication and meaningful consultation with local communities.

I commend the committee on the proposed bill to introduce a community benefit system into the Queensland planning framework. Whilst the measures listed within the bill including the requirements for proponents to undertake a social impact assessment and enter into community benefit agreements will contribute to achieving this, we believe there needs to be further detail. Input from industry and community groups will be essential in ensuring we reach rational solutions, and the Barfield Road group look forward to contributing towards meaningful outcomes.

Ms Shannon: The theme of my statement is collaborating to produce a clean energy transition. I am speaking today because through my work with our local producer group, I have seen firsthand how vital collaboration is to achieving a positive legacy for our communities. I will address three areas.

First, we ask the state to formally acknowledge the contribution our regions are making to serve as a foundation for fairer, more inclusive planning. Our regions are already doing the heavy lifting. We feed the nation and now we are being asked to power it too, yet many of our communities feel they receive fewer services and opportunities than others. This acknowledgement will allow for a more valued, community-led approach.

Second is the need for a community benefit system and social licence framework. Communities must define what legacy looks like for them, whether through shared profits, renewable investment opportunities or long-term tailored support. A community benefit and social licence framework can then be developed by councils and communities focused on transparency, longevity and unity, not quick fixes.

Third, empowering the integration of local government and community leadership will achieve a much stronger region working as one and not two separate groups. We recommend workshops run by independent bodies such as Coexistence Queensland or RE-Alliance to help leaders understand the energy transition and their region's role in it. Informed local leaders can then work with council to guide decisions that reflect the values and needs of their communities.

We urge the committee to support a transition that goes beyond quick fixes. With genuine engagement, good governance and clear policy, we can ensure the clean energy transition provides a positive legacy for our communities.

Ms BUSH: Thanks for coming along and for your submission. I really enjoyed reading it and looking into your group a bit further last night on social media. It is a wonderful arrangement, so thanks for setting that up. In your submission you raised some concerns around what would happen if council had more responsibility but not the resourcing to accompany that. Could you expand on that and what you think the risks, particularly for your community, would be if there was that gap in support to councils under this bill?

Ms Shannon: You are questioning us about the resourcing of the council?

Ms BUSH: Yes. I think I read that in your submission, that there were some concerns perhaps if council had a bigger role and they were having to do more work without the resourcing to support them, that might lead to some unintended impacts in the community.

Ms Shannon: I just mentioned having a working group that has key community leaders as part of it to assist council and they would represent diverse industries such as agriculture.

Ms BUSH: I quite like that idea. I am a politician, so I have to watch what I say, too, but I think sometimes in the community there is a mistrust of politicians, whether you are in local government or state, as best as we try. I like the idea of having an independent party working that through.

Ms Shannon: Yes.

Ms Leather: I think there is more to it than the mistrust of how that might operate—and the councillors touched on it earlier—where we are going across jurisdictions. Obviously, these councils work differently. I think what we are after is a really solid framework that is transparent, clear and consistent so when we do happen to have things that might go across jurisdictions then we have comfort in knowing that we are going to get a very steady outcome. In terms of resourcing, I think the council has a really big job to do anyway. We want to make sure that we are getting the outcomes that we need for our industry and community. We do not want to see councils running thin and not being able to provide that.

Mr JAMES: You talked about a working group. How about a working group facilitated by someone like the LGAQ or the regional group of councils that would go across many jurisdictions? Would that work?

Ms Leather: I can see things like that working but it has to be a very high level working group, too, almost to the point where it is appointed by the minister with a broad cross-section of representation from community, business, industry and First Nations people. It is important, too, to have some level of skills based within that committee.

Mr WHITING: Would you like to see the Queensland government set clearer rules or maps that show where renewable energy projects should or should not go, which would be to help protect prime agricultural land?

Ms Leather: I think prime agricultural land, particularly for our group, is a really big and important factor for us. When we listened to Glen talk about the remnant vegetation and the impact that the proposed wind farms are going to have in terms of the loss of remnant vegetation, that is really important to the agricultural industry as well. Our industry relies on having a healthy environment and ecosystems. We have to deal with a lot of legislation and requirements within our industry to ensure that we are protecting the environment and the animals within it, making sure that we have good biodiversity. We certainly rely on good climatic conditions. The loss of biodiversity and climate change impacts are actually impacting on our ability to produce food and fibre for the world. It is important to us.

Mr WHITING: It is not just prime agricultural land; it is land with high conservation and biodiversity values that need to be protected?

Ms Leather: Absolutely. We have to protect both. All of those things need to be protected. They all need to have a very solid framework and conditions around them.

CHAIR: I note in your submission you talk about lessons learned from other states. Would you like to share with the committee some of those things?

Ms Shannon: I think the lesson that I have heard a lot about is that it is not going so well. I cannot give you exact examples but I can say what I have heard. The experiences have not been great in general. I would love to see us actually reflect upon those, have a clear plan in terms of what to avoid and make sure that the social licence and the community benefits have a lot of detail in them and that there is a lot of transparency and everyone is on the same page—renewable energy companies, landholders, council and government.

Ms Leather: Chair, I think you will find in the room today that there seems to be a little bit of friction in the air. Certainly, there are people in this room who would have had bad experiences. In terms of our group, that is what we do not want to see. We do not want to see producers pitted against each other. Non-disclosure agreements have certainly contributed to friction among neighbours. There is that lack of transparency and real consultation. A lot of times these companies come in and say they are doing public consultation but they are not really. They are just talking to us; they are not talking with us and coming up with workable solutions.

Unidentified Speaker (Inaudible) lessons learned from other countries, not states.

Mr MELLISH: Following on from an earlier question about prime agricultural land, would it be easier in the future, rather than assessing these on a one-by-one basis as they come up, to have a bit more of a regional focus or a bit more of a regional plan about where and when they can be assessed rather than waiting for the applications to come in and assessing them as they fall?

Ms Leather: I think regional plans are important but you obviously would have to get down to that one-on-one assessment as well. The reason I highlighted some of the statistics in this area is that our contribution to agriculture in Central Queensland is huge. Central Queensland is home to the biggest beef herd in Australia. Seventy per cent of our meat is exported all over the world. There is more than just Australia relying on us for food security to provide highly nutritious protein sources to the world.

Definitely, these regions have to be considered when thinking about where we place renewable energy. It cannot be just about where there are existing transmission lines or power stations. You have to look at the whole region, what it is being used for and what its contribution to Australia's economy is. Certainly, food security is something we have to really put a lot of thought into. Our useable agricultural land is slowly getting eroded, whether from mining or urban sprawl, and now we have renewable energy. I am not saying that we do not look at renewable energy but it is how we make sure that agriculture is not impacted at the same time.

CHAIR: That is a good point. Melinee and Melanie, thank you very much for appearing before the committee today and answering our questions. Your community is very fortunate to have you represent them.

Whereupon there was a round of applause from the public gallery.

Creed, Mr Cedric, Private capacity.

Creed, Ms Therese, Private capacity.

Marshall, Mr Les, Private capacity.

McLeod, Mr Matt, Private capacity.

Osborne, Mr Scott, Private capacity.

Wilkie, Ms Kelly, Private capacity.

CHAIR: The next session is for local property owners and producers. Welcome to you all. As you have seen from the other witnesses appearing, you may make a brief opening statement and then the committee will have some questions for you.

Ms Creed: I am one of the tenacious 10 neighbouring the proposed Smoky Creek solar and battery project that you flew over today. We were one of the projects that got approved before the council introduced their rule about saving good agricultural land. It is very good agricultural land. We would like to thank the committee for responding to the many submissions from this area and for coming out of your way to hear us.

I refer to division 1 and 3 of the bill, social impact assessment reports. I would like to focus on the social impacts of renewables. We are into our seventh year of fighting to defend our land, our water, our livelihoods and our children's future. We are up against an unregulated industry and a government that has written us off as collateral damage and sacrificed us and our land on the altar of climate action. But this is not just about the abomination at Smoky Creek. This is about the path our government has chosen that threatens our food security, energy security and, therefore, national security.

We applaud moves by the Crisafulli government towards regulating this rogue industry. We do not believe that any ethical government would hesitate in regulating an industry that threatens a nation's food producers, its virgin forests and coastal ecosystems. The government should make no apology for abolishing an industry that is violating the Paris Agreement and the condition that in a bid to reduce emissions it does not threaten food production—article 2.1.b. The government should make no apology for abolishing an industry that violates the Modern Slavery Act and relies on child labour in its supply chain; an industry has been proven unviable for baseload energy generation in other countries; an industry that will outsource our power grid and syphon billions of taxpayer dollars offshore.

If the renewable energy sector were geared towards saving the planet, the proponents would gladly carry out environmental impact statements from which they are exempt, comply with the Vegetation Management Act from which they are exempt and adhere to reef regulations from which they are exempt. They would also not refuse to carry out preconstruction water and soil tests for baseline data in the event of contamination, as Edify Energy have at Smoky Creek. If these companies cared about communities, they would not coerce hosts into signing confidentiality agreements to keep projects hidden pre approval and gagging clauses during construction.

In answer to advocates of renewable energy, I must say green energy is an attractive fantasy that we would all love to believe, but it does not take a rocket scientist or much research to work out that from the mining of rare earth metals to the resource-hungry manufacture, transportation, construction, short-lived operation, deconstruction and disposal of masses of toxic waste that the net zero label on renewables is a delusion, even if this were a viable form of energy generation. For producers to perpetuate the prostitution of finite food-producing land as a noble cause is unforgivable. The only noble cause here is money.

Finally, the Crisafulli government does not need to spend months on the bureaucratic generation of new laws. It must simply extend environmental and social licence regulations that already apply to other industries over renewables. They could also mandate the Queensland Solar Farm Guidelines, which at present are not compulsory. This government is going to go down in history one way or another: either as the government that stood by and allowed mass destruction of precious landscapes or as the one that led the other states in halting a reckless journey towards environmental, social and economic disaster.

Whereupon there was a round of applause from the public gallery.

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CHAIR: Thank you, Therese. I think that acclamation says that is carried. Does anyone else want to make an opening statement?

Ms Wilkie: I thank the committee for coming out today. As you can see, this is a massive issue. I am a little concerned that it has taken you longer to drive here from Rockhampton than you have actually allowed for the whole hearing today, being an hour and a half. I would ask that in future you actually consider the impact. You can see from the crowd that we have here that this is massive so we would have liked longer to speak. I will try to keep mine as short as possible.

I will be an impacted neighbour, not by sharing a fence line but by sharing the water that will come off these projects. Smoky Creek solar is 9,000 acres and now a BESS that the council says they have not received any paperwork about but Rio Tinto were spruiking in the newspapers—that is the first we have heard of that battery project that the council referred to—and the Mount Hopeful Wind Farm with 97 turbines. They will be above my farm property on watersheds that will affect the water that feeds my cattle. As an impacted neighbour, putting a new post office in the town of Jambin is not of any benefit to my cattle if my water is affected. They cannot eat the mail. Committing money to the fireworks at the Wowan show—this is what these companies show as their community engagement. It is not. It is just them throwing around a bit of money on a Friday afternoon for people to go ‘ooh’ and ‘aah’ at the sky.

Referring to the bill, I will be dealing with an extra 300 vehicles per day on Tomlins Road with these projects. These are school bus routes. We have had the gas companies come through with the same problems. Once these projects start and they make all the promises not to travel during school bus times, that goes out the window when they are running late for work or they have to grab a coffee. They will be on the roads while our school buses and our kids are getting to school. These are the minor things that do not come across when you legislating.

The bill also needs to address the loophole allowing changes to social impact assessment reports that ignore the community access to full information. There is a loophole in there at 106X, parts 1A and 1B, about the companies being able to change their projects once they have put in a development application. That is not something that we can fight. As an example, I brought a bit of paperwork today to show you what one proposal looks like. As you can see, there would not be too many people who have printers in their house to print this size of paper. This is one. This is the pumped hydro project on the Gladstone Highway. This is an example of what a community engagement report looks like. There are thousands of pages here between the two documents. I have brought you just a couple of appendixes. Ten business days to read, download, print, discuss as a group and then comment is not enough time. The council has the same level of issues with the town planning side of things. We need the resources to be dealing with these and we need the legislation to back it up. Thank you.

Whereupon there was a round of applause from the public gallery.

Mr Creed: My name is Cedric Creed. We are a group of 10 food producers—as Therese said, the Tenacious 10—who since 2018 have been opposing an approved solar and battery factory adjacent to our land on a 9,000-acre lease. It is on fertile, prime food-producing land. This site is bigger than Norfolk Island. It is 2½ times the size of Great Keppel Island. We have great fears about the consequences of this development as it is at the head of our watershed and run-off into our properties. In October 2021 we wrote a letter to the proponent, Edify Energy, outlining our concerns. They never responded. They are about as transparent as this prime food-producing soil that they are going to be building on.

We are also closer to the Don River, a major tributary to the Fitzroy River and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Sixty to 100 Queensland bottle trees and pockets of remnant scrub will be flattened for this development. Highly fertile but very heavy, black, erosive soil will be denuded and sterilised forever.

My family have been producing food for Australians since the 1860s and my children are the sixth generation. We intend to continue our good work. Money does not drive me; it did not drive my father nor my grandfather. We have four blocks in the Banana shire and two in the Gladstone shire. We have a total of 18 neighbours. This company was invited here by three other farmers whose money is their god, and this company is by far our worst neighbour. This project was more or less all signed up before any of us knew about it. They are about as transparent as this black soil. They have shown us no decency or respect. God only knows how bad neighbours are going to be when the construction starts. They are sweet and tossing a few coins around in public, but they are real bullies behind the public's back.

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Why has the task of defending Australia's food security from profit-driven corporations fallen onto primary producers who are busy trying to run their small enterprises? Why has the government removed regulations that were in place to protect their landscape? Why are these unethical corporations allowed to self-assess construction practices and formulate their own fire and erosion mitigation plans with no independent audit? It is like the fox guarding the henhouse.

This move to address the situation by the Crisafulli government is welcomed and long overdue. My question is: what are you going to do to protect the neighbours like us? I suggest the Deputy Premier call in Smoky Creek and send it in the same way as the Moonlight Range project.

Whereupon there was a round of applause from the public gallery.

Mr Creed: To quote Albus Dumbledore, 'There is a time when we must choose between what is easy and what is right, and the time is now.'

Whereupon there was a round of applause from the public gallery.

Mr McLeod: Committee, Matt McLeod is my name. I am here to talk about the issues and concerns I have around the soil. We all know that soil is the foundation of healthy plants, healthy food and our beef industry. Ninety-five per cent of our food supply relies on healthy soils. This makes soil health fundamental to food security. The chemicals from the wind farms and solar panels that get into our waterways deteriorate that. We cannot have these chemicals enter our waterways. For the people here, this is their livelihoods; this is our homes.

It is outrageous. You are going against your own rules under your State Planning Policy. This section also covers agricultural land classification. Soils are finite resources and are fundamental to agriculture production systems. Land with special characteristics such as high fertility, water-holding capacity and arability is scarce and is often highly sought after for competing uses. Productive soils that have the capacity to sustain agriculture production with few limitations cover just 2.5 per cent of Queensland. Those are your own rules.

In terms of the impact of degradation, degraded soils reduce the quality and quantity of our crops. In this room there would be a lot of hay farmers and beef farmers. It is not only that; it is the local people in town who rely on our land staying prime agricultural land. Why not build it somewhere where it does not impact our agricultural land, our livelihoods, our children's livelihoods and the future generation? Why can't we leave a better footprint for generations to come?

Ms Creed: It does not make sense.

Mr McLeod: It does not make sense. The contamination will enter our waterways and affect what our livestock eat. My wife and I have a young family. We have just started a caravan park by our lake on our property. That is directly in line with the waterway, so that is our livelihood you are playing with. We have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars investing in buildings and such for our future, but once some of these chemicals and liquids go into our water stream we are going to have nothing. I can only talk for myself, but if this goes ahead you are destroying our futures.

Whereupon there was a round of applause from the public gallery.

CHAIR: Thanks, Matt. I think Scott wants to have a say.

Mr Osborne: Good afternoon, committee members. I am Scott Osborne, a local grazier, contractor and neighbouring landholder to the proposed Smoky Creek and Guthrie's Gap project. I wish to express several serious concerns regarding the current planning and assessment process surrounding these developments. One of our primary concerns is an apparent lack of appropriate scrutiny applied to these projects. Queensland possesses only 2.5 per cent of land considered suitable for high-quality food production. It is deeply troubling that such valuable agricultural land is now being considered for developments that remain largely unproven and pose potential environmental and health risks. These projects, which are promoted as clean and green, have yet to undergo a proper environmental impact statement; nor do they appear to comply with reef protection rules or tree-clearing regulations. As the owner of a neighbouring property that relies solely on surface water and lacks underground water sources, I am particularly concerned by the absence of comprehensive studies into the potential contamination risk associated with run-off from these development sites. Such run-off could have significant implications for our land, livestock and meat production, in addition to posing risks to the health and wellbeing of my family.

From a business perspective, our contracting operation faces difficult ethical and financial decisions. There is considerable community resistance to these developments, and local sentiment has resulted in threats of boycotts against contractors who choose to engage with renewable energy projects. This places businesses like ours into a precarious position, forced to choose between

potential work and maintaining the trust of the local community. Furthermore, I am aware of an instance where local businesses have been approached by renewable energy companies under unreasonable terms. One particular case involved a business being pressured into accepting a 90-day payment term, despite their standard seven-day terms. This would have resulted in carrying outstanding balances upwards of \$1.44 million over the payment period. When the business owner declined, the company reportedly became aggressive and would not accept his refusal, to the point where he is considering involving law enforcement.

In conclusion, I respectfully urge the committee to pause all current projects and require that they return to the beginning of the approval process. A more rigorous, transparent and independent assessment should be undertaken. Each project must be required to demonstrate compliance with all relevant environmental, community and regulatory standards, with final sign-off by an impartial oversight committee. Thank you.

Whereupon there was a round of applause from the public gallery.

Mr Marshall: Thank you, Mr Chairman. My name is Les Marshall. My wife, Anne, and I and our family run a cattle and farming enterprise. We are proud to be part of our group we call Tenacious 10. Our property adjoins a solar and battery factory with a boundary of 3.2 kilometres. We were told in February 2018 that there was going to be a small solar farm built on our neighbouring land. This small solar farm is 9,000 acres leased area with 5,000 acres of panels and is going to be built on the top of our watershed. We are totally reliant on surface water, with a major part of our water running through the proposed site, eventually into the Don River and onto the reef. With contamination hanging over our head from battery fires, spraying of poisons, panel leakage, panel glass breakage, erosion and no compensation being offered, the stress this has caused has been mentally and physically exhausting.

We are resilient people who cope with droughts—not very resilient today—fires, cyclones, floods, market fluctuations and more. These past seven years have been a battle that was never fair. We are up against an industry that has no regulation. The continued stress and pressure affected the mental health of a young couple trying to start a family and build a future life on the land such that they eventually had to sell and move. It is very sad.

No-one listens to the evidence we have provided and we have been hung out to dry by local, state and federal governments. All we ask is that we be listened to, that these companies abide by the same laws and rules as we do and that they also complete an EIS—environmental impact statement.

There are two types of people associated with this renewable rush: the ones who make money out of it and the ones who have to live beside it, and no-one cares about the latter.

Whereupon there was a round of applause from the public gallery.

Mr Marshall: We are Queenslanders, too, and we should be treated as Queenslanders, not just disposable community members. Thank you.

Whereupon there was a round of applause from the public gallery.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your presentations. Obviously, there is a lot of support in the community. We will have time for a few questions. I will go to the deputy chair.

Ms BUSH: Thank you, everyone, for coming—and that is a real understatement. I know that you have a lot going on in your lives without all of this, and then to come and make the effort today certainly has helped me and I think has helped all of us, so thank you very much. Scott, before I get to my question, I just do not want to raise your expectations given that this committee does not have the ability to intervene on any particular project. We cannot go from here and intervene on anything, but that is certainly information that can be taken back—

Mr WHITING: To the government.

Ms BUSH: To the government, correct. I just do not want you to walk out the door and have you thinking that we have not heard you, that is all. I have lots of questions, but one of them is around consultation. I am curious about that process and what that looked like for you. I think there was a public consultation. How did that feel on the ground and how could that have been improved? I assume you were not happy with it. I just want to understand that a bit more.

Ms Creed: We received a letterbox drop in 2018 with the map of the proposed solar. That was our consultation. When we rang the company number to try and organise a meeting, they insisted on meeting us all individually, not as a group. They spoke about a town hall meeting in the newspaper which never happened. We asked one neighbour involved, but because they had signed a

confidentiality agreement they could not tell us anything. Then eventually there were meetings where they came—that we organised, largely; they did organise a couple—and they would not answer our questions. Like Melanie said before, it was a session of them telling us what would happen or saying that they could not tell us yet when we asked questions. Community consultation did not happen. They do not have to do it because it is only Queensland solar farm guidelines, which are not mandatory. They do not have to do it under the law as it stands now. That is the message we are hoping we can get across to all of you. They do not have any regulations on them yet. They need a lot more regulation.

Mr KEMPTON: It would take a lot to get 150 people into a hall in Biloela and we cannot be but touched by what you have told us today. Therese, the legislation we are bringing in I hope does answer a lot of the questions that have been asked. It is far reaching, it is effective and it is impactful, but it is also very complex. Taking up your point, would a community information session be of use to everybody here so that you exactly understand what the implications are for you long term, because we are here for quite a short time? I am really open for you to let us know what you think.

Ms Creed: We have been to REZ meetings. This is a renewable energy zone. We are very lucky to have been named that. When we go to these meetings, they tell you where to sit so that you are not with your group and they lecture to you. Kellie, can you add to that at all?

Ms Wilkie: Absolutely. I actually brought with me the community engagement from Smoky Creek. There are nine pages of what community engagement should look like, but in those 15 pages is missing one single town meeting—not in Bilo, not in Jambin, not in Goovigen, not in any of these areas. We have had probably 20 different meetings that I have attended here in Biloela around the REZ, around the Powerlink lines. A lot of the neighbours here—there are probably about nine—organised individual meetings with Powerlink about the powerlines coming through their places to connect the renewable projects to the grid. Of those nine people who took the time to take Powerlink out and show them the sites, not one of them achieved a single thing. They did not even go around the areas they are trying to protect. The powerlines will still go straight through those projects on the basis that their survey of the area found that more people in the town would see a powerline than the family farms that will have a powerline going through their project, and that is their version of engagement.

Mr KEMPTON: But what I meant was: would you benefit from a community information session about this legislation to reassure you about what the future looks like? This is the legislation we are proposing, not past consultation.

Ms Wilkie: As far as the legislation goes, I got myself sidetracked talking, obviously, because there are so many issues here. One of the issues with your legislation is your meaning of the community benefit agreement. In your actual bill—I have read most of the bill—some of your examples at page 26 pretty much highlight the problems that our regional neighbours are trying to explain. That shows the lack of understanding by the people writing the bill because they have said, 'How about a sports facility or a library for the community or a training program to upskill members of the community?' This is not what we are calling for. We are more than happy that there has to be some legislation put in place, but what we are looking for is lasting projects more along the lines of upgrading perhaps the local high school. The home ec. room there is older than I am—and I am not that young, but it was built in the 1970s. Some 500 kids go to that high school. We could also do with major road improvements because you are going to be bringing hundreds and hundreds of turbines on our roads that are just not designed for this level of traffic. These are back roads in comparison to your highways. A new soccer field is going to be great, but what is that going to do for Les here on his farm 40 kays out of town who comes in town once a week? He is living right next door to a solar farm. The way the community benefit is assessed has to look at the big picture, because the neighbour who is sitting right alongside of it is not necessarily getting a benefit out of having new lights for the soccer fields.

Whereupon there was a round of applause from the public gallery.

Ms Wilkie: I am also a member of the chamber of commerce, so I have been to a few meetings with these guys in the last week. We have had Cameron Dick come out as well. We have had meetings with the department of energy, water and resources. None of these groups seem to know what each group is talking about and what they are offering. The secretary of the chamber of commerce is on the training Queensland group. What she has been told is completely different to what another group is being told. I am all for a community session as long as it is longer and we actually get to have some input. I know there are a lot of people here who are happy to listen, but there are an awful lot of people who would like to actually have their opinions heard and expressed.

Mr MELLISH: Thanks to everyone—you have been living and breathing a project for seven-odd years or so—for taking the time to consider and respond to the specific legislation here today. That must be a difficult process, and I am sorry for asking a really technical question about something that you have been dealing with quite extensively. In terms of what you are after for your particular project, noting where it is and the relevant levels of government approval processes, is what you are after for the feds to reconsider the EPBCA approval or is it the state to call it in? What is the specific thing that would see you get the outcome you want in this project?

Ms Creed: We are currently challenging the EPBC approval because the 44 submissions about the reef were discounted. They said we were not in the reef catchment, which we absolutely are. What we are saying is that if the Vegetation Management Act, the reef regulations and environmental impact statements applied to these projects like they do to us, like they do to mines, like they do to everybody else, then 80 per cent of these things could not proceed. You do not actually have to write new rules. You do not have to pay thousands of bureaucrats to write more rules. The rules are there. The fact is that these renewable energy proponents are exempt from those rules that already exist. The Queensland solar farm guidelines are already written. They are very good. It is a big, fat, glossy document that none of them follow.

The other thing is that our project was stalling because the investors were drying up—we think; we do not know because they do not tell us—but Rio Tinto has now come in to buy the power for their green aluminium. Unfortunately for us, that means that it is going to go ahead. It is not green. There is nothing green about it. The battery energy storage system that they have just added is so they can milk coal-fired power from the grid and sell it back as green and cover up the fact that the panels only do about 20 per cent to 30 per cent of their megawatt rating. I suggest that these companies like Rio Tinto and the big mines that are buying this so-called green energy use some of their land that they have to rehabilitate after mines have been there, and it is not much good for anything else ever again. Why can't they build their own renewable energy plants on that land? The Albanese government has given \$2 billion of taxpayers' money to the green aluminium initiative. Why can't they use some of that to build their own renewable energy plants instead of crucifying us where we live and calling it 'green' so they can sell aluminium with a green label on it for this monstrosity on land that cannot be repaired ever? That land will be sterilised and all of us around it.

Whereupon there was a round of applause from the public gallery.

Mr Creed: We just want this project stopped. It is as simple as that. We do not want money. Money does not interest me one bit.

Mr MELLISH: No, but I suppose I was more clarifying which process you want it stopped by.

Mr Creed: Any of them.

Whereupon there was a round of applause from the public gallery.

CHAIR: Thank you, all, very much. It is my turn to ask a couple of questions, and I will just provide a couple of clarifying things for you along the way. I thank you all for being here and for the representation that you have made. Cedric, I think in your address you asked for the Smoky Creek project to be called in. If you want that, please write to the Deputy Premier. As the deputy chair said, our job is to look at this legislation. I am proud to be part of a Crisafulli government that has actually put in place impact assessable development for renewable projects like solar and wind since we were elected. That was the first part and now we are here dealing with this bill, which is about making sure that those good actors in the renewable space actually work with the council and the community to make sure the social impact and community benefit is addressed.

Kellie, the examples in the bill are examples from other areas of what they wanted. They are not made up things by bureaucrats; they are from actual communities like yours. So whatever that may be or may look like for some other communities, that is important to them. You may not know this, but one of the reasons this bill is before us is that the Local Government Association of Queensland moved 19 different motions through their different conferences that were all about renewable projects. I can tell you about my own example in Lockyer. We have two solar projects that we are fighting. Those proponents have not put in applications to the council. Again, my council area, like Mayor Nev said earlier, is struggling with these things because there were no controls before. On your behalf, many of the councils have taken those issues to the conference where there were 19 motions debated. That has come to us, and this is the second tranche of things that we want to see addressed in terms of renewables going down the track.

Ms Creed: Excuse me, but can I just ask: will it be retrospective—

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Creed:—because there are more than 80 of these things in the Flynn electorate alone?

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Creed: So these new laws coming in are great, but are they only going to apply to things that have not been approved yet?

CHAIR: We are actually going through this process now to make sure we get the bill in place so that we will have these rules because, without them, there is no social licence at all. This is the second commitment that we made and we are putting this second lot of legislation through. In terms of direct impacts for this community, I heard what you said before regarding calling the project in. However, for lessons that you have learned here, what would proper consultation look like for your community?

Mr McLeod: I am struggling to understand why you are allowed to go against your own rules. I understand you just said for Cedric to write a letter, but why should he have to write a letter to reiterate your own rules?

CHAIR: Matt, that was an issue of asking the Deputy Premier to do something. The Deputy Premier has called in one project, all right, and that did not happen because nobody said anything.

Mr McLeod: Yes.

CHAIR: With regard to the State Planning Policy, the Lockyer Valley is one of the most fertile valleys in the world—

Mr McLeod: Absolutely.

CHAIR:—and I can tell you that you are speaking our language and that we are making sure we are managing these things for national sovereignty. I will go to the member for Bancroft for the next question.

Mr WHITING: This is to anyone on the panel here. This morning in Rocky we heard people talking about a level playing field—that is, that everyone knows, whether it be mining or renewables, the simple rules that apply to both of them that everyone can follow. Is that something that would be supported by all of you?

Ms Creed: Yes, absolutely.

Ms Wilkie: Yes, absolutely.

Mr WHITING: So a level playing field; okay, good. I just had nods everywhere there, so that has answered my question.

Mr McLeod: I also want to make it very, very clear to you. The issue of soil health and benefits is huge. I am sorry, but we all know here that our soils are deteriorating at a very fast pace. I would like you to consider speeding up this process. We should be stopping it, not doing things that we know are going to have the reverse impact on what we need to do. Every bit of steak, salad or fruit and veggies that we put in our mouth comes from our soils. I am not sure about anyone else in this room, but I like to feed my kids healthy food, not contaminated foods, not contaminated waterways.

Ms Creed: A new question has been added to our LPA, the Livestock Production Assurance accreditation. The question is: 'Do livestock have access to leaking electrical transformers, capacitors, hydraulic equipment, solar panels, wind turbines, coal seam gas structures or mine wastes?' That is question 2.8 in the section on food safety on your property. We have to answer that question. The question is an acknowledgement of contamination threats from renewable energy installations.

My question is: now that microplastics and chemicals from renewable energy have been found in meat samples in Europe and renewable energy proponents are refusing compensation agreements in the event of contamination of neighbouring land, will this new legislation ensure recompense to primary producers whose viability is destroyed by contamination? Will liability under the tort of negligence fall onto the host, the proponent, the local, state or federal government?

Whereupon there was a round of applause from the public gallery.

CHAIR: Thanks, Therese. That issue was also raised in Rockhampton. It is a point very well made. I do not think we have to give these people another round of applause, but I am sure you will. Thank you to the 'Tenacious 10'.

Whereupon there was a round of applause from the public gallery.

Ms Creed: Thank you so much for giving us this opportunity.

BAILEY, Ms Kerrith, Private capacity

BOYCE, Mr Colin, Member for Flynn, Parliament of Australia

HORDERN, Mr Sean, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome. Colin, I invite you to speak to the committee.

Mr Boyce: I am the federal member for Flynn and I am a community representative here. I would like to make three points, and I will be as quick as I can. Firstly, it is plainly obvious that the renewable energy projects here in the Callide Valley and the wider Banana shire do not have social licence, and I think all of these people behind me would support me in making that statement.

The second point I would like to make is in respect of local government, and Mayor Nev Ferrier touched on this. There have been some unrealistic expectations put upon local government councils. In my federal electorate of Flynn, I deal with eight local government authorities and all of them have issues with respect to the renewable energy projects that they are facing. Local governments do not have the expertise, the finances or the resources to properly assess many of these projects they are facing. Under the Local Government Act, local councillors are forbidden from engaging in what are called operational matters of council, so once DA applications are made, they are very reluctant to engage with their local communities and the proponents because they are actually breaking the law under the act. That needs to change so that these democratically elected councillors can represent the people who put them there.

The third point I would like to make is with respect to these community benefit funds. If you have a look at the investments from these renewable energy companies, they are in the billions. For example, in the three wind turbine projects around the small town of Wandoan to the south, there are approximately 500 turbines in those three proposals by the three different proponents. Their figures will tell you that it is an \$8 billion investment. If you are in the boardrooms of those companies, you are looking for a financial return. Just to pick a figure out of the sky, a 10 per cent net return per year on an \$8 billion investment is \$800 million a year. If you compare that to the community engagement funds that they are putting forward to that small community, it is literally spilling beer on a Friday night. It amounts to nothing.

I would suggest that legislation be passed that requires a minimum percentage of net return from these companies every year—two per cent, five per cent, somewhere in that vicinity—to engage in lasting legacy projects for small communities that are affected by these projects. They could build, for example, communications towers and provide a proper communications system to rural and regional Queensland. They could go about building and replacing many of the small bridges around the place as well as the big ones in terms of road infrastructure. There are literally hundreds of projects. The point is that the community benefit programs put forward by many of these companies are literally nothing compared to the amount of profits that they will be making once these projects go ahead and they start making profits and so forth.

I would like to further point out that, with respect to these projects, the more transmission lines that get built, the more substations that get built, the more batteries that get built, that will go on everybody's electricity bill as further network charges. To add insult to injury, the federal government is proposing the Capacity Investment Scheme, where the Australian taxpayer will be asked to underwrite a minimum profitability for these companies to guarantee them a return.

Whereupon there was a round of applause from the public gallery.

CHAIR: Thank you, Colin. They are three points that are very well made. Just so you know, we have three members who were in local government here, and the member for Bancroft and I were on the independent inquiry which looked at a number of those things and we are looking forward to doing more work in that space. Sean, I invite you to make an opening statement.

Mr Horder: The last group answered a lot of questions. They were really well done. I am from Miriam Vale. I am representing the Miriam Vale and Bororen group. The only question I did not hear answered before is when is this legislation going to be put through and completed so we can get answers.

CHAIR: Very shortly. We will do our report in about two weeks and then the bill, as it is known, will go on the *Notice Paper* and then it is up to our government to make a determination around when that gets put in place. It will not be months.

Mr Horder: Thank you.

CHAIR: Kerrith, would you like to make a statement?

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Ms Bailey: I just want to make a quick point before I start. I am a councillor on the Banana Shire Council, but I am here only in my personal capacity. Nothing I say today should be taken as coming from council; it is just me.

I am here because I have been involved in beef cattle production all my life and the contamination issue that Therese brilliantly raised is top of mind for me. I would like to raise with the committee—and I understand it will not be in this legislation—that there are holes that people need to understand and that need to be addressed when it comes to contamination.

There is no question that it is a live issue. The LPA requires primary producers to make a legal declaration as to whether they are contaminated or not. Specifically, in the case of wind turbines, the erosion of the blades spreads this stuff on the wind. There is no energy company, no proponent of any facility, that can tell you what substances specifically are contained in the wind turbine blades in the thermoplastic coating. We do not know what they are putting out there. I think it is time for the state government to look seriously at some kind of a design standard for these things. If I want a new garden shed, it has to meet certain design standards, and there is no way that these enormous towers should not meet design standards that also include a blacklist of substances you cannot have. We do not want BPA all over our land, in our soil, in our water, in our food chain. We do not want PFAS or any of the other plethora of forever chemicals. That is the first point.

The second point is that, for people who are near neighbours to these projects, there has never been any thought given to any kind of a setback from a neighbour's boundary. There is all sorts of talk about noise—and that is in dispute in some areas—but nothing has been done about protecting the neighbours from the contamination that is spread by these wind turbines as the coating erodes. I suggest that is something the state and federal government should be looking at because this is your food. Every member on the panel here eats the food that we produce; if we are producing contaminated food, you are all eating it, and that is not good. It is not good for us; it is not good for our kids. I would like to see some commonsense regulations around this that requires these people to know what is in the thing they are constructing and mitigate against any toxic substances.

Whereupon there was a round of applause from the public gallery.

CHAIR: Thanks, Kerrith. I appreciate that. I recognise your statement at the start that you are here as a private citizen. We will go to questions.

Ms BUSH: I was not prepared for a question; I was just listening intently to what you were saying and I totally support what you say. Something that has come up in the hearings and the submissions is the need to bring this on as quickly as we can, and I think we can see that, and the need for consistency so that communities know what to expect and councils know what to expect. At the moment there is a bit of a mismatch between this bill and what the resources industry is doing. I think Therese said it very well: that there is an approval process for mining companies now that has been working to a degree. Would it be the preference that, rather than doing more bills, more consultation and more of this, we just simply pick up the current approval process for mining and drop that in over the top of renewables? That would then give you the appealable bits that you were talking about.

Ms Bailey: I support what Therese said, and this has been my position for I do not know how many years. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. If agriculture has to do it, mining has to do it. If anyone else has to do it, then these companies need to do it too.

Whereupon there was a round of applause from the public gallery.

Mr Boyce: If I could make a comment with respect to that, there are rules and regulations that govern the mining and resource and agricultural sectors; there is not a requirement for the renewable energy sector to follow, and that is the entire point to this whole thing. It has been deliberately designed like that to expedite these projects so they do not have to go through the environmental process and all of the rules and regulations that surround agriculture and the mining and resource sector. That needs to change.

Whereupon there was a round of applause from the public gallery.

Ms BUSH: I think we are in agreement on that, Colin—words I never thought I would find myself saying, but there we go.

Ms Bailey: If I could make one last point. I am grateful for what the state government is doing. I think we have taken a big step forward since the election. I am not here to bash on you, but what I will say is what is missing is retrospectivity. When the reef regulations were imposed on agriculture and mining, they were imposed retrospectively. It was the same with the vegetation management laws. I do not see why there should be any block to retrospectively imposing those conditions on every single project that has already been approved. I think that is huge.

Whereupon there was a round of applause from the public gallery.

Mr MELLISH: I want to follow on from the local producers in the previous group and whether the method is fair—the state calling it in or the federal government rescinding the EPBCA. Mr Boyce, would you like the state to call in this project and reject it? Is that what you are seeking?

Mr Boyce: I think the state government would be wise to run the ruler over all of these renewable projects with respect to what I have just said. There is a different set of rules for the mining and resource and agricultural sectors versus the renewable energy sector. This goes all the way to the fact that all of these renewable energy pieces of infrastructure are attached to the land tenure of the land they are upon. Whoever owns that land is ultimately responsible at the end of the day. We have absolutely no guarantees that any of these companies will exist at their end of life, and that is another issue that needs to be addressed.

Mr MELLISH: But on this specific project, do you want to see this one called in?

Mr Boyce: In terms of the Smoky Creek one, yes, I do—100 per cent.

Whereupon there was a round of applause from the public gallery.

Mr WHITING: Thank you, Kerrith, for asking how quickly this can come through. It is something that the chair might want to recommend in the report—that it be declared an urgent bill—so the chair can bring that on. If the committee recommends it is an urgent bill and parliament follows up on that, that may be a way for that to happen quickly.

Ms Bailey: I think you would find that a lot of people in regional Queensland—perhaps the majority—would be extremely grateful if the committee saw fit to make some recommendations for changes to that legislation that would acknowledge what has been said in this room this afternoon with respect to vegetation management, reef regulations and environmental impact. We would be very appreciative.

CHAIR: Thank you, Kerrith. Kellie made a point earlier about the length of time that we are here in Biloela. Can I tell you that we have read and digested every one of the submissions that have been put in. From a lot of experience in doing these things, I know that we can take in a lot of information in an hour and a half and we are not going to double that information if it were three or four hours. I have been doing this for eight years, and I can say that the community of Biloela should be very proud of the representation you have made before the committee today. As the deputy chair and also the member for Cook said, we have heard from the community.

I thank you all for attending today. Thank you to our Hansard reporter for everything you have done. There is one issue of a notice that was tabled by Tarnya earlier. We move that that be tabled; that will be included in the record. This concludes the hearing. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. I declare this public hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 4.33 pm.