




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Thuringowa Electorate, Renewable Energy

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (11.44 am): It is fantastic to talk about renewables in Thuringowa, and today I share with the House the great work that is occurring in my electorate. As we know, there is a renewable energy boom occurring in Queensland, particularly in North Queensland, which is again—much like it does on the sporting field with the injection of our North Queensland Cowboys, the 'Hess Express', 'JT', 'Coops', 'Morgo' and of course Innisfail's Billy Slater and the 'Kelso Kid' Valentine Holmes, who are bolstering the Queensland State of Origin team for game 2—shouldering the weight of responsibility for the rest of the state with large solar farms in Clare, Collinsville, Whitsunday, Hamilton, Kidston, Normanton, Lakeland and Mount Emerald.

In Thuringowa, ESCO Pacific and Palisade are just weeks away from beginning construction on their \$225 million state-of-the-art large-scale solar farm in Kelso. It will have the capacity to produce 148 megawatts, and that is enough clean energy to power some 54,000 homes in Queensland. Importantly, it will create 150 direct jobs which will be a huge economic boost to our region. During our latest briefing I was assured that approximately \$25 million will be created in fantastic employment opportunities focused on local content, particularly in the area of subcontractors, labour and equipment. Construction will begin this month with site establishment. Downer Utilities has been appointed as the lead construction agent on this project, which is a sustainable industry with a 30-year life span. Importantly, the proponents have committed \$20,000 in sponsorships per annum to local programs which promote community connections and vitality, so our local sporting and community groups should benefit from this commitment.

The Ross River Solar Farm in Thuringowa forms an important part of the Premier's recent Powering North Queensland Plan announcement, and a couple of weeks ago the Premier was with me in Thuringowa to turn the first sod on the \$35 million Riverway Drive duplication. This \$386 million investment in North Queensland by the Palaszczuk government will strengthen and diversify North Queensland's energy supply, drive economic growth and support 5,000 jobs. It is amazing that the opposition leader will oppose what we are doing. It is just crazy!

Since January 2016 our state has seen an unprecedented level of energy investment activity in North Queensland, with over 180 megawatts of large-scale projects commencing construction or finalising commercial arrangements. The breakdown of that \$386 million investment in North Queensland—I have not even got to the \$662 million on the front page of the *Townsville Bulletin*—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr HARPER: That is an absolute commitment in infrastructure. Let me tell you what we are doing with that \$386 million: \$150 million has been committed to the development of strategic transmission infrastructure in North Queensland. Unlike those opposite, we know that the biggest challenge in North Queensland has been significant transmission costs up the 1,400 kilometres of Queensland coastline,

so connecting our own renewable energy will be like creating a microgrid for North Queensland, which will reduce transmission costs and increase local supply. This can only have a positive impact on driving down the wholesale price of electricity. Importantly, out of that \$386 million the Premier has committed \$236 million for SunWater to deliver improvement works to ensure the Burdekin Falls Dam continues to meet design standards. The Burdekin Falls Dam was completed in 1987 by a Labor government and the next part, the hydroelectric power station, will be completed by a Labor government that is clearly 100 per cent committed to the people of North Queensland. It has been articulated on the front page of today's paper.