




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR BANCROFT

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ELECTRICITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION (BATTERIES AND PREMIUM FEED-IN TARIFF) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (11.44 am): I rise to commend the bill to the House, after we have all listened for half an hour to the ramblings by the member for Burleigh savaging us. Look out everyone on this side: the moose is loose!

There are three important outcomes of this bill that we can all support. The first is, as we have heard, the changes to the Solar Bonus Scheme. It is very clear that this scheme has been incredibly successful. I do want to rebut a couple of things that have been said previously. It is clear that solar and renewable energy has been overlooked in years past by the LNP. This is an industry that simply did not exist under the previous LNP government. We now have this incredibly vibrant and powerful industry throughout regional Queensland, and we should all be very thankful for that and for what we have created in just a few years.

What we have done through initiatives like the Solar Bonus Scheme is create the solar state. Queensland solar PVs are now the biggest or the second biggest electrical power plant in the state—over two gigawatt in capacity. We have probably over 440,000 solar rooftops here in Queensland, and we will make that half a million under the Palaszczuk government.

This bill corrects some of the anomalies and deals with some of the issues raised with this scheme. If we do not do this, as we have heard, people who oversize—put in a bigger inverter than what is outlined in their solar bonus contract—would be able to generate extra electricity, perhaps with more panels, and pump that back into the system. Also, they could do that with a battery—they could generate it, store it and send it back. Also, may I point out, they could even use a battery in an electric car to do that. This bill will deal with some of those anomalies. We want people in the Solar Bonus Scheme to maximise their use of solar generated power, but we want them to do that in accordance with their agreement.

It was highlighted in the committee report that the Palaszczuk government, as we have heard, has directed Energy Queensland to remove the cost of the Solar Bonus Scheme from electricity bills over the next three years from 2017, and prices have been set in accordance with that saving. That is a very welcome outcome for Queenslanders. Not only are we the leading state in renewable energies; we are leading Australia in putting downward pressure on electricity prices.

We are putting downward pressure on electricity prices under the Palaszczuk government. Our \$2 billion Affordable Energy Plan is helping to place downward pressure on prices, lowering costs for homes and businesses. We are giving people a \$50 bonus off their next electricity bill. Let us not forget the rebate program for energy-efficient appliances which was incredibly popular with Queenslanders.

Queensland farmers can now apply to get a free energy efficiency audit to help cut their power bills as part of the Palaszczuk government's \$10 million Energy Savers Plus Program. In the first phase of the Energy Savers Plus Program, Ergon delivered energy audits for almost 100 Queensland primary producers, resulting in \$1.5 million in annual power savings to date.

Mr HART: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. As nice as this is, this is not relevant to the bill.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Burleigh. There is no point of order. I am listening very closely to the contribution of the member for Bancroft and I find he is being relevant to the bill.

Mr WHITING: That is an amazing call. I sat here waiting for the call for half an hour listening to every point he made. I think we were very generous. The Advancing Clean Energy Schools program will help 800 Queensland schools cut their power bills by about 20 per cent and save about \$10.2 million per year.

I turn to the non-reversion policy. In terms of helping place downward pressure on prices, this bill delivers a great outcome for regional Queenslanders looking for a better electricity deal. That is the outcome of the changes to the non-reversion policy. For those who want to go back to Ergon as their electricity provider, they can do that under the changes to the non-reversion policy in this bill. In regional Queensland about 50 per cent of large businesses have switched from Ergon, and that has been great for competition. We want to help those small customers go back to Ergon which previously they were prevented from doing.

I turn to the issue of embedded networks. Another great outcome is the changes made to embedded networks. I want to commend the Minister for Public Works who has overseen the building better futures act as well. That has been a great outcome for people on embedded networks in home parks. This will build competition amongst electricity retailers. People on embedded networks get a great advantage because their supplier, their on-seller, is able to buy electricity in bulk and pass on those savings to them. Often people in home parks or retirement villages are charged by their wholesaler at commercial rates. It would be great to see them negotiate with these parks to make sure they are supplying them at residential rates. That is something I would like to see changed as it will deliver some improvements in Queensland. As I said, it is a great outcome for people in home parks on embedded networks to be able to select a retailer of their own.

Another wonderful element of this bill is that people in embedded networks can now go to the electricity ombudsman free of charge to resolve any issues they may have. For people in those parks on fixed incomes, that is a great result. I have three large parks in my area and I pay tribute to the people who live there—Green Wattle, Pacific Palms and Palm Lake. Many of them have embedded networks. I have worked hard for many years on behalf of those residents to get a better result in their embedded network outcomes to help deliver better electricity prices and costs.

Being able to access the ombudsman is one of three great changes that we have made for people on embedded networks as it delivers better outcomes for electricity. Another great change we have made is that pensioners can now access state and local government rebates. For years they tried to get those rebates and they now can. We have also made sure there is no fee charged for reading these meters. Once again, the embedded network manager can only recover their cost of supplying electricity. We have done a lot to look after these people who are on embedded networks.

I pay tribute to the secretariat and to the Public Works and Utilities Committee in the last parliament. I was a member of that committee as well, guided by the member for Kurwongbah. I also thank the other members on our committee. I think we have worked well together to deliver this great outcome. I commend this bill to the House.