




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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ELECTRICITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL


 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (5.58 pm): I rise this evening to speak in support of the Electricity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, and I support it 100 per cent. This is another great example of our Premier showing absolute commitment to the city of Townsville by locating the newly merged Energy Queensland in our great city. This exciting news is yet another boost of confidence for investment in North Queensland. Does it get any better?

Mr Costigan interjected.

Mr HARPER: I take that interjection from the member for Whitsunday. Does it get any better after the great news that we can build our stadium with funding made available in yesterday's budget? The answer is yes. I thank the Premier and acknowledge her vision and strong desire to provide our city with the nation's biggest power asset. After combining Energex and Ergon, which has a whopping value of some \$24 billion, the merger will create even more jobs in North Queensland. Conversely, as we know, the previous LNP government under Newman-Nicholls leadership wanted to sell off this great electricity asset. We know that the LNP are trying to frighten small business owners because they want to bring public ownership into disrepute so that 'Mr Asset Sales', the member for Clayfield, can fulfil his lifelong ambition and dream of flogging off assets that belong to all Queenslanders.

The new company, Energy Queensland, is on track to open its Townsville headquarters in coming weeks. I am sure the members for Townsville and Mundingburra join me in being very excited that this merger will bring even more jobs to North Queensland and looking forward to the economic activity this will bring to our region over the coming years.

Front-line staff will continue to operate in their respective regions to ensure the network businesses continue to be leaders in emergency response and to ensure the lights remain on for Queensland businesses and households. Energy Queensland will look at options to utilise renewable technologies in regional Queensland, particularly in remote areas of our state, to improve reliability and sustainability of electricity supply. This business will support the development of regional Queensland and will have a clear focus on providing regional Queenslanders with access to innovative new products and services available in other parts of Australia.

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (9.09 pm), continuing: I support the Electricity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I will now discuss the positive contribution that Energy Queensland will make by being based in Townsville. This business will offer solar technology solutions, battery storage, energy management systems, smart meters and demand management services to respond to customer needs. The creation of this energy services subsidiary is a key element of the Queensland government's plan to merge Energex and Ergon Energy to improve network efficiency and reduce pressure on electricity network prices for customers over the longer term.

This initiative is just another one of the great things that the Palaszczuk government is doing in the regions to create a bright future. It includes the electric superhighway. In July this year, Ergon Energy announced that its retail business was working with the government and industry to help create an electric vehicle—or EV—highway, with Australia's first solar powered fast-charging station for EVs to be established in Townsville. Ergon is also finalising a lease offer to employees that could see up to a further 100 electric vehicles in private use later in the year. This forward-thinking initiative is part of the Palaszczuk government's commitment to support emerging and innovative industries. Solar and renewables are creating jobs. A former goldmine site may soon be a world-first generator of clean, green energy and jobs for North Queensland.

I am referring to Genex Power's \$580 million energy project near the township of Kidston, 280 kilometres north-west of Townsville. In relation to battery trials, early results from Ergon Energy's 12-month trial involving battery storage, home energy management systems and alternative electricity tariffs in Townsville are shedding light on how technology and tariffs will shape the future energy network.

We expect to see growth in regional Queensland as a result of the merger between Ergon and Energex. Ergon is an energy retailer and distributor within regional Queensland communities with 733,000 customers. Ergon has 4,500 people, 67 depots and covers 97 per cent of Queensland. Ergon has 33 communities on isolated grids and a government election commitment to invest further in this future. The government has some fairly big commitments around renewable energy. Ergon has over 120 embedded generators over 30 kilowatts looking to connect to our network, with 50 of those over one megawatt and a retailer in the market for 150 megawatts of renewables. That will be a significant contributor to the economy in the future.

A key part of the merger will be the creation of an innovative new energy services business based in Townsville. This business will be positioned to respond to the changing electricity supply market and to deliver new products and services to households, businesses and communities. This business will be based in Townsville and we know will create up to 500 jobs across the state over the next decade. The new energy services business will offer a range of new innovative products and services and investigate ways to utilise renewable technologies in regional Queensland. In particular, it will focus on improving reliability and sustainability of electricity supply in remote areas and reducing the cost to supply electricity to rural and remote customers. The parent company structure selected by government is intended to bring Energex and Ergon Energy together whilst ensuring that their employees continue to live in the communities that they serve, whether this is in regional Queensland or in the south-east of the state. Importantly, front-line staff will continue to deliver network services in their respective regions, while the new energy services subsidiary will be formed and incorporate Ergon Retail which, as stated, is anticipated to create hundreds of positions in regional areas over the next decade.

The government is focused on reducing the cost of living for Queenslanders and is taking action to minimise the impact of electricity network costs on consumers. Electricity network prices have risen over the past decade, particularly over the last couple of years under the LNP, which has been a significant contributor to rising household electricity prices. We have heard plenty about that. The merger will create savings by removing duplication and ensuring the network businesses are run as efficiently as possible. These savings will help achieve sustainable price outcomes for customers over the longer term.

The government has previously outlined that the merger, along with a number of other efficiency measures across Queensland's electricity network and generation businesses, will save around \$680 million over a five-year period to 2019-20. Of this amount, \$562 million relates to the merged Ergon and Energex businesses.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr HARPER: Those opposite do not like hearing about it, but we are getting on with this parent company being based in Townsville. It is a great contributor to North Queensland and I commend the bill to the House.