

Queensland Climate Transition Bill 2023

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Submitted by: Shane Cuthbert
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Introduction

As a future legal practitioner, an advocate for the Cairns community and as an Australian Marine Conservation Society ‘Reef Leader, member of the Australian Conservation Society and the United Nations Association of Australia (Queensland Division), Volunteer and Member of Greenpeace Australia Pacific and a Volunteer at the Reef Restoration Foundation, I have both a professional and personal responsibility to protect the rule of law, the integrity of the legal system, the rights of others and our environment. In the past I have volunteered in the past, with the Australian Youth Climate Coalition (before turning 30).

The objective of the Bill is to support Queensland to meet its obligations under the Paris Agreement¹ to keep global heating below 2°C, preferably 1.5°C, above pre-industrial levels, by reducing scope 1, 2 and 3 greenhouse gas emissions. It also establishes a new statutory authority to develop and implement a strategic climate transition plan that ensures consultation, compensation, training and job opportunities for workers and local communities affected by the transition away from fossil fuels.

The Need for Limiting Global Warming to 1.5°C.

The Bill has been introduced by Member for Maiwar MP Michael Berkman and is supported by the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and the Paris Agreement.

Many of the impacts of global warming are especially pronounced for Queensland. In particular, 2°C of warming is projected to destroy more than 99% of the Great Barrier Reef, compared to a very serious but not fatal decline of 70-90% at 1.5°C. Australian Governments’ failures to adequately protect the Reef from the impacts of climate change, as well as water quality and land management issues, led to UNESCO recommending in 2022 that the site be inscribed on the List of World Heritage In Danger². Destruction of the Reef would impact Queensland’s tourism economy by an estimated \$3.9 billion annually, or more than 33,000 jobs³.

I live in Cairns, one of the larger regional communities of Queensland in the Far North where, many of my friends and family members rely on tourism and the Great Barrier Reef for employment. Cairns is one of the major hubs for Great Barrier Reef associated tourism because of its Domestic and International airports, as well as its close proximity to the Daintree Rainforest.

Queensland is also significantly more vulnerable to impacts from extreme weather and disasters. Analysis by the Climate Council predicts 6.5% of Queensland properties will be uninsurable by 2030 due to the state’s high risk from extreme weather and sea level rise.

¹ The “Paris Agreement” refers to the Decision 1/CP.21, paragraph 21 of the 21st Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to adopt the Paris Agreement

² *Report on the Joint World Heritage Centre/ ICN Reactive Monitoring Mission to the Great Barrier Reef (Australia) from 21 to 30 March 2022* <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/154/documents>

³ Deloitte Access Economics (2017) *At what price? The economic, social and icon value of the Great Barrier Reef* <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/au/Documents/Economics/deloitte-au-economics-great-barrier-reef-230617.pdf>

Insurance in and around Cairns is already very difficult to obtain, if obtained it comes at a great cost many cannot afford to pay.

I have attended most Regional Council meetings and recently heard a Cairns Regional Council discussion around the withdrawal of funding to infrastructure projects that fall within the forecasted sea level rise areas. Much of Cairns is located within these areas. Cairns has many low-lying areas and many roads within the CBD and Port Smith areas regularly flood during high tidal events. This year, the Cairns Post reported that a stingray was swimming up our newly renovated esplanade dining precinct. This precinct, constructed with significant State Government funding has already been impacted by such an event.

I agree with Michael Berkman MP, that there is a need to limit global warming.

Current Targets

Queensland currently has one of the highest rates of per capita emissions in the world⁴ and the highest emissions of any Australian state, at over 159MtCO₂-e in 2020⁵.

The State Government has currently committed to a 30% reduction in emissions on 2005 levels by 2030⁶; Net zero emissions by 2050⁷; 50% renewable energy by 2030, 70% by 2032 and 80% by 2035⁸; and A 50% reduction in energy sector emissions on 2005 levels by 2029-30, and 90% by 2035-2036⁹.

The Bill proposes that, The Government's state-wide emissions reduction target of 30% by 2030 and net zero by 2050 is not consistent with the objectives of the Paris Agreement¹⁰. It is almost identical to the emissions reduction targets of 26-28% by 2030 proposed by the former Federal Government led by Tony Abbott and most recently by Scott Morrison. The United Nations states that global emissions must be reduced by 45% by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050¹¹, with greater reductions needed from more significant greenhouse gas emitters like Australia and Queensland.

This Bill introduces new state-wide emissions reduction targets including a 75% reduction in emissions on 2005 levels by 2030; and Net zero emissions by 2035.

Alternative Ways of Achieving Policy Objectives

⁴ Accenture (August 2022), Queensland Climate Action Plan: Laying the foundation for a successful climate transformation <https://www.wwf.org.au/what-we-do/climate/renewables/resources/queensland-climate-action-plan>

⁵ Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, *State and territory greenhouse gas inventories: 2020 emissions* <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/climate-change/publications/national-greenhouse-accounts-2020/state-and-territory-greenhouse-gas-inventories-2020-emissions>

⁶ Queensland Climate Action Plan (2020) <https://www.des.qld.gov.au/climateaction/emissions-targets>

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ ¹¹ Queensland Energy and Jobs Plan (2022) <https://www.epw.qld.gov.au/energyandjobsplan>

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Climate Resource (June 2022) *Comparison between Queensland's 2030 and 2050 emission reduction targets, 1.5C pathways and 2.0C pathways*

¹¹ United Nations Net Zero Coalition (2022), *For a liveable climate: Net-zero commitments must be backed by credible action.*

I believe there are alternatives and/or projects that can be implemented supporting the policy objectives, having recently been briefed on the ‘Iron Boomerang project’ by Civil Engineer and friend, Max Hooper.

It is essential that the State Government begin planning now to ensure Queenslanders are protected from job losses and economic uncertainty as a result of sudden and unplanned declines in fossil fuel investment, increased risk of global penalties and sanctions, stranded assets, and growing tension and confusion in communities where new fossil fuel projects continue to be approved with little long-term viability.

The Iron Boomerang

Deloitte’s “New Futures, new resources” report, commissioned by the State Government in 2021, found that rapid global decarbonisation will likely reduce demand for fossil fuels, with increasing demand for minerals and metals required in low-emissions technologies. Government support for a coordinated approach to decarbonisation would lead to the best-case scenario for the resources industry and Queensland’s economy and wellbeing more generally¹².

Australia must think big if it is to find a way out of the current economic depression and Queensland, if it is to become more sustainable, provide additional housing and limit the impact of global warming, reducing our emissions. There is a proposed National project that will do that. Project Iron Boomerang is a bold plan to connect northern Queensland’s coalfields to Northern Western Australia’s iron ore reserves with a railway that transports the minerals both ways, supplying steel mills at both ends.

Irrespective of the imperative for Queensland to phase out fossil fuel exports in order to limit global emissions and meet its obligations under the Paris Agreement, economic projections show a global decline in the use of coal and (to a slightly lesser extent) gas, which will inevitably affect workers currently employed in the resources industry, as well as businesses and communities currently dependent on income from fossil fuel exports¹³.

This proposed project will result in a more efficient Australia, these efficiencies will significantly benefit Queensland¹⁴, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Although precise figures vary, anywhere between 20,000 and 38,000 people were employed by coal mining in Queensland in 2022¹⁵. If the project and subsequent employment opportunities

¹² Joe Hinchcliffe, The Guardian (27 November 2022) *Queensland faces ‘significant’ wellbeing decline if it doesn’t quickly transition to renewables, report says* <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/nov/27/queensland-faces-significant-wellbeing-decline-if-it-doesn-t-quickly-transition-to-renewables-report-says>.

¹³ The Australia Institute (2020) *Getting Off Coal* <https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/P881-Getting-Off-Coal-WEB.pdf>

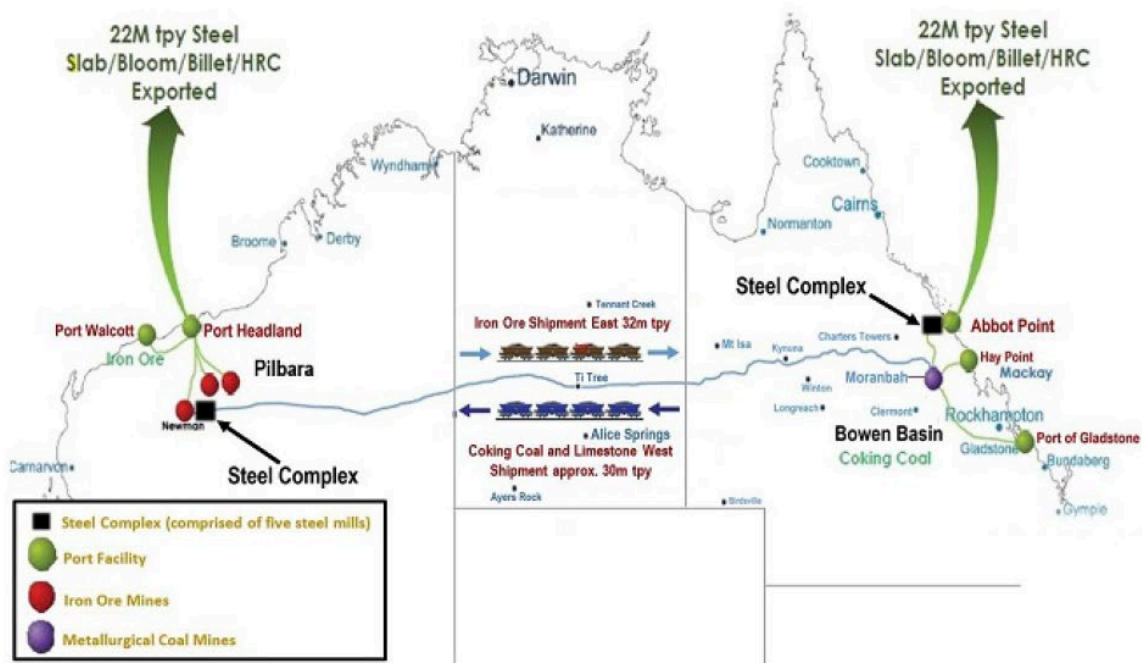
¹⁴ *Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee on Iron Boomerang*. Submission 18, Australian Mining Cities Alliance

¹⁵ Gilfillan, G., Australian Federal Parliamentary Library (2023). *Employment trends in coal mining and the renewable energy sector*. https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp223/EmploymentTrendsCoalMiningRenewableEnergy

come to fruition it would provide considerable long-term opportunities for regional, rural and remote Australians¹⁶.

The project will create 50,000 jobs in construction and 30,000 jobs in operation, provide for additional and affordable housing in regional centres and lower emissions through ‘DC’ power cabling, lowering the cost of storing and delivering electricity.

The world is dependent on seaborne iron ore and coal transported to steel furnaces in Asia, and Australia dominates the trade in both. But the ships from Australia, which are the world’s biggest bulk carriers, sail thousands of nautical miles to China and Japan returning empty.



The plan is to build a single-track railway line with passing points, between Abbott Point near Mackay in Queensland, and Port Hedland in WA. At both ends multiple modular steel plants will combine the minerals into first stage steel, which can be shipped in slabs on customised containerships for further processing in Asia. It is estimated 44 million tonnes could be exported per annum and the exportations would be more than 20% more efficient than the processes in China, contributing to our global emissions.

As the explanatory notes propose, domestic emissions reduction targets do not account for the contribution of fossil fuels extracted in and exported from Queensland to be burned elsewhere (commonly called scope 3 emissions). However, as affirmed in the 2022 Land Court decision in *Waratah Coal v Youth Verdict (Galilee Coal Project)*, coal, oil and gas exports from Queensland will lead to emissions elsewhere and contribute to global heating

¹⁶ *Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee on Iron Boomerang*. Submission 22, Isaac Regional Council

which will have impacts in Queensland as well as internationally¹⁷. This project could dramatically reduce global emissions.

State Government policy and legislation still allows for new fossil fuel exploration and mining in Queensland, and information from the Department of Resources indicates there are 12 coal mines already approved in the state that are expected to continue operating past 2050, including some until 2099¹⁸.

History of the Iron Boomerang Project

This project was close to being adopted as a Coalition policy before the 2013 federal election however then-Opposition Leader Tony Abbott personally rejected it. On 5 September 2022 One Nation Senator Malcolm Roberts moved a motion for an inquiry by the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee on Project Iron Boomerang.

The motion passed, notably with resounding support from Labor Senator from Western Australia Glenn Sterle, deputy chair of the committee charged with the inquiry (with Nationals Senator Matt Canavan as chair).

According to the terms of reference, the committee will examine the employment created by the project; the benefit to Australian GDP and balance of payments from increased productive capacity; the capital, energy and resources required to build and operate the project; feasibility of design; environmental benefits or impacts and impacts on Aboriginal communities; the project's relevance to national security; and any related matters. The committee will report back to parliament in 12 months.

Senator Roberts outlined the proposal in some depth:

“Project Iron Boomerang is an exciting and visionary project that can make our country's north and can make our whole country. Project Iron Boomerang's main elements are a 3,300-kilometre transcontinental railroad with heavy duty axle capacity connecting existing rail networks in the iron ore region of the Pilbara to the existing rail networks in Central Queensland, on the way linking with the existing Darwin-Adelaide rail line to improve freight movement nationally.

“The essence of this project is that iron ore will be transported from west to east, and those carriages will be then backloaded with coal to transport coal to Western Australia—hence the boomerang name. Steel blast furnaces and steel parks at both ends—in the east in the Bowen Basin of Queensland and in the west in the Pilbara in Western Australia—will, in turn, turn the iron ore and coal into steel slabs for export from Port Hedland in Western Australia and from Abbot Point and the Port of Gladstone and Queensland. Fibre optic, water, power and potentially gas lines can be laid along the rail alignment for additional commercial benefit. “Project Iron Boomerang will strengthen Australia's balance of payments. It will lift our gross domestic product, and, with that, lift our whole economy, restoring our national security, restoring opportunity. We have allowed too many industries to be closed and sent overseas. Too many jobs have been exported. It's time to turn that around.”

¹⁷ *Waratah Coal Pty Ltd v Youth Verdict Ltd & Ors* (No 6) [2022] QLC 21

¹⁸ Matthew Killoran, Courier Mail (29 November 2022) *Revealed: How long Queensland coalmines are expected to stay open* <https://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/qld-politics/revealed-how-long-queensland-coalmines-a-re-expected-to-stay-open/news-story/f174e38a7236742188e0537ecd433c6f>

WA Labor Senator Glenn Sterle gave this endorsement:

“I hadn’t heard of Project Iron Boomerang, but I sat down and got a briefing from Senator Roberts. It comes back to when I was a kid growing up. I remember in the great state of New South Wales we used to do all of this sort of stuff. We actually used to make our own steel. We used to have proud steel cities, where there were communities, there were bonds and there were families, before all this ‘fly-in, fly-out’ nonsense took over. It was before the farm was sold—if I can use the terminology of a farm. It breaks my heart to think, as I’m watching my grandchildren grow up, how disgusted they should be with the politicians before us who thought it was a good idea to contract out work, we used to do, and we did well. ...

“So, I want to support this. I know the Labor Party and Prime Minister Albanese—the Albanese government—support you, Senator Roberts, for bringing this to us. I think it’s a magnificent thing, and I also think this is what we should be doing. These are the big-ticket items that, when I first came into the Senate, lo and behold, I thought we would be discussing on a daily basis. How tricked I got! But, anyway, at least let’s get back to the big stuff about building a better nation, as I said in my first speech, and leaving it better than how we found it. ...

“I want to support this, and we will support this, Senator Roberts. I understand the opposition are, hopefully, getting behind this too, because this is the stuff we need to do. ... Let’s try and put these two great industries together: iron ore in my state of WA and coal in your state of Queensland. It just makes too much sense.”

D.C (Direct Current) High Voltage Cable

It has been proposed that, the railway could transport not only iron-ore related cargoes but also equipment and supplies for a D.C. (direct current) high voltage cable placed parallel but some distance from the railway (e.g., 50 metres). D.C. power cables are technically superior to A.C. (alternating current) power cables for long distances. The cables would be placed discretely below ground without the visual disturbance of electric pylons.

D.C. high voltage cables are now used to convey electric power for considerable distances in Europe. In Germany electric power will be conveyed from Northern to Southern Germany while in China, cable lengths have reached 3,000 km.

There is a 2-hour time difference between the North-West of Western Australia and the East Coast where most of the Australian population resides. A critical disadvantage of solar power occurs in the early evening when power demand is high (cooking supper and air-conditioning for returning families) while the sun is low in the sky and easily obscured by clouds. By contrast, the North-West would still be in the mid-afternoon with strong sunshine, the more northerly location further boosting the available solar power into the winter¹⁹. Solar power projects have already been proposed in the North-West to support the mining industry²⁰.

¹⁹ *Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee on Iron Boomerang*. Submission 3, Andrew Batchelor

²⁰ <https://stockhead.com.au/energy/asx-green-energy-stocks-fmg-planspilbara-renewables-hub-agl-exits-coal-three-years-ahead-of-schedule/>

The Queensland Government has proposed a section, of this new 'DC' power line construction further South. It would make great sense to have this type of infrastructure installed throughout the State from the North, where there are greater opportunities for the production of electricity and the South, where there is a greater consumption of electricity.

I attend Rotary Club meetings regularly and late last year, we welcomed as a guest speaker, a senior project manager for the wind farm projects on the Atherton Tablelands. When asked 'why the large wind turbines on the Tablelands were not operating recently' and 'was it because there was no wind? He answered the question by saying that 'although the project has been a great success, the State Government had not yet provided the funding necessary to construct the infrastructure capable of transporting the enormous amount of clean energy these turbines were producing'.

So, the windfarms were from time to time, 'switched off' not because there was a lack of wind, but because there needs to be greater investment in the infrastructure that stores and carries our electricity. This again, is another reason why the Queensland Government should consider supporting the Iron Boomerang project or at least, parts of that project to see where efficiencies can be made, especially in regard to the movement and storage of electricity.

Increased Container Shipping Efficiency

The proposed dual purpose Iron slab / container ships are six times more efficient than the current bulk ore carrier ships' which mean just one new ship, will replace six of the existing bulk ore carrying ships. The new ships will have a pay load each way and would not return empty, backloaded with containers for the return trip to Australia.

Iron ore consists of approx.60% iron and 40% dirt so once processed into steel slabs it consolidates three times and takes up 65% less space. Because of the efficiency fewer ships are required therefore there is less traffic going in and out of Australian ports, less risk of pollution at the ports and less chance of damage to the Australian and global marine environments²¹.

Australia supplies most of the seaborne natural gas, iron ore and coal for steel making globally, some responsibility rests with Australian coking coal and steel makers to reduce carbon emissions or face carbon penalties in export markets. Carbon penalties are an emerging reality and may damage the competitiveness for Australian mineral exports²².

Carbon Reduction Opportunities

The establishment of environmentally responsible and commercially effective global steel production in Australia will benefit other Countries globally specifically, our neighbours Indonesia, Vietnam and India given that, we will be delivering decarbonised steel and cement two decades prior to their own 2060 net zero commitments²³. A regional leadership opportunity for Australia in this space.

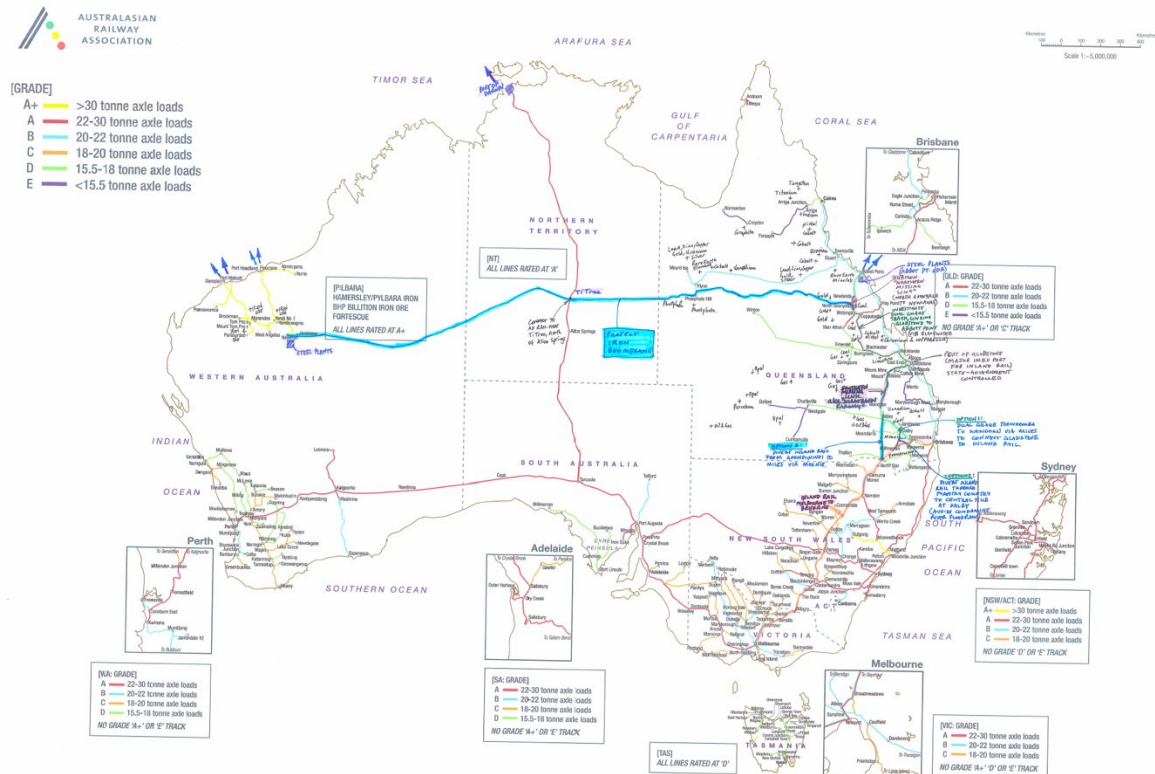
²¹ *Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee on Iron Boomerang*. Submission 5, Keith Kerr

²² *ibid* Submission 15, Cubic QED Pty Ltd

²³ *ibid* Submission 19, East West Line Parks Pty Limited

The Iron Boomerang proposal improves upon Australia’s emission reduction target of 43% by a further 27%-37% at commencement and aims to become carbon neutral by 2040, ten years earlier than Australia’s 2050 target²⁴.

The sheer scope, complexity and cost of this project is likely to attract criticism from many professional and institutional naysayers in a country like Australia which unfortunately in recent times has lost its mojo in the great game of creating truly visionary and significant infrastructure schemes of this magnitude²⁵.



Conclusion

It is my overall submission to this committee that the Bill be supported however, further technologies, projects and opportunities for reducing carbon emissions must be investigated. I agree that there is a need to reduce our carbon emissions however, this need must be balanced with the rising costs of living, the creation of and provision of long-term jobs and industry, the needs of our regional and remote communities and citizens of Queensland as a whole.

Regards,

Shane Cuthbert

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ *Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee on Iron Boomerang*. Submission 20, Max Hooper

Lived Experience Advocate for Mental Health, Youth, the Environment, Justice and Equality.