



# ***TRANSPORT AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE***

**Members present:**

Mrs MF McMahon MP—Acting Chair  
Mr PT Weir MP  
Mr BW Head MP  
Ms PE Pease MP  
Mr LA Walker MP  
Mr TJ Watts MP

**Staff present:**

Ms M Telford—Acting Committee Secretary

## **PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE ENERGY (RENEWABLE TRANSFORMATION AND JOBS) BILL 2023**

### **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**Tuesday, 30 January 2024**

**Rockhampton**

## TUESDAY, 30 JANUARY 2024

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**The committee met at 8.48 am.**

**ACTING CHAIR:** Good morning. I declare open the Rockhampton public hearing for the committee's inquiry into the Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill 2023. My name is Melissa McMahon, member for Macalister and acting chair of the committee. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay our respects to elders past and present. We are very fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples whose lands winds and waters we all share. With me here today are Pat Weir, member for Condamine and acting deputy chair, who is substituting for Lachlan Millar, member for Gregory; Bryson Head, member for Callide; Joan Pease, member for Lytton; Les Walker, member for Mundingburra; and Trevor Watts, member for Toowoomba North.

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 witnesses 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. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and my 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. Please turn your mobile phones off or to silent mode. The committee will have about 15 minutes at the end of the program today if any observers would like to comment on the bill in any official capacity. If you would like to do so could you please make yourself known to Margaret, the committee secretary, before 10.30 and she will provide further information.

### **FERRIER, Mr Neville, Mayor, Banana Shire Council**

**ACTING CHAIR:** To kick off proceedings, I now welcome Councillor Neville Ferrier, Mayor of Banana Shire Council. I invite you to make a short opening statement after which time committee members may have some questions for you.

**Mr Ferrier:** Good morning everybody. I am the mayor of Banana Shire Council covering 28,000 square kilometres, 15,000 people and 12 towns. We call ourselves a shire of opportunity. Agriculture, of course, is our base; always has been and always will be. We have coalmines, a gold mine and disaster management. We have QNP that makes prills for blowing up coalmines, of course. We have Tey's Meatworks in Biloela. We have a coal-fired power station. We are very proud of what we have. We are probably lucky that we have different identities and wages coming in. Our power station and coalmines provide good wages, of course, and a lot of those people have small farms around the shire as well. We are very lucky there.

We are not against renewables, the Banana Shire Council. We know they are coming. We want to try to do the right thing and we want to do the right thing by our ratepayers and make the most we can out of this industry as well. It is a bit of a dog's breakfast at the moment though, especially with the wind farms. We are a member of CQROC as well—six councils there—and we have been trying to do a lot of things with getting roads ready for when wind towers come out of the Gladstone port. Gladstone Regional Council and Banana Shire Council have paid a consultant to do a road survey and we have taken that down and presented that to the minister. I believe that is probably helped form what they are now calling the Queensland Transport and Logistics Council. I have had meetings with them. We get on very well with them. I think they are doing a really good job, to tell you the truth. We had another one come and see us yesterday. They are calling themselves the Queensland Renewable Energy Council and I think they are going to try to do a good job as well to try to get the renewable industry on side.

At the moment you cannot blame the renewable industry, especially the wind farms. It seems to be first in best dressed at the moment and it always seems to be a race to come second because the first one seems to be the one that has to pay for a lot of the infrastructure so it is not working out properly at all. I think the state government has missed the boat. Everything has happened too quickly.

I am not blaming them. We have been trying to help all the way along through CQROC and our own council and we have come up with what we believe is a lot of good ideas, but it is just taking too long to get going.

There was \$100 million come out of the federal budget four or five years ago to do a heavy vehicle bypass out of the Gladstone port and nothing has happened. If that was done back then half of the troubles that we are having now would not be there. That \$100 million should still be sitting somewhere not spent. It is little things like that. It is no good looking back and blaming people, it is just what it is, but we have to move forward on this. We have to try to do the right thing. We have to get the wind farms and solar farms working together themselves.

We have a lot opposition to renewable industries out there at the moment and it is getting bigger every day. I think we just have to work together. We are not doing it properly. As a council we have come up with some ideas ourselves. We are making a start on a mining camp in Biloela because you cannot get a room in Biloela as it is from Monday to Friday, just with the power station shutdowns and the coalmine shutdowns, and that is how it has been for a fair while. We know we have to have camps. We would rather those camps in towns and around towns than out on-site. I have been speaking with the government. One of our wind farms wants a site up in the mountains. The state government cannot stop them. They found that out themselves. It was a bit of a shock to them that they cannot stop them putting a camp there.

There are people investing in the shire, doing up the Dululu Hotel to be accommodation for wind farms, and the wind farm will not sign a contract with them. There are four hotels within 70 kilometres. There is Westwood, Dululu, Wowan and Goovigen. Most pubs are closed. This renewable industry should be able to open all those pubs and get those little towns firing again. They have to work with their social licence and help rural communities. I believe the rural councils and communities throughout Australia are carrying the load for the renewable industry. I get a bit of a grimace every time I see Minister Bowen and Minister de Brenni get up and say the targets we are going to reach and how we are going to do it because I know that we are the ones doing the work at the moment, and bearing a lot of the cost. We have very big trouble getting planners, engineers and everything at our council and we just cannot keep doing what we are doing and not getting anything out of it. As you know, with the solar farms we have put the cost on them, but with the wind farms we do not get anything. The first time we know something is going on with a wind farm is when they come to us about a road or unless one of the landholders tells us, but they are signed to secrecy because they have signed up for money of course.

It is not working real well at the moment. We are trying to find ways around it ourselves. Some of the wind farms we have coming in, and solar farms, they are very good so I am certainly not complaining about some of them, but some have to do their social licences a bit better than they are doing. We had one come and see us the other day. They want to build a 1,000 megawatt solar farm and they are saying their social community fund is \$30,000 a year. That would not buy the coffee. This is ridiculous. Something has to happen. Anyway, we are here to help. We are trying to move forward. We have come up with some great ideas, I believe, our council itself, on housing and that sort of thing, and I will explain that later if you like.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Mayor Ferrier. I will turn to the deputy chair for the first question.

**Mr WEIR:** You talked about the impact on council infrastructure and you talked about speaking to state government about roads. You are obviously talking about council roads not state controlled roads—the impact on council roads, bridges, crossings, that sort of thing? What other council infrastructure are you referring to?

**Mr Ferrier:** I am talking state roads too. CQROC, we are all in one, and the Gladstone council. The state government will not let them take a heavy load over the Calliope River bridge in Gladstone so they have to use council bridges in Gladstone to get the heavy loads out of town. They are not even using state roads there. We were trying to bring things forward about that and pointing all that out. I think one of those bridges goes over an electric railway line so you know what would happen if that collapses. It will never get fixed. Some of the big loads for the power station had to be barged up the river further and come across to the other side of the Calliope River so they could put it on trucks on the other side of Fisherman's wharf and cart it out. They could not even cart that out of Gladstone.

**Mr WEIR:** Is that bridges that they could not go over?

**Mr Ferrier:** Yes, there is a state road bridge over the Calliope River that will not hold the load. Even some of the loads for the wind farms cannot come over that bridge.

**Mr WEIR:** What are your thoughts on how that should be done? As you said, it is the councils where these projects are proposed that are carrying the can, in your view.

**Mr Ferrier:** It is a bit late now on that one but the heavy vehicle bypass that the \$100 million was there for should have been in there. That would have bypassed that and come out along the railway line so it would have missed a lot of that. The \$100 million might not have been enough to do it, but I think it would have been. At the time that was the price, I think. We tried to work on this before to try to get it ready because we could see what was happening. The Gladstone Regional Council put a lot of work into this. We have a really good lady there who was doing all the heavy loads and the bridges and all that sort of thing.

We had one come to us the other day. They have given us two different ways to bring their wind farms to between Jambin and Dululu. We have to look at using two lots of council roads to do that. We do not have the people to do that. They have to make up their mind what they want to do and then come and see us and we will tell them what we can do and how much they have to do first. We have a bridge there but we do not know if it will take the load. We are not going to bring a consultant in and pay to do that when they might not even use it.

We believe that there should be a bond when these people come in. I know it is very hard to deal with for them because they have their finance. They do not have it ticked off until they get everything worked out so it is a bit hard to blame them as well. But we certainly cannot afford to keep doing things like this and then they change their mind and use a different road. If we have to get consultants in to work out if the bridge is good enough, we cannot pay for that. There should be a bond, I believe, every time they come in, whether the state government holds it or whatever, so that these jobs can be done first because this is going to be holding them up later on as well and then they will be blaming everybody else, and us of course. This should be worked out first.

**Mr WEIR:** You mentioned the lack of line of sight by council, particularly on wind projects, because of the approval process being more state development than council.

**Mr Ferrier:** Yes.

**Mr WEIR:** You say that needs to be reviewed so council has more line of sight on the notification of these proposals before they go any further.

**Mr Ferrier:** Yes. Sometimes the first we know of it is when they come in and ask about using these roads. We do not know until then. Sometimes they have had their wind towers up to see if there is enough wind for 12 or 18 months and no-one knows about it. Say there are only three property owners they are going to use, they sign a contract and in that, of course, it says they cannot tell anybody. They are not saying anything because that is in the contract so they are keeping quiet. I would, too, because some of these people are going to get a few hundred thousand dollars a year out of this so good luck to them. I would be shutting up, too, I can tell you. That is how it is.

You can see that there is going to be a big rush at the end. With one of them we have coming, there is going to be 25 kilometres of gravel road, our roads, that they will use and there are 12 grids. They all have to be done. There is a lot of work to be done before they start. Then they have to cart all the gravel. If they want to get gravel up onsite and get that in then they have to get permits and everything for that as well. That is probably the best thing to do because, say you are putting up 60 wind towers and there is 800 tonne of cement and concrete in each one, the road is just going to get pulverised if they are carting 60 kilometres from a quarry somewhere. If they go and drill to see if the gravel and the stone is alright to make concrete, that is a big expense as well and it takes time. Then they have to get permits and everything to do that. It a bit of a catch-can thing. There has to be a lot more done at the start, I believe. There is no way in the world that the government is ever going to meet these targets because these things are going to take years to build.

**Mr HEAD:** I know from one of my mayors of the work that you are doing in this space to try to see rural communities through this with some good outcomes and trying to make sure as best you can that they do not get left behind. Further to the road issue that the member for Condamine was asking about, I understand that it was in 2019 that that \$100 million was put on the table but the issue was identified probably long before that. If the Gladstone port access issue was addressed today, how much easier would it be for projects of any description and development in Central Queensland? How much easier would it be for things to go ahead?

**Mr Ferrier:** I think it would still work. Better late than never, I suppose. At that time—people here probably do not know—the Moura grain depot was the second biggest depot in Queensland. There is no railway line to bring that grain to port. All that grain from Moura—and some of it comes from the Central Highlands into the Moura depot—goes by trucks to the Gladstone port. They cannot Rockhampton

road train down there. The idea was to do all the heavy vehicle work so that they could get the grain carted to the port a lot cheaper for everybody. There is hundreds of thousands of tonnes a year. It was to try to help that, before the wind farms and everything came along. It would still have to be a help.

**Mr WATTS:** Have you quantified what the cost would be to ratepayers if the government does not invest in this road network? Ultimately, your ratepayers will be the ones paying to fix the roads, build the bridges, get the engineers to check them and the power is going to be shut off somewhere else in the grid.

**Mr Ferrier:** We have not signed a contract with wind farms on roads yet. We have not even done the first one. They wanted to start in this quarter but I think it is going to be the second quarter of this year that we will have two of them starting and we have not even signed a contract or anything with them yet. We are that far away. One of them is still going on about two different ways to get there. A lot of that is state roads as well, of course. For some of these loads, if they cannot get a bypass to where they are going, going to Banana and coming back around 80 kilometres—if they can come over one of our bridges it will save them 120 kilometres a trip or something. It is a big cost.

We will make sure that we are covered with ratepayers. That is why we need a bond. If something happens it will not get fixed straightaway because we will not have the money to do it and they probably will not want to do it straightaway either. There is going to be a hell of a blue about it all. If we had a bond then we could just get something done straightaway, without using our money. We do not want to use ratepayers' money at all. We believe that if they come to us and they sign a contract then they have to start doing those roads up before they start work, but the pressure is going to be on them, of course, to build straightaway. I know that they will want to take their heavy gear up there and start moving on the hills before everything else happens. They will want to start before all the grids are fixed and all that sort of thing. To gravel and do up a 25-kilometre road is going to take months and months of work and a lot of money. They have to cart gravel. They have to buy gravel at quarries or do it all up on the hill. They are a fair way off from starting. I know they think they are going to start before the end of the financial year, but, the way things are going, they have no chance.

**ACTING CHAIR:** I have a question in relation to the bill we are looking at, the proposal for the renewable energy zones and the Banana Shire Council's position within one of those potential renewable energy zones. A lot of the framework around the bill involves a number of councils and committees bringing all the stakeholders together. Would the involvement of local governments such as yours in those committees give you the opportunity to make sure that all stakeholders are at the table before these proponents start speculating about where they can put wind farms?

**Mr Ferrier:** It would help. We have already done a supply chain ourselves. We have had a fair few meetings with them and most of them have come along and listened. We have given them a list of all the local people and businesses in the shire that can help them do things. They can go and see them and try to start on the right foot. For most of the ones that want to go public, we have put out paperwork to say that these are the ones that are coming and here is how you get in contact with them if you are machinery operators or whatever. We have had meetings.

We are not going to run a mining camp. At Biloela, we have put land aside for it and we are going to put the sewerage and water on it and someone will come in and run that. I was very worried that if you owned a pub or a caravan park or a motel in Biloela then you would not want a mining camp in town. We went out straightaway and got a bit of buffering in the first meeting or two about that, but we kept having meetings with them. A combination of people in the shire came up with the idea themselves that we will get that site ready to go for someone to come in and then contract it out and then, of course, they will have to pay us a fee.

On the accommodation side what they have come up with is that we put some of that land aside for them so if they want to buy 10 rooms and place them there to run from a motel, hotel or caravan park then they can do that. The locals still have a chance to make money. It is not just the contractor coming in and taking money out of town. We have gyms and everything in town. From where we are going to put the site they can walk to gyms and they can walk to hotels, cafes and everything from there as well. We are trying to make sure that the locals can get something out of what comes here; it is not just a camp that is run by someone in Melbourne or somewhere else with all the money taken out of town.

**ACTING CHAIR:** I guess what I am hearing is that shires like yours do support and see the benefit of these renewable energy opportunities in and around your area as long as the infrastructure is there to support it and as long as there is a local component that is embedded as part of the project in construction and ongoing?

**Mr Ferrier:** That is right, yes.

**Mr WALKER:** Thank you for coming this morning, doing your presentation and allowing us to ask questions. We have heard some exciting information from the Port of Brisbane. They have met their targets early in relation to their carbon footprint and what comes out of the Port of Brisbane. Now they are working with the private sector on other ideas to help them because the global market expects green credentialing from Australian companies that want to compete on the world market. There are big players. In relation to other local authorities, when at the Brisbane port we heard about the logistics of getting out to the wind farms west of there. Have you consulted those local government authorities and those proponents on how they do their logistics and the impacts on their infrastructure?

**Mr Ferrier:** I heard they are having as much trouble as we are. One of their bridges closed the other day or something and they could not run at night time and all that sort of thing because they were doing the road up and no-one knew about it.

**Mr WALKER:** So you are having those conversations with them on the logistics?

**Mr Ferrier:** We are talking a fair bit with the Transport and Logistics Councils and Lauren. She is very good. Because we had so much to do beforehand through CQROC, she has come and presented to CQROC twice so we are all over that a bit. There are two different things at the moment.

**Mr WALKER:** I asked that because the LGAQ is your advocacy group and there are three different local authorities west of there that they have been dealing with to get the equipment out to the wind farms. They have some good stories about the positives and the negatives. I am wondering if you have some information directly from them to assist you on the issues that you have to deal with.

**Mr Ferrier:** No, not really because they have not come our way yet. They are only coming up to Clarke Creek so they are only coming out of Gladstone and having heaps of trouble and then coming through Rockhampton. They are running out of hours to go up and back. There are not enough police and there are not enough police cars. They have to get the private pilot cars on the road again. They have been doing that in the mining industry here for 40 years and there were very few accidents, if any. It works well, they know what they are doing, it is their professional job, they are a lot quicker and you can get the police back on the beat where they are supposed to be.

**Ms PEASE:** Thank you very much for coming in, Mayor. It is really great to hear from you. I would love to hear a little further about the Banana Shire Council's commitment to renewables and what you are doing in that space already.

**Mr Ferrier:** We back them all the time because we can see that is what has to happen. I think most people realise that you have to have renewables and the quicker it happens the better. I went down to the Australian Council of Local Government meeting in Canberra last year. A motion was put up that renewable firms have to have a social licence and pay so much a year. That was a motion put up by one of the councils. I could not believe that so many councils throughout Australia voted against that. The reason put to us was that these companies are trying to save the planet and we should be doing our bit to help as well so we should be carrying the cost of that.

I came home and I said that we have two parts of Australia here. We have all the ones on the little councils around Melbourne, Sydney and wherever that think they are saving the world down there by riding a pushbike around the block. We are up here and we cannot afford to fix our roads and everything because of the cost of everything and what is happening in our shire. There is no way in the world that these companies, mostly overseas companies, cannot pay their way. They are going to make money. They are not here to be friendly. One of those companies coming to us—and it was one that offered \$30,000 a year, mind you—is worth \$9 billion. They come over here and think that they are going to pay the community a benefit fund of \$30,000 a year. They are not here for their good health; they are here to make money.

**Ms PEASE:** What I am trying to understand is whether your own council has targets in place and plans to reduce your emissions. What are your plans for going into and making use of renewables? There is a real desire of people not just in cities but all around Australia to make sure they are doing their bit to save the planet, reduce their emissions and reach targets. Does your council have a plan on that?

**Mr Ferrier:** For 10 years, we have had solar energy on our main admin buildings, water towers and sewerage. We are doing our bit, I can tell you, and it is paying off. We are not quite getting enough out of the solar industry that I thought we should have to start with, but we are doing our bit. We are looking at hybrid cars. I can get in my car and do 800 kilometres on gravel roads in one day and come

back. I cannot have an electric car or anything like that. Most of the time you need four-wheel drive vehicles to do that. There is no way in the world that a regional council can really be efficient in that, but we can do all of that with solar power et cetera. We have not talked to anybody about seeing if we can ply cheap power out of some of these solar or wind farms to council because it is a bit hard to do. All of that is in the wings. We have to get all of this sorted out first before we can work out our bit. We are doing a fair bit ourselves just with solar power and our buildings. Our big cost of course is our sewage plants and water plants.

**Ms PEASE:** You certainly have a very diverse council, with lots of different organisations and families that operate. Thank you for coming in and for all the great work you do representing them.

**Mr HEAD:** I have two quick questions regarding the council workload and the impact on council. I understand you are trying to employ someone who will pretty much do this full time. Could you put that on the record? Further, the key thing I want to ask you relates to the future of communities such as Biloela and those across the Banana shire. This energy bill and the Energy and Jobs Plan and the jobs guarantee that underpins it refers to relocation packages. I want to get your thoughts on what a jobs guarantee for the Banana Shire Council should look like for the future of the coalmine workers and the energy workers in the Banana shire.

**Mr Ferrier:** Most people realise that coal is going to be there for another 20 or 30 years. We have good coal in the shire. Batchfire supplies all the coal-fired power station at Biloela and it is a conveyer belt through the fence. That is how close they are. It is just perfect how it is set up. They will be doing that for a long time. As you know, Callide B is probably going to close in 2028 but Callide C will be at least 2038. It was on the news again this morning about Callide C. A quarter of that 1,500 kilowatts is brand new and it will start in a couple of months time. The water tower is brand new. It will have a life span of 40 years if they want it. It is the last one to come into Australia and it is brand new. All the other ones last for 40 years. It will too if it is needed, and I believe it probably will be the way we are going.

Mr de Brenni has done a fairly good job there. I think he has got them pretty well covered with a lot of that. At the power station itself, there are 230 or so people. They assure me they will be going for awhile. They are talking hydrogen and batteries there. We were saying before here up the back that batteries is the only thing that is going to save this and make it work. There is a lot in that side of thing with batteries as well, and manufacturing them and having them around the place. We are working on that side as a shire council ourselves to bring someone in there. That is beside the point probably.

We can meet these targets. We are not against it, but I think there has to be a lot more work done. Batteries are the only thing that is going to save us. There is not going to be a lot of people working, but if we can manufacture batteries—and we have been talking to one company—we will have a lot of workers there.

**Mr HEAD:** With the jobs guarantee specifically, the government is putting a lot of money up-front to secure jobs in the energy sector. Should it be more localised so communities like Biloela see their workers retained in that community?

**Mr Ferrier:** Yes. I think a lot of that is going to happen. A lot of those jobs will be elsewhere—they will be out of the shire—and we are very worried about that. Everything seems to be going down south. Everyone wants to come and build factories and everything outside the big cities to get a workforce. As a council at the moment we are only 70 per cent staffed. That is why we have trouble trying to do a lot of this work. We are worried about that. We believe they will find jobs in a lot of these high-tech things but it will not be in our shire; it will be close to a big city.

Can I say one more thing before I go. We have got what we call the Major Projects Housing Demand and Levy Policy that we have come up with as a council. If a wind farm or a solar farm is going to spend \$600 million on a project, we have put through a policy at council that 0.7 per cent of that must go into new housing. They cannot come and buy houses; it is to build new houses. They pick what town they want to do it in and build a house. If it is \$500 million, that would be \$3½ million going towards building houses, which would be seven houses or six houses or whatever.

We put that through as our policy, but we need the state government to back us on that to make it a policy so we can get that out of every renewable firm that comes along. We have it in the council policy but we need that backed if they do not want to do that. Otherwise, we will not have houses for nurses, Woolworths workers, council workers or anyone else because those projects will come and pay a lot more rent and if they are not paying rent they will just go and buy the houses and

we will lose out all the way around. We believe that any project over \$50 million has to come and do this. That is what we put in our housing policy. We have seen it everywhere else. You cannot rent a house in Biloela at the moment. We cannot get workers. Sometimes we get a worker to start and then we cannot get them a house so they cannot come and do the job, and we have not got the renewables there yet.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you for your time this morning and for your submission.

**WIDDOWSON, Ms Matilda, Campaign Assistant, Environmental Advocacy in Central Queensland**

**ACTING CHAIR:** Welcome. I invite you to make a short opening statement, after which committee members will have some questions for you.

**Ms Widdowson:** I would like to begin by thanking you for the opportunity to appear here today. I am here on behalf of Environmental Advocacy in Central Queensland to emphasise the urgent need to decarbonise our energy sector and shift away from our dependence on fossil fuels. As such, EnvA is strongly supportive of the Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill 2023 which outlines a distinct path to a clean energy future and will allow Queenslanders to reduce emissions and minimise the impacts of climate change.

However, as outlined in our submission, we believe the bill can be strengthened to have further positive impacts on our communities, environment and climate. Although EnvA is very supportive of the renewable targets being legislated, they are still not consistent with the pathway to limit warming to 1.5 degrees. This bill presents an opportunity for Queensland to step up its commitment to reducing emissions by also addressing the need to phase out government owned fossil-fuelled power stations and introduce provisions to prevent the development of new fossil-fuelled power stations in the private sector. Additionally, we acknowledge that renewable developments can still have very real and perceived impacts on the environment. To reduce the likelihood of these negative impacts, we recommend the renewable energy zone framework be completed as a matter of urgency with specific consideration for using previously disturbed land so that these projects benefit nature. For the projects that are being developed ahead of the finalisation of the renewable energy zone framework, we advise they be required to demonstrate that they have undertaken best practice environmental and social assessments.

To reiterate the final point in our submission, the bill should provide more of a framework around small-scale renewable projects which allow for cheaper and quicker installation and therefore can yield faster results for reducing Queensland's emissions. Thank you.

**ACTING CHAIR:** I turn to the deputy chair for the first question.

**Mr WEIR:** In your submission, and you just stated it again, you believe that the targets should be earlier than what is already proposed. Also in your submission you express concern that it 'is likely to result in irreparable damage to our local landscape and result in stranded assets'. I would be interested in your thoughts on that. We have just heard of the challenges being faced by local government. They are concerned that things are going too fast and we are not prepared for these developments. You are saying go faster but there are impacts. How do you think we will get through that?

**Ms Widdowson:** The climate science tells us that by 2030 we need to be at a 67 per cent reduction of emissions from 2005 levels. Under this framework with this renewable target, unfortunately, we are still not in line with that. There are definitely challenges to be overcome to be able to quicken this transition which is why we think the implementation of this strategy is critical to make sure that we are not facing pushback from communities—that we understand all of the challenges thoroughly so we can be planning ahead to overcome those in the quickest way possible. It is ensuring that the planning and the leadership is in a direction that will allow this to be the most efficient transition that it can be. We know it is a very big and very challenging change and we may not be able to get to those targets, but we need to try to make sure everything is as smooth as possible so we can have the best shot at keeping warming to within 1.5 degrees.

**Mr WEIR:** With the approval process, are you saying that should happen faster? I am concerned about the lack of scrutiny on it. I will give you an example of what I am talking about. I get landowners who have wind projects, as an example, and they are going to clear vegetation that nobody else would be able to clear. The landowner would not be able to clear it. There is a resistance to putting powerlines through state owned land because you would have to clear vegetation to do it. The project is allowed to do it but you are not allowed to do a powerline so this is where the public get a bit wary. Where is the environment movement in this conversation? How do you reconcile that?

**Ms Widdowson:** In our submission we explicitly say that renewable projects should benefit nature. We do not think any project should be allowed to clear where there are threatened habitats or species or areas of ecological significance. That is where we come in with our messaging that the renewable energy zones should be done with consideration for using already developed or disturbed land so that these impacts can be minimised.

In the areas where we are seeing renewable projects jump ahead of the framework planning and develop in areas that have previously escaped disturbance from other developments, they should be required to show some kind of environmental assessment and also show they're consulting with the communities around there who may not have previously been exposed to big developments, acknowledging that Queensland has a pretty poor environmental protection record across-the-board for all developments. It is ensuring there is trust between communities in the framework for the renewable transition that the government has put forward and the developers of these renewable energy projects to make sure we can have the best outcomes for the environment, climate and communities.

**Mr WEIR:** There is a concern in that, and I will talk from my area which is a lot of prime agricultural area, and the Central Highlands and so forth have plenty of the same. That flat ground is good for solar farmers but it is not good for agriculture. There is also a balance between prime agricultural land and these projects.

**Ms Widdowson:** They are trialling projects in Tasmania cohabitating low-stock grazing and solar properties down there so I think we can keep an open mind to see that as a possibility in the future. I also do agree that we have this prime agricultural land and we should be benefiting from that. I think there are still prospective other areas like unrehabilitated mines that could potentially be used where we know that there is always relatively cleared ground that we can use for solar farms and they already have a lot of the transmission infrastructure there as well.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you for attending. It is very important that the committee and all parliamentarians do travel throughout Queensland to hear the various different perspectives. I would like to acknowledge the member for Rockhampton here in the room today. It is very different when you step outside South-East Queensland and you start talking about climate change and targets. Again, that is why it is very important that the committee travels throughout Queensland. There is in many places an ideological opposition to renewable energy and the idea of climate change in its entirety. How does government or how does an organisation that is looking to promote renewable energy work with communities and the social licence that is required in areas where there is opposition to renewable energy from an ideological perspective? I am sure you encounter that in your advocacy.

**Ms Widdowson:** I am not sure that I have quite the answer for you. We are still trying to figure that out ourselves. I think, and you would be aware of this, that it is pretty well known that disinformation and misinformation is a mounting challenge in the political environment and social environment as well. Through this challenge of the transition away from fossil fuels and tackling climate change to ensure a safe future, we need to ensure that the messaging is clear that it will benefit all Australians. I know that has not landed properly in some areas. It is just managing to build relationships. A lot of what Central Queensland has experienced is the same industries, agriculture and coalmining, and they have looked after them for generations and they have a lot of trust in those industries so we need to build up a trust for renewables from a scientific and also a new job perspective with these people. I think one of the best ways we can do that is just by beginning to implement that and showing how successful it has been in other areas and creating education around those issues. We know education is one of the best tools for change—education and information—and these kinds of events as well where communities can come in and have access to listen to people who have knowledge that they may not have had access to in the past and ask questions will be really beneficial for communities that have genuine real concerns about what the future might hold for them in their regions.

**Mr WATTS:** In reference to your point that it is likely to result in irreparable damage to the local landscape and result in stranded assets—and the comment was made earlier about a camp being built up where potentially a wind farm is being built—I would be interested in your thoughts around what should be in the REZ to make sure that landscapes at end of use are returned, that assets are not stranded and that things like camps—obviously a wind tower has to go where the wind goes, but a camp can be located in many places. What are your thoughts on what should be in the REZ policy around tightening some of that up?

**Ms Widdowson:** As in for the end of life of these projects per se?

**Mr WATTS:** Both the end of life and potentially at the start of life. Should a camp be allowed to be built there or should that be where there is already a township and they travel in? I am interested in your thoughts in terms of protection of the landscape both at the start and at the end of life.

**Ms Widdowson:** I think that we have seen a lot of the resource communities in this region. I have personally grown up here and know people from them or who have moved from those areas who have come from towns where prior to the drive-in drive-out and fly-in fly-out workforce were

booming and were thriving and had really amazing communities and since the transition to a seven-on seven-off workforce have experienced big declines in the sense of community that they have in these townships. There are two different issues. You have got towns like Biloela where at the moment they do not have enough housing there to host other projects. To get around that I do not know that the best solution would be to build these housing units within the renewable energy zones. But then you have towns like Blackwater where the town has been largely deserted and they are missing a lot of their workforce; whether or not it will be better in instances around there to encourage people to move to those areas, to build and work on these renewable energy zones. I do not know that there would be a straight answer on that from me at this moment, but I would be happy to take that and get back to you if you would like.

**Mr WATTS:** I would be interested in that and also your thoughts around end of life. What should be in a renewable zone that ensures that at end of life it is put back as it was?

**Ms Widdowson:** I think we have learnt in the past that it is very important to have an end-of-life plan for these big-scale developments. When it comes to renewables, like we said in our submission, in the best-case scenario these projects will be going in on already disturbed land so ideally would not have a large-scale impact. I also recognise that these projects are not like a coalmine where they have a very distinct lifetime. Once the resource has been depleted then they have a large-scale impact that requires big rehabilitation plans and big rehabilitation bonds. The renewable projects, to my understanding, will be up and running for the foreseeable future, unless we come up with some better way, but I think that will be some time still. By 'end of life' my assumption is that you mean the biggest issue would be the recycling and the decommissioning of these wind farms or solar panels as they reach the end of their life. I think we are coming to an understanding that we have to live in a circular economy. Resources and water and everything is very finite, especially with growing demand for these things. I think a very important aspect would be that these resources are not going to just be wasted and that they are coming up with some way to recycle these very important resources.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you. Yesterday at the Port of Brisbane we had the opportunity to actually have a look at the wind turbines and we were briefed on the various different ways that at the end of their life they are broken up and basically taken back to their basic elements and used again as material, which is good to see. I will turn to the member for Mundingburra.

**Mr WALKER:** Thank you, Chair, and welcome. You talked about getting the messaging right. I think we have done it exceptionally well with the container exchange and recycling with our young folk. Moving forward and taking people on that journey has been very successful. We have heard from Councillor Ferrier about levying the green energy industry. We have done that with the coal industry to put the money back into those communities. There has been a lot of pushback on levies and royalties. We are spending that money on hospitals in these rural areas. At Moranbah, for example, there is a big hospital being built there from coal royalties. There is big pushback. What do you think in relation to getting some money back into those communities through some sort of levy?

**Ms Widdowson:** I think that there are costs that these communities will pay for hosting these renewable energy projects. I think especially for these communities that have hosted coal projects before and the coalmining is ending, that they have something else there that they can look forward to and they are not feeling like they are going to be left high and dry and all of a sudden missing out on all of this funding. Like the mayor of Banana said, the renewable energy developers do stand to gain some benefit from this and I think this should be shared across those community members who we know have had very real and perceived concerns and so should be compensated for that.

**Mr HEAD:** Thank you for being here. As far as community division and the ideological debate, which is more about the general policy direction, on a local level all I see is a lot of community division where neighbour versus neighbour because one neighbour is putting a project in and getting the benefits and are set to make a lot of money from the project and their neighbours have not had an offer or are not getting that opportunity. How do you see communities addressing that when across a fence you are talking hundreds of thousands of dollars a year in benefits. Is that something that you have discussed across this area?

**Ms Widdowson:** I have not discussed that personally, but I cannot imagine that this problem is a new problem. We know that the resource industry has been operating in Central Queensland for a long time where you have some property owners who have a high-value resource under their property and are going to be compensated for that and I am sure that there will be neighbours who may feel that they have lucked out in the sense of not having that resource under their property that they can get compensated for. I think there is a lesson that we can learn from that in the past and apply it to this transition.

**Mr HEAD:** I would say though that resources come under compulsory acquisition and some landholders might get well compensated, but also do not have a choice in that whereas this is very much where landholders have the choice for the most part. But at the same time a lot of landholders also say, 'I might not want it, but my neighbours are going to get it so I am going to sign up anyway', and that is certainly a big issue. I thought I would throw it out there and ask do you think there is something the government should be looking at to ensure that communities as a whole benefit and everyone gets a piece of the pie rather than one neighbour getting most of it and his neighbour missing out?

**Ms Widdowson:** I had not considered that, but I really like where you are going with that. I think it is important to maintain these community relationships. I cannot see if a renewable energy project came in and only benefited one how that would benefit the transition in the sense that we are already having some social pushback.

**ACTING CHAIR:** I now turn to the member for Lytton.

**Ms PEASE:** Thank you for coming and for your great work and advocacy on behalf of the environment. You spoke very passionately about education and keeping the community engaged and a lot of work that has been done in other areas. Have you any interest in participating in a community consultative committee with any of the wind farms or the other work that is going on and who do you believe should be part of that committee if such a committee were started?

**Ms Widdowson:** Education is one of the strongest tools that we have. A lot of things have changed for the better because of education in the past. I think we can apply it to this. We are already seeing the benefits of that. It can be also hard sometimes to continue to push the same messaging and hope that people take it on board. I think if we were to have a committee for people to come and raise their questions and their concerns that would definitely be a step in the right direction and I think it would be beneficial to have a representation of environmental advocacy in Central Queensland or one of the many other very passionate climate activist groups. I think it would be really important to have a very diverse array of people on this committee, like First Nations people, community members, landholders, coalminers, who can all attest to the importance of this renewable energy transition and be able to relate to whoever has these concerns.

**ACTING CHAIR:** There is one question I want to follow up. As an environmental advocacy activist, in the push to renewables there is also the need to ensure that we have the resources to be able to pursue a non-carbonised economy. Many of the elements that we need in our solar panels and our batteries are things that actually do need to be mined. There is always a balance between having renewable energy and also the need to still have a thriving mining industry to be able to acquire the rare earth minerals that we are quite rich with here in Australia. I am wondering from an environmental advocacy point of view if you have any comments about balancing the need to have a thriving mining industry to be able to support a carbon free economy?

**Ms Widdowson:** There is definitely a balance that needs to be struck. One of the main things we advocate for in our organisation EnvA is stronger nature protection laws. As I mentioned earlier, Queensland's nature protection laws have seen a fair few projects slip through the cracks and that has caused some significant environmental harm. Specifically the cumulative impacts of all projects really need to be considered more thoroughly.

Our primary focus, though, is against climate action because we cannot fix land clearing, threatened species habitat protection or water management for the Great Barrier Reef if we still have climate change because that will fundamentally underpin any further disasters for these environment issues and just fuel them on. You definitely cannot just solve climate change and expect the rest of those issues to fall into line as well and be solved themselves.

The environmental degradation in Queensland and Australia is multifaceted and needs to be tackled from many angles. That is why we are addressing the climate challenge and we are hoping that renewable energy projects can be developed in areas that will minimise environmental harm by using already disturbed land. As for the mining of critical minerals, we are a very vast, large, rich country. We are fortunate enough to have areas that will not be of high ecological significance or threaten the habitat of endangered or threatened species so that we can still have a thriving mining and resource industry.

**Mr WEIR:** My question comes back to that line quoted earlier. You stated that 'could result in stranded assets'. Is there any particular project you had in mind? There is obviously large hydrogen—

**Ms Widdowson:** This will be in reference to any new power stations. We know that Clive Palmer has been trying to push for his Waratah coal-fired power station to go ahead west of here, which could see emissions continue for decades to come. We believe that allowing new fossil fuel projects to go in sends the wrong message. We are trying to have a unified message that we are moving away from fossil fuels and transitioning to renewable energy, and to allow the private sector to open these projects is undermining any emission reduction efforts we have already achieved. Once the renewable energy all comes online and energy from renewables is cheaper than coal, these projects will become stranded assets.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much for attending today. There was one question on notice. The committee secretariat will get in touch with you to confirm the wording of that particular question. Responses to that question on notice are due by 12 pm Tuesday, 6 February. Thank you very much for attending.

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

**ACTING CHAIR:** I now welcome the next witness, who is a former member of this committee. Good morning. I invite you to make a short opening statement after which time committee members will have some questions for you.

**Mr Boyce:** I acknowledge the committee and thank them for the opportunity to put on the record my comments in relation to the proposed Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill 2023. The transformation of Queensland's energy transmission sector from traditional coal-fired power generation to one of solar, wind, hydrogen and batteries and pumped hydro will be far-reaching now and into the future. The detrimental effects to the economy and the general cost of living, reliability of power generation and the cost to heavy industry and manufacturing have not been fully understood. For example, does the committee really believe that the alumina industry in Gladstone can exist on a competitive world stage if it is to rely solely on power generation from wind, solar and batteries? What guarantees can the government offer that the heavy industry will exist into the future with such an energy policy?

The footprint of these renewable projects is enormous and requires large tracts of agricultural land to be developed to achieve the government's outcomes. The true extent, impact and cost is only starting to be realised by rural and regional communities that are directly affected. Furthermore, it has become clear that genuine concerns raised by affected stakeholders have been blatantly ignored. The approval process has been reduced to a 'tick the box' exercise and, in my opinion, it has been deliberately designed that way to expedite these projects. These developments have no real avenue open to these affected people to stop them or be compensated by these development proponents.

In terms of jobs, the government claims it will support job transition of highly paid and skilled people who have become redundant in both the traditional power generation sector and the mining and resource sector. The government needs to explain how thousands of well-paid jobs will become available in the renewable energy sector. Furthermore, what support is offered to existing businesses and communities? For example, if Callide Power Station in Biloela is to close in the future, there are some 250 jobs that will leave the local economy. What that means is fewer children at the school, less groceries sold at the store, less beer drunk at the pub and a lower rate base for the local government authority—and the list goes on.

In terms of infrastructure, there has been no priority given to the upgrade of transport infrastructure—roads and bridges et cetera—that are required to deliver these wind and solar projects. For example, the four bridges accessing the Port of Gladstone all have weight and load restrictions on them. Almost five years ago \$100 million was allocated by the federal government to assist the funding of this port access problem. However, former transport minister Bailey has allocated hundreds of millions of dollars to bikeways in inner-city Brisbane rather than prioritising bridge replacements that are critical to deliver these developments knowing full well these developments are imminent. Again I ask: why?

My final point is local government has been used as a shopfront by the government to give approval to these projects and this is wrong. Local government does not have the funding and it does not have the resources or the expertise to properly analyse and assess these projects. Furthermore, local government is used by the government so they can say the development has received local approval and, therefore, argue they have social licence when in fact they do not. The reality is the position and authority of local government is compromised if they choose to oppose the project.

In the interest of time, Madam Acting Chair, I will be happy to take questions and make further comment.

**ACTING CHAIR:** I will turn to the deputy chair for the first question.

**Mr WEIR:** We heard earlier from the mayor from Banana and he touched on some of those issues you are talking about with local government. Having been on local governments yourself, you would understand those challenges. How do you see the way through that? One of the challenges with this is to not make one section of the community pay the price for the benefits of another section of the community. How would you see that cost that will be incurred by council being alleviated?

**Mr Boyce:** The problem here is that government has engaged local government to assess these developments through the approval process and so forth. These are billion dollar projects we are talking about and there are 51 of them that I know of in the local Flynn electorate that are all overseen by the local government authority.

The local government councils are not in a position to access money and funding for the road infrastructure, the upgrades to water and sewerage, the requirement to build housing to service these people and all of those priority needs that need to be addressed. There is also the access to gravel, for example, to make access roads to all of these wind and solar factories that are proposed to be built. It all lands in the lap of the local government authority. As I said in my opening statement, they do not have the resources or the expertise to properly assess how all of this is going to impact the local communities. Furthermore, the money that is spent in the local communities by these huge foreign owned companies is literally spilling beer on Friday night when you look at the amount of money that has been invested in these and the money that will be generated into the future.

**Mr WEIR:** I probably should have asked the mayor this question. Do you know of any local council that has rejected a proposed renewable energy development?

**Mr Boyce:** I am not aware of any here in Queensland, no.

**Mr WEIR:** You say they facilitate the approval, but we also heard that basically they get late notice of some of these projects—and it was wind farms that the mayor was referring to—and they have limited control over those projects. Is that your understanding?

**Mr Boyce:** Again, from my experience dealing with a lot of these small communities they are really struggling to get their head around the impacts of these projects on their small communities. We have seen one at Smoky Creek, for example, near Biloela where they have written some 400 letters to various government departments and authorities and the response they have had to their genuine concerns is nothing more than absolutely appalling. There is no avenue open for these people either to be compensated or to stop these projects which they disapprove of. These are the people who have to live right next door to these things.

**Mr WEIR:** I know in New South Wales they have introduced a levy per megawatt hour as compensation for local government. What would you think of a proposal such as that? Do you have any thoughts on how money could come back into the council instead of the token amounts that you were talking about?

**Mr Boyce:** Again, I think the government is in a position now where it has to substantiate how they are going to support these communities when at some point in time we see power stations close. There are three of them here in Central Queensland: Callide Power Station, Stanwell Power Station and Gladstone Power Station. Central Queensland is the economic engine room of Australia. Heavy industry, and the mining and resource sector rely on affordable baseload power to operate. How is that going to be achieved with a possible 100 per cent renewable energy policy? It is just crazy to think that this is achievable. Furthermore, the amount of money that is taken out of the economy for these people who will lose their jobs will affect everybody.

We have seen closures of coal-fired power stations in Victoria, for example, where a redundant workforce has suffered up to a 69 per cent loss in income in the first year after redundancy. Those are the sorts of things that need to be analysed and they are the sorts of things that we want put on the table by the government to tell us exactly where these highly paid, highly skilled jobs will be in the renewable energy sector.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Boyce. The Energy and Jobs Plan and the bill that this committee is inquiring into set out the framework for providing a number of organisations and councils to assist our smaller councils in transitioning and dealing with renewable energy proponents. Is this the pathway to making sure that the smaller councils actually do get to have access to those skills and experts in terms of assessing the viability and also the planning that is required as outlined in the bill?

**Mr Boyce:** I note from the government's explanatory notes to the bill that they will set up various committees and boards to oversee the proposed projects into the future. I note also that there is no avenue for representation from local government authorities that are affected. There is also no avenue for producer bodies in terms of the mining and resources sector, the agricultural sector and so forth, which are people who are directly affected by these projects. We will have all these representatives of metropolitan Australia, or metropolitan Queensland for that matter, rather than the local communities in Central Queensland that will be affected.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Just to be clear: the aspects about representation from local communities is not something you have read in the bill?

**Mr Boyce:** There is not enough of it; that is the point I am trying to make. As noted in the explanatory notes, these boards that the government intends to set up include various expertise people and Aboriginal people, for example. Where is the seat at the table for the agricultural representative bodies, for example?

**ACTING CHAIR:** We did hear from a number of those bodies earlier this week. Do you have any comments on what they actually said to the committee?

**Mr Boyce:** I have not had the chance to analyse the record of this inquiry to date.

**Mr WALKER:** Mr Boyce, we heard an excellent submission today from the Mayor of the Banana Shire Council. One of his suggestions was for a levy, a royalty or a tax on the green energy industry. Do you support that concept?

**Mr Boyce:** I know from having been on local government many years ago that there is an avenue open for local government authorities to have a deferential rating process on big business and industry—for example, power stations, coalmines, the gas industry et cetera. They impose that on those industries and it is where they gather a large percentage of their rate base. If into the future we see the mining and resources sector decline and the traditional power generation sector decline, the question has to be asked: how will a local government authority make up the shortfall in their rate base? For example, the Central Highlands Regional Council, at Emerald, retrieve approximately 50 per cent of their entire rate base from the mining and resources sector. At some point in the future, if there is no coal industry out there, you would have to ask the question: where is the shortfall in rate revenue going to come from in terms of the local government authority out there? Obviously, councils, the state government and the Local Government Association have to work towards understanding the cost needs of the local government authority when and if we see the demise of traditional coal-fired power stations and power generation sources and the loss of the working families that live and operate in the economies of those small communities.

**Mr WALKER:** You would support a rate or a levy to be imposed by the state or the local authority going back into local infrastructure in that local authority area; yes or no?

**Mr Boyce:** At the end of the day, these things are open to extensive discussion. I would suggest that already we see the state government imposing a coal tax on the coal industry, for example, and a very little percentage of that is returned to where it comes from.

**Mr WALKER:** There is a lot going back into the rural sector in those areas where the coal is being mined. Moranbah is a good example with a new hospital. My original question was: do you support a levy or a rate on the green energy industry going back into those local communities; yes or no?

**Mr Boyce:** In theory, yes.

**Mr WATTS:** Col, in your submission you talk about impacts on the environment. I am particularly interested in the REZ and the comparison between a renewable project that does not have to put up a bond and the process it has to go through compared to that of, say, a mine. You talk about legislation in relation to reef regulations, tree clearing, environmental protocols and the agricultural, mining and resources sectors. I am interested in your thoughts on what should apply in a REZ to make sure that there is a level playing field with energy production and that we are looking after our natural landscape and environment.

**Mr Boyce:** Again, there are many questions being asked, particularly by the farming and grazing community, as to why all of the environmental protocols that are put upon the agricultural sector and the mining and resources sector do not necessarily apply to the renewable energy sector. As has been pointed out, if you are a farmer and you want to clear some land then you have to go through a regulatory process that is extensive but the same thing does not happen for the renewable energy sector. There is an enormous impact on the environment with possible impacts to water quality, water runoff and all of those sorts of things, but there is not the same rule book as is imposed on the mining and resources sector and the agricultural sector.

Back in my time, the government instituted the Mine Rehabilitation Commissioner to oversee the rehabilitation of mining sites. Why has not the same thing been done in the renewable energy sector where they have to pay into a fund to rehabilitate, dismantle and dispose of these infrastructure projects when they reach their end of life? A big issue that is yet to be addressed is how we deal with that problem.

**ACTING CHAIR:** To follow up, you would like to see a stronger regulatory framework around the application, the assessment and the decommissioning of renewable energy zones, so more regulation?

**Mr Boyce:** I think it is only fair to make a comparison that if you put that regulatory framework around the mining and resources sector and the agricultural sector then you be fair across the board and do the same thing with the renewable energy sector. As I have stated, there are literally hundreds and hundreds of these wind turbines proposed to be built. There are millions of solar panels that are

proposed to be erected. What exactly will we do with the disposable problem when those projects reach their end of life? It begs the question: will the companies that own and operate those things be in existence in 20 or 25 years time when we arrive at that point?

**Mr WATTS:** We heard earlier about the ability for a camp to be put on one of these sites, which nobody else would be able to do without an approval. I would assume that you would want to see that go through the same sort of process.

**Mr Boyce:** Again, this is a burden imposed on the local government authorities that have to process all of these requirements. Where will we house all the people who are going to build them? How are we going to fit that in to the local government rules, regulations and authority imposed by Brisbane and the local government minister? There is one rule for one and another rule for another, it appears.

**Mr HEAD:** I acknowledge Councillor Kirkman, who is in the room, and the member for Capricornia, Michelle Landry, who was here as well, which is great to see. I further acknowledge the hard work that you do across the great electorate of Flynn, Col. How important are property rights in this country and what should be considered in this bill to ensure landholders have the right to choose, whether it is in regard to wind, solar or, especially, transmission lines?

**Mr Boyce:** Property rights are a big issue. Obviously, those people who are directly affected by these projects—for example, people who make an agreement with a wind turbine company or a solar panel company or whatever the case—receive direct compensation depending on how they write up their agreement. The people who live next door and who have to suffer the consequences of it, basically, have no avenue whatsoever and there is no compensation made to them. It is a chicken-and-egg situation: what do you do if you do and what do you do if you do not? The whole process has not taken into account the overall impact for everybody.

One of the other issues that is raised frequently with me is the fact that these renewable energy companies do not have to take out any sort of land tenure, for example, a mining lease. There is no such thing. There is a lease agreement made with the landholders. These projects are attached to that land title and then, at the end of the day, whoever owns that land title will become partly responsible.

**Ms PEASE:** Colin, you have probably spoken about this already but, particularly with regards to the GasFields Commission, what is your position with regards to the government extending the mandate to cover renewable energy?

**Mr Boyce:** Again, I would be open to scrutiny for that. In its early days, the GasFields Commission, which I had a lot to do with, was an oversight committee put together by the governments of the day. I would suggest there needs to be something, as we have spoken about, such as the Mines Rehabilitation Commissioner, the GasFields Commission or something like that. A renewable energy commissioner—whatever you want to call it—would oversee and make sure that everybody is getting a fair go in respect to the development and the approval of all of these projects.

**Ms PEASE:** You spoke earlier about landholders et cetera not having an opportunity to participate. Do you support the renewable energy toolkit that AgForce has published?

**Mr Boyce:** There are various proponents in AgForce who are extensively involved in some of these developments from a financial point of view and I would discount some of the comments that have been made. The large majority of people I speak to who are directly affected by these proposed developments have an alternate view. I referred in my opening statement to some of the impacts of these big developments. The one at Camboon near Theodore, for example, has a footprint of 45,000 hectares. One hundred and sixty wind turbines are proposed for that development. Those wind turbines are 280 metres tall. That is approximately the height of the skyscrapers in Brisbane. That land area would cover Ipswich to Redcliffe, for example, with huge wind turbines dotted all over the place. You would see them literally from 100 kilometres away. There is an aspect as to how they deal with those situations.

**Ms PEASE:** You do not support the toolkit that has been developed to support landholders? Have you seen it?

**Mr Boyce:** I am not aware of AgForce's toolkit but I am aware of some of the comment made by some of the AgForce people. The reality is that AgForce probably does not represent the people affected by these wind turbine and solar panel developments as well as they might.

**ACTING CHAIR:** We will get to hear from AgForce a little later on this morning. We can ask them how relevant they are to the local area.

**Ms PEASE:** May I correct myself: it is the Queensland Farmers' Federation. My apologies. It is a similar organisation.

**ACTING CHAIR:** We did hear from a lot of the larger stakeholders earlier in the hearing. I want to ask about the opportunities outside of the renewable energy generation sector, in terms of the other industries that need to be created regionally to support the renewable energy sector. I asked questions earlier about the thriving mining community that we need to develop around the rare earth minerals that support battery components and solar panel components as well as the push to create a manufacturing industry where we build and manufacture those components and, therefore, will not need to rely on foreign countries. Do you see an opportunity in the growth of the mining and manufacturing industries here in regional Queensland?

**Mr Boyce:** Unless there is affordable and reliable power generation given to heavy industry, business and so forth, you will see all of those operations forced offshore. In respect to the mining industry and rare earth metals—for example, lithium—all of those lithium products are not processed here in Australia. Most of them are shipped to China. If you look at the turbine components and solar panel components, they are all produced overseas in places like China. You have to ask the question. The vast majority of the on-cost to build all of these proposals is generated offshore, not here in Australia.

**ACTING CHAIR:** So the question is: do you support those manufacturing opportunities to be created here in Australia?

**Mr Boyce:** Absolutely, but that all revolves around the economics of it. As far as I can see, the economics of producing unreliable renewable energy will force the cost of energy up. That is what we have seen across Australia in recent years. There has been procrastination from various governments about how renewable energy is cheaper, and all we see is energy bills getting more expensive and more expensive.

**ACTING CHAIR:** That concludes our time with you today. Thank you very much. I do not believe there were any questions on notice.

**DWYER, Mr Vincent, Director, Central Queensland Power**

**ACTING CHAIR:** I note we do not have a submission from you in our pack yet. I invite you to make a short opening statement outlining details of your organisation and making your comments on the bill, and then we will have some questions for you.

**Mr Dwyer:** Thanks for the opportunity to present. Firstly, I would like to extend my respects to the traditional owners, the Darumbal people, of the land on which we meet today and pay respects to their elders past, present and emerging. I am joined by my colleagues from Central Queensland Power as well.

Central Queensland Power is a joint venture between two renewable energy developers. We are responding to the QJP by developing a portfolio of 3,000 megawatts of renewable energy projects in and around Central Queensland. We first came up to Central Queensland about five or six years ago to develop large-scale renewable energy. We were one of the very first developers here, recognising the great opportunity that Central Queensland affords for renewable energy. Why? It is fundamentally because of the load, because of the strength of the grid and because of the nature of the towns and workforces that Central Queensland affords. We certainly support the bill. We support a lot of the premise of the bill. We support the decarbonisation goals, the engagement of the targets themselves, the involvement of the department and the minister in making strategic decisions around the grid and the establishment of advisory bodies to oversee and advise on the impact on employees of the energy transition.

The committee has already heard about the benefits of renewable energy so I will not reinforce those here, other than to say that in the first instance the best way to preserve jobs is to preserve the industries that are heavy users of power. We have seen recent announcements about heavy industry signing long-term offtake agreements to underpin their own financial viability. As others have mentioned to the committee in Brisbane, renewables are the cheapest form of power available and the industry continues to grow to support the decarbonisation of heavy industry and the preservation of jobs in the first instance. Then we look to the growth of additional jobs, and the growth of the industry in Central Queensland will underpin long-term jobs for this region, not only directly but also through the supply chain that is here and will be built here to service the opportunities that these projects are developing.

However, it is not enough just to have large-scale investment. We need to draw on all those community issues that have already been put before this committee, both in Brisbane and this morning. We completely acknowledge the impact of transition. We look back to the evolution of the CSG industry and then minister Macfarlane's early discussions in his own voice of the need for the developers in the industry to take the community on the journey with them. It is a journey of change. It is not an easy journey. It is a journey that has been undertaken around the world. As a developer we have been involved in projects around the world as well as throughout Australia. We understand the complexity of that journey and the stress associated with that journey. It is particularly acute in Queensland because of the contemporaneous retirement of coal and the development of renewable energy. That has made the story more complex because different issues are getting caught up in the one story of decarbonisation and the development of renewables. We are very committed to working with all community stakeholders—with the landowners, the adjacent and neighbouring landowners, the local councils, the traditional owners—in ensuring we can develop this industry and our own projects responsibly and respectfully in this community.

In relation to the bill, I might make a comment generally. We would like to see continued investment by government in the SuperGrid, which is fundamental to the development of that ability to service a 24/7 load. We need a grid that delivers power from around the state. In the last week in Brisbane, some of the night-time power coming out of solar out of Western Queensland came in at that 5 pm, 6 pm and 7 pm time when solar at the coast was not as available, so we need a strong grid.

We want to see the enhanced ability of the state, particularly through the regulatory authority, SARA, which oversees the regulatory environment for wind, and we will come back to the regulatory environment, and to make sure they are properly funded. We want government to invest in the projection of independent, trusted information to ensure that communities are given the right information. Do not just trust the developers for all of the obvious reasons. Do not just trust any particular group. We need independent, trusted sources of information, and government can be a very useful tool for making that available. Groups like the Queensland Farmers' Federation have done a great job on their toolkit, as raised earlier, which at least in our view is a nice balanced education of landowners of the sorts of issues.

Secondly, in relation to the bill, we want to emphasise the importance of collaboration with existing industry, with existing land users, to the points about agricultural land and so on, with the stakeholders in the local community and with other developers. The renewable energy industry is, at least in Queensland, reasonably new; it is not so new elsewhere. As developers, we are very committed to collaboration with other developers so we are not all talking about separate camps on our own sites, separate infrastructure and separate trucks running down the same road at the same time. It is about collaboration to ensure we manage this build out of the energy transition in a sensible way.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Mr Dwyer, unless you have some other salient points, I note we have a limited amount of time and I know members will have questions.

**Mr WEIR:** You have been sitting here listening to other witnesses this morning and there have been some comments about the regulatory process for wind farms as opposed to solar and other projects. Could you step me through how that goes in terms of local government, community, vegetation management, regulations and those sorts of things? Could you clarify that?

**Mr Dwyer:** At a very simple development cycle, it is important to engage early with council, whether or not they are the regulatory authority. That is from a general engagement perspective because as a developer we are on council land, we are on council roads, for all the issues that the mayor raised earlier. Whether you are wind or solar, you are subject to the EPBC Act. That is federal legislation for environmental protection and biodiversity conservation. We have to do a very significant environmental impact statement with many studies around vegetation, runoff and traffic management. All of these issues come into the regulatory realm of the feds under the EPBC Act.

At the development application level, that is where it distinguishes between local council for solar and state for wind. There are differential pathways depending on whether you are wind or solar, and that is the issue that has caused some complexity. On the other hand, local councils—and this is not a criticism of them at all—are not sufficiently funded to have the breadth necessarily, particularly given the number of projects going through. The state is but at the same time it is a local issue. It really depends on whether it is wind or solar as to whether it is state or local. However, all of them, as with any other piece of infrastructure, have to be subject to the EPBC Act. It is not a separate light touch regulatory oversight.

**Mr WEIR:** There was a high profile wind project that was just knocked back by the federal minister under the EPBC Act. Have there been any of those in Queensland?

**Mr Dwyer:** Sure. Koalas have played an important role in environmental oversight and restrictions on wind farms in Queensland. It was birds on the north-west coast of Tasmania. It is very location dependent as to what are the key sensitive topics. It was frogs on solar farms in North Queensland. There is a whole range. A lot of these issues are considered and assessed. Some might be knocked back. Within the requirements of the EPBC Act there are then conditions imposed around those issues. Whether it is through the EPBC Act or through the DA, there are a lot of conditions imposed right across the environmental issues and the practical issues—traffic management, all of those sorts of issues as well.

**Mr WEIR:** We heard from the mayor earlier about the impacts on local council. That appears to be not quite resolved as yet. What are your thoughts on that?

**Mr Dwyer:** It is really important that councils are appropriately resourced to play their incredibly important role in these developments, between Banana, Rockhampton, Gladstone and Bundaberg councils. I appreciate that Bundaberg is separate, but it is still within some of our projects that we call Central Queensland. Councils are at the coalface of these issues, particularly when it comes to physical infrastructure. That is partly state with TMR; it is partly local council depending on what roads you are talking about. There needs to be the right funding and support for councils because they cannot do this alone. This is an enormous development of tens of billions of dollars in Central Queensland alone. Moah Creek, which we are developing basically across the road from Stanwell, is \$1 billion itself. That is almost double the Rookwood Weir. That is just one project out of many in the region.

**Mr WEIR:** Where is Moah Creek up to?

**Mr Dwyer:** DA has been approved. The EPBC application is in. That will be out shortly hopefully on the website for public comment. We hope to go into construction in the next 18 months and then it will take 2½ years for construction. It is that order of magnitude. We have a terrific partnership that has been announced with CleanCo as a government owned company. That is an incredibly valuable support to us because it helps ensure that what we are developing is consistent with effectively government sensitivities and procurement.

**Mr WEIR:** The EPBC process will come back so that will be open to public consultation and then it goes back to be approved or not approved or conditioned.

**Mr Dwyer:** Most of them end up being conditioned in some way or other depending on what the results are of the many surveys we have undertaken.

**Mr WEIR:** And you anticipate that within the next 12 months?

**Mr Dwyer:** Earlier than that because we want to be into construction mid next year.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Mr Dwyer, you have been in the room and you heard from the last witness that renewable energy is not reliable, it is too expensive and there are no jobs attached to the industry. As a proponent who is looking at investing a significant amount of money, what do you say to those comments?

**Mr Dwyer:** We did a lot of work for Boyne Smelters on strategy around decarbonisation on a flat load—an 850 megawatt flat load 24/7. So we have been down to on the half hour, every half hour, every day based on actual data. It is complex. Fighter jets have fly-by-wire, you know. We are not running a simple system anymore, unfortunately. Coal-fired power has done the heavy lifting. Coal-fired power stations operate at a 60, 70 per cent capacity factor, give or take. It is about being smart and intelligent and having a sophisticated blend and strong grid to reinforce with big storages, as government is proposing, and they work as a blend together.

**ACTING CHAIR:** As a region that has a lot of heavy industry and does a lot of the heavy lifting, is renewable energy as outlined in the pathway by the government going to be able to sustain those industries here in regional Queensland?

**Mr Dwyer:** Absolutely. From an electron supply point of view across the grid, yes. From an economic and market perspective, it is essential because without decarbonisation some of those industries will not stay here because of their carbon composition.

**ACTING CHAIR:** So it is actually a requirement of the future of those industries that they transition to renewable sources of energy?

**Mr Dwyer:** Absolutely, as seen through their own public statements and their own signing up of a gigawatt PPA on a solar farm in Central Queensland last week.

**Mr HEAD:** You touched on that there was a lot of engagement with the local community et cetera, but I want to ask you for a bit more on that. What did that look like in the local community and especially what sort of interactions and engagement did you have with the neighbours to this project rather than specific landholders whose land it might be getting built on?

**Mr Dwyer:** That is a really good question. That is one of the really hard issues and important issues around all our projects and projects by other developers. We as a general principle try to go out early—start engaging with a community early. We have done that in the case of Moah Creek because we want to say to the community, 'Look, this is coming. We don't have all the answers yet because we are starting all of our studies to really be able to understand the difficult and appropriately difficult questions that are asked.'

The first thing was to go out early to the community to start to have conversations where people wanted to have conversations. Some people are very keen to have conversations, some people are less keen to have conversations, and that is perfectly understandable. Then it gradually progressed into, after a period of having some one-on-one conversations, town hall type environments at Kalapa. I think we have had three town hall sessions. We have engaged with landowners within a five-kilometre radius of the boundary of the property to offer one-on-one conversations as well. Then we start to work through all the different stakeholders, whether it is council or other community groups, to try to build those relationships. We are opening an office in Rocky shortly. It is deepening that engagement as we go through.

Like any significant project, we want to be open and listen to as many people as possible. We will not be able to answer everybody's questions—certainly during the development cycle, as we are evolving some of these things—but we will continue to work on those and we can say we are looking at the hard issues, the water supply issues, the bushfire management issues, all of those things, which are of high sensitivity and we are working through those. We are establishing a community consultative committee at the moment to get that up and going so that we can deepen and have another voice into this process.

**ACTING CHAIR:** I will take the opportunity to ask one last question. Within that renewable energy sector, notwithstanding that there have been some early adopters, we are still really at the beginning of this transformation to renewable energy. I guess you could liken it to the Wild West out

there in terms of the number of proponents who are out there and all the things that they are suggesting. Where you have the Wild West you also have some cowboys out there probably giving the sector a bad name. Do you see the bill and the framework that this bill establishes has the ability to tighten up those processes and those proponents out there wanting to establish all sorts of various different renewable energy businesses in regional Queensland?

**Mr Dwyer:** It is new and has been a bit Wild West, particularly in Queensland. It is not new in Australia. I was doing the first wind farms 25 years ago in South Australia. There is a long history of projects in Australia, but it is relatively new to Queensland. Two things are really important. One is making sure we lift the quality of the development process and the developers. If government needs to have some serious discussions, have serious discussions. It has the benefit of the GOCs that buy a lot of this power or, in our case, hopefully invest directly in the project so they can help oversee the quality of the developers. I think it is about having institutional support, like the GasFields Commission, for example, and picking up those lessons of the CSG industry. Let us not lose those lessons. People on our team were on the board of APLNG when that was being built, so we understand those issues. Something like the GasFields Commission, extending the remit, is completely appropriate and it helps provide that independent voice, like the Farmers' Federation have been trying to do—an independent voice so you do not just trust the developer and have that validation.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Mr Dwyer and your team, for joining us today. I do not think there were any questions on notice. Thank you very much.

**COLLINS, Mr Mark, Chair, Sustainability Committee, AgForce Queensland.**

**RUTTLEDGE, Dr Annie, Senior Policy Advisor, AgForce Queensland**

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you very much for joining us. We do have a copy of your submission here in front of us. You have been referenced already, I think, this morning.

**Ms PEASE:** Can I apologise for that reference. I am sorry. I did correct it.

**ACTING CHAIR:** You referenced the tool. I think someone else referenced AgForce.

**Ms PEASE:** No, it was me.

**ACTING CHAIR:** I invite you to make a short opening statement after which time committee members will have some questions for you.

**Dr Ruttledge:** We thank the committee for the opportunity to be present at this hearing. Mark Collins is the chair of the AgForce sustainability committee for which I am the secretariat and author of submission No. 42 to the Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill. I will now hand over to Mark to provide the opening statement.

**Mr Collins:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, committee, for the opportunity today to present. AgForce is the peak organisation representing Queensland's cane, cattle, grain, sheep, wool and goat producers. Our members own and manage around 55 million hectares, or a third of the state's land area. AgForce supports farmers' rights to choose how to run their farm business. We know that the transition to renewable energy will bring opportunities for farmers as well as lots of challenges. The transition will require more roads, transmission lines, corridors and other energy infrastructure which must go across farming land. It will be hosted on ag land and this will directly impact farmers. They must not be forgotten. Without proper and prior consultation and fair recompense, farm businesses can suffer loss of income, threats to human and animal welfare, degradation of natural capital, including through insufficient attention to biosecurity by these companies and their contractors. We regularly hear that landholders can feel confused and powerless when faced with the proponents of renewable energy developments. There is little to no information on fair pricing to ensure farmers do not fall foul of unscrupulous cowboys who are operators. A transparent, consistent and fair approach is needed.

Agricultural land is home for farming families. Development needs to be done sensitively. Governments and corporations must ensure they have a social licence to operate without which no development, even renewable energy, can be truly sustainable. It is our hope that a standardised and reportable code of conduct created with landholders will be implemented to guide renewable energy companies, their staff and contractors. A standardised landholder/developer process for negotiating agreements, inclusive of neighbour payments, can help ensure fair and equitable benefit sharing to smooth the transition process. We refer the committee again to our land use protection principles in the appendix of our submission.

Going forward, AgForce requests consultation in subsequent policy development and that farming representatives are allocated a seat at the table for governance arrangements for renewable energy zones. This is necessary to preserve a fair and equitable power balance amongst stakeholders. Finally, we emphasise that agricultural land must be preserved and protected. Queensland's arable land is a valuable, rare and shrinking commodity and it is not replaceable. We thank the committee for its time and the opportunity to present today.

**Mr WEIR:** I will go to your last comment. How do you see that? As you remember, when CSG was coming at landowners and the GasFields Commission was formed—we will talk about that later—the statutory regional plans came in to address prime ag land. Is that how you see protection here? How would you envisage valuing ag land?

**Mr Collins:** I am not sure about your question, but in individual cases arable land is not infinite. Not all land is suitable for cropping. From a larger policy perspective of prime ag land, certainly I think we would be receptive to further discussions on that and zones where prime arable land does need to be protected.

**Dr Ruttledge:** If I may also offer a comment, the National Farmers' Federation have a firm position that all agricultural land must be protected and that it should not be differentiated between prime and other classes, because it all serves a purpose.

**Mr WEIR:** That is a very valid point. Going back to the GasFields Commission, what are your thoughts on expanding the remit of the GasFields Commission over renewable projects and how do you think the GasFields Commission is viewed overall in the role that they have already played?

**Mr Collins:** I do have some insights into that as I do remember, a good many years ago, attending some GasFields Commission meetings in the early days. It went a long way to formalising a process to allow landholders to negotiate and brought stakeholders together. It was an awful, awful situation before that initiative. Adding that responsibility to a GasFields Commission at this stage, or that body, I do not know, we would have to provide comment on that. I do not know how that would work.

**Mr WEIR:** We probably need a bit more clarity around that ourselves, because it is not clear whether it is the same body or whether there will be people brought in with other expertise to cover that. Your point about what is a fair price, that is another interesting aspect that nobody has actually raised thus far in these hearings. Those agreements are confidential, I would imagine, so neighbours do not know what other neighbours are getting. How would you like to see that addressed?

**Mr Collins:** The confidentiality issue?

**Mr WEIR:** What is a fair price?

**Mr Collins:** What is a fair price? Each agricultural business is an independent standalone business. You cannot compare one business with a neighbour. We have different production systems. I might be organic, produce organic cattle, so I am going to need a different set of parameters regarding my access agreements as opposed to my neighbour who might have a different enterprise. He might be a farming enterprise where they are broadacre farmers so their impact, if they are in the middle of a renewable energy zone, is going to be greater. It is not one-size-fits-all when it comes to compensation, it is how the impacts are for that particular business on that particular part of land. Our landscapes are so diverse. We do not have the same land types. We do not have a mountain range. We do not have suitable country for a solar array.

**ACTING CHAIR:** To clarify, it is a challenge in terms of transparency and one neighbour being compensated more than another because, as you said, it is not just one size fits all. In the case of a wind turbine, for example, one owner may be compensated more or less than their neighbour for the exact same piece of infrastructure.

**Mr Collins:** It is a difficult question to answer. Once again, it would depend on the individual circumstances. I think it has to.

**Dr Rutledge:** If I may offer an additional comment, I have conversed widely with a number of members about this including people who host renewable energy infrastructure that is planned to be developed. What they are being offered can vary widely. Because of confidentiality clauses in contracts, usually people feel under some pressure to sign quickly. They cannot consult with their neighbours and they may not have the power, the knowledge or the negotiating ability to set a price that is fair or even similar, like for like, with other people in their community. A lot does come down to the negotiating ability of an individual landholder and they have no way of comparing quotes so to speak.

**Mr WEIR:** That would vary from, say, a proposed wind project to a solar project to a powerline. You do have a right to say no to the former but powerlines—

**Dr Rutledge:** We have heard that in New South Wales as far as transmission lines are concerned, compulsory acquisition has been rushed through before planning approvals have even been granted. That would definitely be something that would raise concern.

**Mr WATTS:** Thanks very much for being here. You will have heard me ask this morning about the REZ and how it should apply. I also have a little bit of experience with the GasFields Commission and the regional plans as they were set up. As these zones are put in place I am interested from a government point of view what sort of protections, governance and things should be in that zone to ensure that our agricultural industry can continue to thrive whilst we are looking to satisfy these other things and make sure that is done in a fair and reasonable way. Specifically from your members' point of view, what do you see should be in there? We spoke a little bit about the GasFields Commission. Should there be a body set up specifically to look after the REZ? What are your thoughts?

**Mr Collins:** That is a deep question. It certainly would assist. We do not want to see landholder rights diminished in REZs. It would be a whole body of work, which we would be happy to engage with, around what landholder rights are needed for a REZ. Some of that is in our submission.

Certainly our rights cannot be diminished. We need to be able to successfully run our businesses and we need to be able to function as a community. It is very divisive in these situations when you have the disparity of power, and negotiating with these companies is divisive in communities and in between neighbours. That social aspect and the ability to farm is what we need as well as protection over our land that we can go forward with and continue to farm. I know that is a broad answer.

**Mr WATTS:** That is fine. I am trying to get down to the detail. I am trying to understand from a legislative framework point of view why some legislation that exists can be overridden by some of the renewable projects. If you want to push some trees over on your property you have a very different process to if it is for a wind farm. I think there needs to be some balance in that.

**Mr Collins:** There is a disparity in the legislation as to what these companies can do and what we cannot do and that really does upset landholders. It makes them cranky from the outset. There needs to be fairness in that regard. In terms of the issue of where wind towers can go, obviously it is a highly elevated position. It is something the farmer has preserved as part of their landscape. Whether or not there is legislation they then see these energy companies come in and do something which they just shake their heads at and think, 'This isn't fair.'

**Mr WATTS:** What comment would you have around potential camps being set up on, say, a wind farm property versus having to use the infrastructure of a township?

**Mr Collins:** In the case of a donga camp or that sort of arrangement on someone's land, whilst the individual landholder may reap some rewards in the short term, the long-term consequences environmentally and indeed through local government planning laws would be a whole different conversation.

**Mr WALKER:** You mentioned that the Farmers Federation would like all farming land protected as a policy. Is that the same policy for AgForce?

**Dr Rutledge:** AgForce is a member of NFF. They are our national representative body. While we do not have a particular policy on that, our members are multicommodities; they are across all forms of broadacre agriculture, so we would not value one commodity over another or one land type over another.

**Mr WALKER:** The reason I ask is in North Queensland where I am from, in Townsville, and as a former chair of the Townsville City Council development and planning committee, I did see some agricultural properties go to solar farms. In Cairns sugarcane farms are being cut up for housing development. That is a choice of the farmer; they become the developer in those cases. That is why I asked that question. In relation to that I want to get a line of sight because farmers, like all humans, have to make a dollar and there could be an opportunity to value-add to their property as well. What amendments would AgForce propose in regards to the renewable energy zones and why? What changes would you propose?

**Mr Collins:** I missed the question sorry.

**Mr WALKER:** What amendments would AgForce propose in regards to the renewable energy zones and why?

**Mr Collins:** It would be the ability for us to continue to farm and there is a whole raft of things underneath that. Accessibility—can we still travel stock across them? Can we still access one side of our land from another by road? The legal ramifications—and we did not ask for any of this—the cost of legal bills ramping up for farming families is huge to get legal advice. A lot of changes are needed.

**Mr WALKER:** I have seen some international solar farms where they have co-located fish farms with cattle and the farmers love it. Do you support the co-location, because I have seen some really good opportunities in relation to shade and getting other value-add to their product in terms of organic. Do you support the co-location of both renewables and agriculture on the one site?

**Mr Collins:** Only in specific cases. Once again, it would be up to the individual's land use. An example would be running sheep around solar arrays. It sounds like a lovely idea but the sheep and goats tend to jump up on the panels. It is a piecemeal, individual thing. For some it is not suitable.

**Mr WALKER:** On that, the ones I have seen with the sheep, goats or cattle have gone higher. They have put it up nice and high and they get a bigger roof space. The negotiated outcomes have resulted in a shade structure from their negotiation process. There are ways of getting around those issues. I just wanted to ask you about that co-location because it has become popular.

**Mr Collins:** It would be very difficult. I cannot see how grass would grow underneath solar panels. I cannot see how our production systems at that deep level could be integrated. It would be extremely fractious and difficult.

**Mr HEAD:** Thank you for being here. I know members of AgForce work in coalmines and the energy sector for supplementary income and to support their agricultural enterprise. The energy sector and coalmines also provide a lot of services in communities and allow a lot of businesses to exist. In Chinchilla we have multiple part runs a day so when there is a farm breakdown et cetera, we can get a part out from the city within hours basically because of all the parts that are also supplying

the resource sector. I want to throw that out there and ask for your input and your ideas on how important it is that these rural communities are not left behind. This bill has a jobs guarantee in it, but it also refers to relocation packages. For the sake of the agricultural sector how important is it that we sustain enterprise and populations in these rural communities that underpin the agricultural sector?

**Mr Collins:** It is a concern that we have seen resource companies come in, for example, and ramp up—namely, the gas industry—and then pull out. The threat to communities is in the construction phase. It is good there is a ramp up to communities and their services, which is what you alluded to. Then the ongoing maintenance of wind towers and solar arrays is negligible compared to the construction phase. That is a concern as to rural communities and how our members function in their communities and how that ramp up and then the decline is going to be managed.

**Mr HEAD:** What should this bill consider in that jobs guarantee as far as its remit to ensure that there are more jobs in rural communities?

**Mr Collins:** It needs to be cognisant of that. We need more people in regional communities. That is an absolute necessity.

**Dr Rutledge:** I draw the committee's attention to one of the points Mark made, which is that going forward AgForce requests consultation in subsequent policy development and that farming representatives are allocated a seat at the table for governance arrangements for renewable energy zones to provide a fair and equitable power balance amongst stakeholders. I think that providing those voices in a governance structure will assist in achieving that aim.

**Ms PEASE:** I have a few questions that are fairly straightforward to begin with. I am interested to hear, going back to the toolkit again, if that has been of assistance? You did talk about the complexity around dealing with and negotiating with companies around when turbines and solar panels are going up. Have you or any of your members found that QFF toolkit to be of any assistance?

**Mr Collins:** Absolutely.

**Ms PEASE:** Does it go far enough?

**Dr Rutledge:** I was given this copy by one of our members, so, yes, it is used. Does it go far enough? It is difficult to say. There is almost an assumption that renewables have been around for a long time, but the first commercial wind farm in Australia was built in 2003. It is not really a long time especially when you imagine the life span of these turbines is 25 years, and that is just for the parts that do not last as long; the towers themselves can last much longer. We have not really seen the full suite right through to decommissioning. In fact, I am not even really sure that too many wind turbines have been fully decommissioned in Australia. I think maybe only one has been. QFF have done a great job, but we do not have the experience in this country yet to talk about that full life cycle.

**Ms PEASE:** It is an interesting space. One of the great things about farmers is you are the traditional conservationists. You have to take care of your land so you can continue to deliver the product that you grow there. For these sorts of environments, to be doing futureproofing in terms of renewables, it is a good thing, and I am sure it will sit quite well with a lot of farmers who have had to deal with many things over the years, including mining companies coming through. I have worked with many of the farmers over the years with regards to that. How did you engage with your members with regards to this particular bill for your submission? Did you do a survey?

**Mr Collins:** It was by groups of landholders. We have a committee process within AgForce—impacted landholders and others who are interested and have a passion, such as myself, for good policy across the state. It is by committee and then pulled together by staff.

**Ms PEASE:** I say congratulations on that. I know that you are faced with many challenges and much of it to do with changes having to be made to policy. I congratulate your members because they do pick it up and run with it and do what needs to be done into the future because you value your land; you know how important it is.

**Mr Collins:** We do.

**Ms PEASE:** And also the climate. It is a good opportunity. One of the other things I wanted to talk to you about was your concerns about road infrastructure which you mentioned and potential damages that that may have to your property. On the flipside of that, would that also not provide better road infrastructure for your members?

**Mr Collins:** Our experience is no.

**Ms PEASE:** Why is that?

**Mr Collins:** A lack of money by governments to repair the infrastructure such as roads as needed.

**Ms PEASE:** Can you elaborate on that?

**Mr Collins:** It is the case that our road infrastructure is falling apart regionally. It is in a shocking state. One of the big costs to our businesses is supply chains. It starts at the farm gate and ends at the port. I guess it is our 'first mile, last mile' policy. A good example is the Leichhardt Highway, south of Taroom. It absolutely copped it during the resources boom and it has never been the same since. It is a lot of individual things. It does not matter what road or what government—it is local, state and federal—but it needs to be properly thought out. Even at a regional level, whilst the transportation of the blades of the wind turbines seems to be happening, it is not without its issues either, as you are undoubtedly aware. The roads are not fit for purpose. I guess what we are after is fairness and equity for farmers and, of course, to always retain the right to say no.

**Ms PEASE:** Thank you, and thank you for your great advocacy on behalf of your members.

**Dr Rutledge:** May I add another small point about roads? It is not just the road infrastructure; it is the use of the roads. Some of these roads are largely on private property. I have heard directly from members about contractors using these roads in an unsafe manner. That needs to be part of, I would argue, a code of conduct.

**Mr WEIR:** I notice in your submission you raise some concerns around actions for noncompliance. Are there specific incidences that you are aware of? For example, in resources, if you breach your conditions—

**Mr Collins:** Yes, it is that sort of thing that we are talking about. There has to be teeth to this, otherwise if we just have a voluntary code of conduct, it is not going to hold water. We have seen that in the resource sector to the point now where there is an ombudsman to help with Land Court applications. We do not want to see that. We want this nipped in the bud quickly and we want it done effectively. Farmers' rights need to be absolutely paramount and respected.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you very much to you both for coming in, for your submission and for attending as witnesses and answering our questions here today.

I indicated at the commencement of the hearing today that there would be an opportunity for attendees to make or give a statement from the floor. I believe we have Mr Glen Kelly who has taken this opportunity. I invite Mr Kelly up to the table.

**KELLY, Mr Glen, Private capacity**

**ACTING CHAIR:** I invite you to make an opening statement for the committee members. Please identify who you are, where you are from and what you would like to tell the committee.

**Mr Kelly:** Thanks for giving me this opportunity today in this inquiry. It is quite special and it is a privilege to be here. My name is Glen Kelly. I live 30 kilometres west of Rockhampton in a little community called Kalapa. I have been there all my life. I am a sixth-generation farmer. My belief, being a farmer, is that it is all about the next generation. I am just the caretaker of my property, and I am proud to be that way. What I am here to talk about today is the fight for the next generation—that is, the little people who cannot fight because they are too young. Respect to them. There are many young children in my communities who I think need looking after, and it is up to people like myself to give them every opportunity.

Today I would just like to say that with renewable energy, I find that there is a place for it; I do get that. I understand that coal will not be here forever. However, I do find when you start putting wind factories and solar factories in and around so close to cities like Rockhampton, whether it be 40 kilometres, 30 kilometres, or the Bouldercombe solar farm being only 10 kilometres away, which has been approved federally, I think there is something that we have to remember here. When we are living in a city like Rockhampton, it has the potential of a massive boom when it comes to the resources sector especially, coal and other agriculture such as beef—we are known as the beef capital of Australia. When you start putting projects such as the Moah Creek project, the Moonlight Range project, the Boulder Creek Project, the Mount Hopeful project which are all wind, that is five wind farms within the Rockhampton Regional Council area, let alone the three solar farms. The Rockhampton Regional Council area is not a big area at all when you look at it on a map and look at it as a zone. These are things we need to highlight because of the fact that once these renewable projects go in, that is it. That stops the frontier of the new frontier of what we have in Rockhampton. With that small area of country out there which is Gracemere, it is the only way it can go. Once these infrastructures go in, that closes down the opportunity for people to build there.

When you have these turbines with state code 23 which is the wind farm code, and state code 16 which relates to vegetation law, it allows the developers to put turbines within 1.5 kilometres of a house. These turbines can be up to 275 metres to the tip of the blade. When these developers are allowed to put a turbine so close to someone's home and that person has no choice mainly because they have already done the studies and what have you to find the positions where they want to put these turbines and then letting the community know, as was said here this morning, at our Kalapa Hall that, 'This is what we plan to do in your community whether you like it or not,' it is hurting. It is very emotional. Straightaway it is closing down the opportunities that the likes of Rockhampton has. I do understand that, yes, the move forward is something that we certainly have to look into, but the placing of these turbines and solar farms is certainly another thing.

When we consider the issues that we have which concerns me greatly, like the Moah Creek project, for example, using up to 58,000 tonnes of concrete just for the footings alone and other structures in that project, and 76 kilometres of internal roads over a 10,500 hectare study area, there is a lot of earth to be moved, there is a lot of timber to come down. There is remnant vegetation in that zone which has to come down. My concern is, for a start, without anything else, why are we touching remnant vegetation?

State codes 23 and 16 have allowed these developers to do whatever they like. I give due respect to the developers. They have a job to do, too, and I respect that—I certainly do—and that is something that we all must remember. But New South Wales and Victoria have legislation in place which states you cannot build within three kilometres of a home. That has been missed. It did not get allowed in, in 2015 with the state government back then, and it has been missed and pushed aside which has allowed the developers to do whatever they like. Moving forward, something we must reconsider is pulling things up a bit and let's have a sit around the table and have a look at where these things can go and where they should not go. When you start fiddling around with areas like Rockhampton, bringing the potential of wind farms and solar so close to the people, issues arise.

If memory serves me correctly, 8,000 people were evacuated out of Gracemere in the November 2018 fire. I was in that fire, and that was one of the worst days I have experienced in my life. It was a very emotional day. Without the planes in the air, there would have been people killed that day and I would have been one of them. We were saving houses in Kabra. Where the Moah Creek project starts on the eastern side is only five kilometres from where that fire ignited.

Moving forward, I think these are things that have not been recognised when it comes to wind and solar projects. One thing that I must make as a statement here is the fact that when it comes to renewable energy in Queensland, the state government does not have any guidelines whatsoever

when it comes to a fire mitigation plan. I have read the Victorian one and I have read the New South Wales one and they are put together very well. That is something moving forward that has to be watched. I have spoken to the developers about it. The fact of who owns the fire is something that has to be looked into. When we are so close to the town of Rockhampton and we have so many houses—the Moah Creek project, as an example, has 148 homes and structures within 1.5 to 6 kilometres from the 58 proposed turbines—straightaway that is a red flag for me. Straightaway that tells me that we have to look into this and see where this is going. Is it the right spot or is it not the right spot?

As a rural firefighter and a community person, which I have been all my life, the community comes first. We can talk about the developers saying, ‘We are liaising with the community to do this and to do that’—well, that is great, but I know for a fact, and they know too with me, it is broken and we are actually trying to heal that. A broken wheel is hard to fix. I think there are multiple things I could go on about here, there is no doubt, but my time is short. I do believe that, yes, there is a place for it, but building structures such as wind and solar farms so close to major cities like Rockhampton certainly has to be looked at, and maybe it is not the right place.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Kelly, for coming in and giving your submission. Before I turn to questions from the other members of the committee, can I ask you to clarify that you are a landholder out west here?

**Mr Kelly:** Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Can you outline to the committee what has been your engagement with some of the renewable energies in relation to your land? What processes have you gone through?

**Mr Kelly:** Thank you. I am a beef cattle producer. We have about 6,500 acres out there. I have inherited land. I have bought land. I was fortunate enough to have inherited land to help get me going. In regards to the land that I have bought, when I found out that a turbine is going to be placed within 2½ kilometres of my property, it was quite a shock. I was told by the developers that the land will not devalue. It will devalue. These are things that have started to make me realise that we have to look into where these projects are going, and the importance of small, historical blocks which are already there. Five acres, 20 acres, 40 acres—they are already there. Under the likes of Rockhampton Regional Council at the moment, you cannot subdivide a block any smaller than 105 acres, but when you have it already historically drawn up, it allows the opportunity for that landholder, if he requires, to sell it or subdivide it and that is his decision.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Just to clarify, so you have a wind turbine that is proposed within 2½ kilometres of your boundary?

**Mr Kelly:** That is correct; off one of my properties, yes.

**Mr WEIR:** Thanks, Glen. Staying on that subject for a bit, you talked about the Rockhampton council. Have they made any announcements about their future plans for that area?

**Mr Kelly:** We have Advance Rockhampton which I am yet still to talk to, which is fine. Rockhampton city council turned down a motion from the mayor just before Christmas which told me that Rockhampton city council itself is divided. They are starting to understand what is going on. They are starting to listen to the constituents—the people—of the Rockhampton Regional Council. Do not forget that Rockhampton is a country town. Even though there are maybe 80,000 people who live here, it is still classed as a country town and one thing about country towns is that people talk. The word is starting to get out there. In my journey 18 months ago I was none the wiser with solar or wind. My family was approached for a solar farm. I, too, had the opportunity. It was quite incredible what I could have received from that portion of that solar farm. It blew me away. When we sat down and started to think about it, the first thing I thought about was my neighbours and how close my neighbours would be to a solar farm and the issues that they would have, and I could not do it to them. I just could not do it to them and I walked away from them, and as this journey has gone forward I am pleased I did because I personally with the houses that are in this project that is the issue we have out there. The mental stress of those poor guys out there who are my neighbours and my cousins and my family is mentally killing them—it is—and it is something that I have to be careful of, too, because you think about it every day and every night. It just does not go away.

**Mr WEIR:** You were present for the earlier submitters who were talking about this project?

**Mr Kelly:** Yes.

**Mr WEIR:** The EIS process has been done. I assume you put a submission in to that?

**Mr Kelly:** We put a submission in to SARA. We have not seen anything yet from the state. We have not seen anything yet from the EPBC. We are sitting on the fence waiting to see what happens there obviously. We do have concerns. I find that the Moonlight project, which is 40 kilometres west Rockhampton

of Rockhampton, was part of the Moah Creek project. The Moah Creek project was originally 120 turbines and they narrowed it back to 58 turbines. They walked away from the Moah north project because it was too hard. After them walking away from the Moah north project because it was too hard, we had another developer come along by the name of Greenleaf which grabbed it up and were quite open to tell me it was the right place. When that is going on, it makes you wonder where this is going to end. The type of terrain of Moah is one thing I am very familiar with. I have flown it, I have walked it, fought fires on it and there is one thing I know about that country: there is a lot of rock there—a lot of rock—and for them to do what is planned to do at Moah TNT is going to be the most important machine in that development. If that is renewable energy, I beg to differ.

**Ms PEASE:** Thanks very much for coming in today and for your generations of caring for the land and providing food and beef. I just wanted to clarify exactly where the wind turbine is. You said 2.5 kilometres. Is that from your house or from your fence?

**Mr Kelly:** No, so that is from the boundary of one of my properties. My house will be just over four kilometres. We have had it valued lately. The home is a \$760,000 home. When we poured all that money into it, I did not realise that we were pouring money into something that one day might not be worth that because we have a turbine sitting right there. My neighbour has just put \$200,000 into his home and four weeks later he found out he was going to have a turbine 1.7 kilometres from his house, and he is one of the guys that I am fighting for.

**Ms PEASE:** And is that on his neighbour's property?

**Mr Kelly:** This particular property adjoins the Moah Creek project.

**Ms PEASE:** Okay, so it is a neighbour?

**Mr Kelly:** A neighbour to the project.

**Ms PEASE:** Yes. I know that Pat Weir asked a question with regard to consultation. Have you engaged with the EPBC consultation process?

**Mr Kelly:** We have not heard from the EPBC at the moment. We will be putting in a submission to that when that opportunity comes. I think community consultation, touching on that subject, is a very interesting one because one thing that I think broke the wheel in our community was the fact—and I do believe the developers understand this one—that they were allowed to come into our community and be there for three years and do all of the ecological study and all the rest of it and the planning and the processing with the hosts of the project, but they then put their hand up and said, 'We're here now and this is what's going to happen to you.' I think that is something that really does knock the wind out of small communities, especially when you have to live underneath these monsters.

Living so close to the Stanwell Power Station, which I do—eight kilometres—the potential of renewables is very high. We know that, but the potential of transmission lines is even higher even though we know there are transmission lines there. So my community out there are very nervous at the moment—very, very nervous—and I think through the course of how things have been done it has actually made them feel more uncomfortable, and I think that is a sad thing. Just quickly, in 2018 if we had had developers come to our communities and say, 'Hey, this is what we'd like to do. What are your thoughts? Please let us know what you think about this and that,' that may have been something that would have stopped that wheel from breaking.

**Ms PEASE:** Just finally—and just a quick answer for this one—I know that the QFF have the toolkit and also AgForce have been doing some work. Have you engaged and have you participated or had a look at the QFF toolkit or engaged with AgForce? Are you a member of either?

**Mr Kelly:** I am not a member of AgForce. I have probably been a bit of a lone sheep on that one. National Farmers' is something that I respect greatly.

**Ms PEASE:** Have you looked at the toolkit?

**Mr Kelly:** I have had a brief look at it, yes.

**Ms PEASE:** Thank you.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Unfortunately, we are limited in time here in Rockhampton today, so that will conclude this hearing. I want to thank you, Mr Kelly, for coming forward and to thank everyone who has participated today. Thank you to our Hansard reporter. A transcript of these proceedings will be made available on the committee's website in due course. I declare this public hearing closed. Thank you all very much.

**The committee adjourned at 11.22 am.**