



Speech by

**Ronan Lee**

**MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPILLY**

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## **GREENHOUSE GAS STORAGE BILL**

**Mr LEE** (Indooroopilly—GRN) (4.59 pm): It is always with a sense of trepidation that one listens to speeches by the member for Burnett. Today I am not quite sure if I wish I had not listened to his speech or if I feel that it was incredibly important that we all listened to the sort of two-bob-each-way bet that the member for Burnett tried to have on the climate change issue. He cannot have it both ways on climate change. Climate change is either happening and we need to do something about it or, as the member for Burnett seemed to be arguing, it is not something that is happening at all and we should not worry.

We need to take clear and decisive action on climate change. It is as simple as that. We do not get to be wishy-washy about our response to climate change. We do not get to think that maybe it is a cycle that will last 22,000 years—I think that was his argument—as though the folk whose homes have been inundated with water in the Pacific because the sea levels are rising can hold their breath for 22,000 years for the cycle to come around again the way the member for Burnett seems to think it will. If that is his policy strategy, the mind must boggle as to what his strategy is for ever getting elected into government. Is it if he sits there for long enough it will eventually happen?

Climate change is without doubt the single greatest policy challenge of our generation and we need to take action to deal with it. We need to take action today. We do not need to have another debate, as the member and some of his colleagues have suggested, as to whether or not climate change is really happening, whether it is something that we should be concerned about. We need to accept that it is occurring. We need to do things to deal with it today.

One of the other members of the House described the member for Burnett's speech as 'kooky' and 'Google researched'. Sometimes we give him too much credit. It was an appalling speech in terms of its message. It was a speech that said that we should take no action and we should just sit and wait. It is an appalling indictment on the members in this parliament of the Liberal National Party that that is the best we can do. But he was not the only one. There were others who bought into the same sort of climate change scepticism that we have become used to from members of the Liberal National Party. It is a terrible sight to see. It is an appalling policy position to take.

I will deal specifically with this bill. It is of course appropriate that a strong regulatory framework be established for the storage of greenhouse gases. As yet, this is an unproven and still, and most likely well into the future, a very expensive technology. So presumably the bill simply paves the way for finding suitable sites until we are certain that carbon capture and sequestration are a viable alternative. My concern though about this bill is that it does not treat the issue of sequestration as a long-term activity that has the potential to cause serious harm, including to future generations.

There is something of a myth that carbon dioxide is a benign gas. Everyone exhales it, plants absorb it and it is a part of the cycle that is essential to life. But there are situations when CO<sub>2</sub> is in fact far from benign. I am not talking simply about CO<sub>2</sub> being a greenhouse gas and therefore being responsible for enhanced global warming when emitted in large volumes. Carbon dioxide can be incredibly dangerous when emitted in large amounts close to living beings. We saw this in 1986 when Lake Nyos in Cameroon suddenly, with no warning, emitted a large cloud of CO<sub>2</sub>. The consequence was that around 1,700 people were suffocated and thousands of livestock in nearby villages also suffocated.

When carbon dioxide is sequestered underground we need to be sure that it is going to stay there and stay there forever. If there is a leak, as happened at Lake Nyos, or weaknesses emerge within the storage area, then we at least need to have a financial basis to deal with that problem. We do not want to see the same situation we have seen with so many mine sites around the state where a company has walked away from the site leaving the taxpayer to foot the bill for proper clean-ups and rehabilitation.

I intend to vote for this bill because it is important to have a regulatory framework for carbon sequestration, but I would have much preferred to see two additions. I will suggest them now. The first is extending liability on companies for monitoring, measurement and verification to at least 60 years—at least 60 years—after application to surrender has been approved. The second is introducing a mandatory industry funded Queensland government held trust to ensure funds are available for future remediation works in the event that the leaseholder liable for leakage is no longer in existence or does not have the capacity to remedy any actual or likely risk of leakage. There is a serious concern here that the taxpayers of Queensland would be asked to foot the bill for the shoddy practices of a commercial operator. Notwithstanding the safety concerns, there is a serious risk in financial terms to the budget bottom line in Queensland.

I want to join the debate that has been occurring in the chamber today about why there is a need to legislate in this manner. It seems that basically two strands of thought have emerged thus far in the debate. There is the Liberal National Party argument, which is that LNP members are going to support the legislation because it helps the coal industry to continue in the long term and they are frantically panicked about any changes that may affect the mining industry. But they are not in any way concerned, it would appear, about climate change. That is something that they are not concerned about. They seem to think that this is a piece of legislation that will get them over that policy hump, where they think people are talking about climate change an awful lot and I think they support this sort of legislation because they hope that the day will come when people will stop talking about climate change and they can get back to business as usual.

The argument that I read from the Labor side of the chamber is that they actually understand that climate change is real but they are not really that concerned about doing too much about it. So there is an endorsement of Kevin Rudd's pitiful and appallingly low targets as part of the emissions trading scheme. There is an endorsement of the Prime Minister's five per cent target. There is an admission that climate change is a serious problem, but there is no policy oomph to follow it up. I say that the government has to do both. It has to acknowledge that climate change is real and then has to take concrete steps to deal with it. It cannot spin its way out of this one. It cannot say, 'Climate change is real and here's the glossy brochure that tells you that we're doing very little.' Five per cent, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, means that the Great Barrier Reef will die. That is what it means. When Labor members endorse the five per cent target it means that the Barrier Reef will die. It means that Kakadu will be gone. There are 60,000 Queenslanders' jobs and billions of dollars in the Queensland economy every year associated with tourism connected with the Barrier Reef, and under Kevin Rudd's proposals they will go. It is the condemnation of anyone working in the tourism industry in Queensland. It is appalling. We need to take much tougher action on climate change than what we are seeing.

Queensland is one of the most appalling jurisdictions in the world when it comes to renewable energy. We have an appalling policy structure in Queensland. I have spoken in the House before about concerns about the feed-in tariff in Queensland and how policy measures in Queensland have been structured to actually undermine the renewable energy sector to advantage the polluting industry. We need to do much better than that in Queensland. Queensland should be a world leader in solar energy but Queensland is not, and it is an indictment on any member of this parliament who is not as outraged as me with the fact that Queensland is not leading the world in renewable energy, particularly solar energy.

The Queensland Greens have made a policy announcement that we believe is entirely feasible for two solar power stations to be constructed in Queensland, with work to start immediately. Engineering firms in Australia have done the figures on this, and it is entirely feasible that we could get change from \$4 billion if we built two 250 megawatt solar based power stations in Queensland. One could be built in the Townsville region and the other could be built in the Darling Downs. We could actually start transitioning Queensland's economy away from being an economy that is based upon energy produced from pollution and towards an economy that leads the world in renewable energy. Why would you not want to do that? Why would you stand in the way of such straightforward and simple mechanisms that would give our planet a chance in the future?

What we have seen from the Queensland government on this so far is stunned silence. The government admits that climate change is real but it does not really want to do anything about it. That in many ways is almost a worse position than the position of the Liberal National Party. One can kind of understand the Liberal National Party not wanting to do anything because it does not think climate change is happening, but I cannot fathom why the government would not want to take serious and immediate action to build a renewable energy sector in Queensland when it knows and accepts—at least it says it accepts—that climate change is real and that it is the biggest threat to Queenslanders into the future.

We need to be working every day to immediately transition Queensland's economy so that we build a strong economy that is based upon renewable energy or we will simply be left behind by the rest of the world. The rest of the world is doing this sort of work. The Europeans are miles ahead of us and cloudy Germany is miles ahead of Queensland when it comes to solar energy and wind and tidal energy. Queensland is very much behind when it comes to solar energy and it is just not right.

We need to not see legislation like this as simply an opportunity to sweep a problem under the carpet. Legislation like this is to climate change what landfill is to refuse. We all understand nowadays that we need to move towards recycling rather than simply throwing our rubbish away. Forty years ago, people threw everything away, but now there is significant support for recycling and Queenslanders have been pretty good at it. We can always do better but we have been pretty good.

While there needs to be a strict regulatory regime, policy strategies like we are seeing today create the same sort of thinking: brush it under the carpet, bury it, put it underground and forget about it. It is not a smart way to be conducting policy in Queensland; it is certainly not a smart way to be tackling climate change. Any suggestion that 'clean coal' or geosequestration is going to be a solution so that Queensland can continue to be one of the biggest polluters in the world is not a smart policy position for Queensland. Queensland should be smart enough to be leading the way in its engagement with renewable energy and a commitment to renewable energy. We should be leading the world in terms of our commitment to reducing carbon emissions, and we are simply not. We need to do much better than that. It is an indictment on a government that has got both an understanding of what is going wrong with the planet and also the capacity to make a change.

This government has a clear majority in the parliament at the moment and it has the capacity to be part of transitioning Queensland's economy into something better than what we have got, and the sad thing will be if we emerge from the current economic malaise with an economy that is just as 19th century as the one we went into the malaise with. That would be the worst scenario I could imagine: that Queensland would rebuild its economy to be the same as it was before the current economic decline.

This is our opportunity to actually make things better. It is our opportunity to lead the world in terms of changing our economy. We should be an example to the rest of the world. We should be an example to countries and jurisdictions that are thinking they are not quite certain about what they want to do to tackle climate change or how they want to restructure their economy. It would be a terrible thing if Queensland were not leading the way.

I note that in the United States Barack Obama has got a strategy to rebuild the US economy on the basis of sustainable jobs. That is the same strategy the Queensland Greens want to see taking place in Queensland. We ought to be building the Queensland economy on the basis of sustainable green jobs. We propose the immediate construction of two solar-powered power stations, and 4,000 jobs could be created immediately through that construction. These would be jobs that help build a sustainable economy in the long run, jobs where people know they have got a long-term future and jobs where they have got skills that will apply into the future, not skills that are based on a 19th century mindset about how the economy should work and about how Queensland should make its money.

We ought to be promoting the tourist industry not condemning it. In committing to a paltry five per cent target for emission reductions, the Labor government nationally, supported by the Queensland government, is condemning Queensland's tourism industry. What we are seeing in Western Australia, where they really do not have any tourism industry to speak of, is an economic dip that is affecting the mining industry and their economy is now in serious trouble. Queensland has a strong tourism sector and we should not allow it to be condemned because this government is not prepared to stand up to the federal government and say, 'We need clear and decisive action on reducing emissions. We need to do better than just proceeding with things the way they have been going.' What will actually destroy Queensland's economy into the future will in fact be a business-as-usual model about how we tackle climate change and how we rebuild the economy. If we try to rebuild the economy to be the same as it was before, we know that our emissions will condemn the Great Barrier Reef and condemn the jobs of 60,000 Queenslanders at the same time.

It is with a sense of resigned sadness that we need this sort of legislation, but I am looking forward to a day when we will actually see legislation before this parliament that provides us with the opportunity to build a strong, green economy, to transition Queensland's economy out of its 19th century mindset, to build an economy that is clean and green, to give us a society that does not condemn the jobs of 60,000 Queenslanders whose jobs depend on the Barrier Reef and to give us a much brighter and greener future.