

Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill 2023

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Attn: Mr Shane King MP
Chair of the Transport and Resources Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000
Via email: trc@parliament.qld.gov.au

12 December 2023

Re: NECA Submission to the Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill 2023

Dear Chair,

Australia's electrotechnology sector is a significant contributor to the economy, employing approximately 360,000 workers and turning over more than \$92 billion annually.

The National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA) represents over 6,700 member organisations nationally, with many of our country's electrical workers starting their career as a NECA apprentice.

In June 2023, NECA in addition to more than 90 other stakeholders provided feedback to the draft legislation to deliver the Queensland Energy and Jobs Plan, the early exposure draft of the *Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill*.

The Queensland Government summarised the outcomes of this consultation process into the following categories¹:

- 1. There was broad support for a transition to renewable and the key elements of the Plan (and its implementation through the draft Bill).*
- 2. Alongside respondents' general endorsement of the approach to transition to renewables was a call for fairness in its implementation.*
- 3. Stakeholders wanted a greater focus on social licence.*

NECA has reviewed the amended Bill along with the supporting documentation provides further recommendations to inform the Transport and Resources Committee's Inquiry into the Bill, primarily relating to the following elements, and as detailed in this submission:

1. Grid Supporting Technology
2. Job Security Guarantee Fund
3. Queensland SuperGrid Infrastructure Blueprint
4. Proposed Governance and Advisory Bodies
5. Procurement
6. Workforce Development and Training.

¹ Explanatory Notes, *Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill 2023*.

1. Grid Supporting Technology

NECA notes the update to the definition of operating works in the *Electricity Act 1994* and inclusion of synchronous condensers and Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS).

The Queensland Government needs to ensure that any amendments align with the work of the Office of Industrial Relations on modernising the Electrical Safety Act 2002, and that any safety requirements on battery storage devices are not compromised.

2. Job Security Guarantee Fund

In response to the early exposure draft of the Bill, NECA expressed its support for job security for all workers, particularly for workers transitioning from coal fired power stations.

Training and future employment opportunities within the energy sector play a critical role for those especially employed in regional and rural locations.

It is therefore unclear why Part 7, Clause 85 (1) of the Bill, states that it is the 'intention' of Parliament for the State to provide security and support to affected energy workers.

NECA recommends this Clause is updated to reflect the Parliament's commitment, not merely intention, for the State to provide security and support to affected energy workers.

In line with the recommendation of the Electrical Trades Union, NECA also supports the Government's consideration of affording workers from privately owned coal mines and coal-fired power stations the opportunity to access the benefits of the Job Security Guarantee Fund.

Furthermore, the criteria that is to be applied for the purposes of defining a 'prescribed facility' Clause 86 (5) in the regulation is unclear.

NECA recommends extending the coverage of the Job Security Guarantee Fund to those private facilities that may be impacted by the Queensland Government's actions and decisions in further support of the 'optimal infrastructure pathway objectives'.

Government's social licence for renewable energy initiatives extends beyond community consultation.

As publicly owned coal-fired power stations are phased out as a result of the Queensland Government's commitment to the renewable transformation, workers remaining in privately owned facilities cannot be forgotten.

The Queensland Government led renewable transformation and jobs needs to be fair for all workers in the industry.

The Government needs to give private entities the choice to the entitlement of a government funded Job Security Guarantee, and the opportunity to apply to participate in the initiative.

NECA also recommends that this is done in a way that is voluntary to those private facilities, and they may choose to apply to the Minister to join the Job Security Guarantee.

Such applications are recommended to be made to the Minister, and must adhere to a clear set of criteria that is underpinned by a thorough and fair application process.

3. Queensland SuperGrid Infrastructure Blueprint

NECA is of the view that the SuperGrid proposal needs to be carefully considered to ensure there are no gaps in the generation and distribution of energy.

The existing coal fired grid is respectively speaking somewhat simple, whereas this Blueprint is rather complex with many smaller grids combining to form the SuperGrid.

Full oversight of this grid will be needed as the new normal is a much more complex control operation.

It is also important in developing and maintaining the Blueprint to keep in mind that the Queensland population and infrastructure requirements are growing at a much faster rate than elsewhere in Australia and the Australian Bureau of Statistics predicts this to continue for many decades to come.

This will in turn place pressure on the requirement for increased electricity generation to meet the growing needs of Queensland.

4. Proposed Governance and Advisory Bodies

NECA supports the Government's introduction of the following governance and advisory entities in an effort to effectively guide the energy transformation:

- **The Queensland Energy System Advisory Board**
- **The Energy Industry Council**
- **The Queensland Renewable Energy Jobs Advocate**

The Board forms a critical component in the delivery of such a complex and new grid, and will be tasked with providing independent advice on what is in the best interest of Queenslanders.

NECA recommends that the Queensland Government ensures that the composition of the board extends to a broad range of stakeholders across the relevant industries, employer and employee representatives from the energy sector included.

NECA believes that a leading Energy Industry Council is essential to the successful implementation of the transition from coal to renewable energy.

There needs to be extensive and detailed consideration of the work of regional and rural workers both within current coal fired power stations and also the regional and rural communities that form part of the current supply chain and broader community workforces.

This includes public and private sector workers, including local electrical workers.

In this regard NECA considers it essential to have private sector employer representatives on the Energy Industry Council to ensure that supply chain and local communities workforce requirements in the electrical industry are adequately considered as part of the transformation.

We note and appreciate the amendment in the Bill relating to ensuring the representatives for the Council are of an industrial organisation under the *Industrial Relations Act 2016*.

NECA also supports the establishment of the Queensland Renewable Energy Jobs Advocate, and believes that it is imperative that the person appointed to the role understands the national

landscape, particularly as it relates to skills and workforce development, as all jurisdictions will be competing for workers of the same skillset.

The Advocate will therefore need to ensure that current and future workforce needs are addressed in Queensland to support the transition to renewables.

5. Procurement

Queensland Government's *Buy Queensland* procurement approach supports local businesses and jobs, while boosting the local economy.

This policy is particularly important for regional and remote communities where many families who will be affected by the transformation, indeed work and reside.

NECA understands that under the Queensland Energy and Jobs Plan, procurement by Government Owned Corporations will be in accordance with the Government's *Buy Queensland* policy.

NECA recommends that a stronger framework is established in the Bill to demonstrate the Queensland Government's commitment to expanding local procurement, manufacturing, and supply chain opportunities from energy development, and how it intends to work with local Queensland businesses to enable greater participation of affected communities.

It is also unclear from the Bill how the Queensland Government intends to deliver on some of the other principles of the energy transformation, for example *Empowering First Nations Peoples*.

NECA understands that one of the functions of the Advocate (Clause 155, Functions) will be to consult and engage with Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples in relation to how employment opportunities could be increased.

NECA also strongly suggests prescriptive approaches to local procurement be focused on the regional areas where the work is performed to deliver economic growth and opportunities for those particular regions and local areas.

NECA recommends the Queensland Government, through the Bill, demonstrates a stronger commitment for active, ongoing and genuinely inclusive engagement with First Nations peoples in an effort to enhance opportunities for training, employment and business participation.

The Bill also does not commit the government to supporting the growth of female workforces in the sector.

Not only is gender equality a fundamental human right, but having a more diverse, inclusive industry is important to meeting resourcing challenges and skills shortages the sector faces, both now and for the foreseeable future.

NECA recommends that the Queensland Government commits through the Bill to increasing the number of women in the electrical trade, significantly contributing to the renewables transformation.

This includes a sharp focus on recruiting apprentices and women into electrical trades.

Engaging more women in the industry also supports Queensland Government policies and overall social benefits of greater gender equality in the workforce.

6. Workforce Development and Training

The clean energy economy is driving workforce demand through initiatives such as Queensland Government's policy and reform, major infrastructure projects, environmental, consumer-driven and economic drivers.

Queensland electricians are pivotal in all aspects in the design, construction and delivery of renewable energy.

With the proliferation of renewable technologies across all jurisdictions, there is a national shortage of electricians to support the renewable transformation.

Up to 35,000 additional electricians will be needed across Australia between 2023 and 2030², and in the current climate of serious skills shortages, it will be impossible to reach this number unless government decides to take action beyond business as usual.

To successfully deliver on the renewable transformation targets, NECA recommends the Queensland Government include a stronger emphasis in the Bill on ongoing workforce development, including training, apprenticeships and continuing professional development, underpinned by government and industry partnerships.

NECA appreciates that the Council will be tasked with the role of providing the Minister with the advice on the skills and training needed to build, upskill and deliver workforce capacity and capability for the training industry, however, there needs to be a greater focus on ensuring a steady growth in the attraction, development and retention of workforces to the sector.

NECA also understands that the initiatives outlined in the Future Energy Workforce Roadmap aim to provide the training and skills needed for the future energy system, however **NECA recommends the Government commits to continuing work with the industry to ensure that the demand for future workforces can effectively be met.**

² The Clean Energy Generation: Workforce Needs for a Net Zero Economy, Jobs and Skills Australia, October 2023