




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Record of Proceedings, 22 March 2018

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Renewable Energy Projects, High-Value Agricultural Land

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (2.43 pm): This afternoon I rise to place on the public record my concern about the development of renewable energy projects on high-value agricultural and irrigated land in Queensland. In September last year, RES Australia was given approval, through a delegated authority, to construct a 160-acre solar farm on high-value agricultural land that is a key part of the Emerald Irrigation Scheme. The Emerald community was outraged by the decision, and rightly so, as 160 acres of prime cotton-growing country in Emerald is now gone. I will acknowledge that, following the approval, the Central Highlands Regional Council adopted a temporary local planning instrument that precludes all land that is part of the Emerald Irrigation Scheme from renewable energy developments in the future. However, one renewable energy project in the Emerald Irrigation Scheme area is one project too many.

The Emerald Irrigation Scheme area is a vital part of the Central Highlands community. Without it, we would not be able to produce the annual \$60 million cotton crop and other crops. That said, I do not want there to be any misconceptions that I do not support renewable energy projects, because I do. In fact, there are renewable energy projects underway across my electorate, including in Barcaldine and Longreach. I commend companies such as RES Australia for investing in renewable energy in the regions. However, it should not be at the cost of high-value agricultural land.

Throughout my electorate, communities thrive off the agricultural sector. It employs our people, puts food on our tables and fibre on our backs. While renewable energy projects employ a lot of people during their construction phase, once built the only person left is the gardener who mows the lawn once a month. Agriculture is the unsung economic hero of this great state. That is why we must protect our high-value agricultural assets.

However, if mining and agriculture can coexist, there is no reason renewable energy and agriculture cannot do the same. There is plenty of land outside the Emerald Irrigation Scheme that is ripe for the picking for renewable energy projects. It just takes some strategic planning to get the balance right. The Emerald irrigation area has been around for over 40 years, growing magnificent crops such as cotton, chickpeas and sorghum. We need to protect that land. We are not going to make any more high-value irrigation land at the moment and it is important that we protect the valuable black soil of the Emerald irrigation area.

Renewable projects are going well at Barcaldine and Longreach on land that is not high-value agriculture or high-value irrigation land. However, when you see a renewable project built on prime agricultural land such as the Emerald irrigation area, taking out 160 acres of country that normally grows cotton, is just not on. I commend Kerry Hayes, the mayor of the Central Highlands Regional Council, for putting a stop to that. We need to ensure that we never see this happen again.