




Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

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

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development) (4.34 pm): The Palaszczuk government has never been shy about its support for small businesses in this state. As the Minister for Small Business, I have personally spoken to hundreds of small business owners across urban, regional and remote Queensland. I know that for many of them energy and electricity is a critical issue. When you are running a small business, every bit of assistance that you can get helps and this bill seeks to do just that.

This bill aims to do three things: give clarity to the Solar Bonus Scheme; enable the effective implementation of the national regulatory framework for retail competition in embedded electricity networks; and allow residential and small businesses in regional Queensland to have the option to return to Ergon Retail. These proposed amendments will go a long way to ensuring that small businesses and households will be able to make the right choices for their electricity needs.

When the Solar Bonus Scheme was introduced in 2008, it was an ambitious but innovative policy and it was critical in encouraging Queenslanders to take advantage of our abundant sunshine as a source of energy. The LNP—ever the critics of environmentally responsible policies—pledged to tear this scheme apart. The member for Clayfield, the former treasurer and opposition leader, Tim Nicholls, called the people who took up the scheme champagne sippers and the latte set when most of the households that installed solar PVs were on middle and lower incomes and many of them are in my electorate.

Since it started, the scheme has helped over 280,000 Queensland small businesses and residents install solar PV systems and it has been instrumental in building our state's solar industry. Given that more efficient solar PVs and new energy technologies like batteries are now available with rapidly falling prices, we need to modernise. We know that customers want to take advantage of new technologies, but the ambiguity around how the scheme addresses this and the risk of losing their eligibility if they do so is making them reluctant to transition into more effective and efficient technologies, and the bill seeks to clarify this. It is important that we set the right conditions to encourage small businesses and households to install new solar PVs and batteries without the worry of losing their eligibility to the scheme.

The bill will give participants in the Solar Bonus Scheme the necessary confidence to invest in new technology, assured that they can continue to receive the tariff as long as they remain eligible. A new national regulatory framework for embedded electricity networks started in December last year. This means that small businesses on embedded networks are better able to choose their electricity products, services and providers. The proposed amendments enable the implementation of the framework in Queensland, giving our small businesses access to a wider and more competitive range of options for electricity supply. This means they can reduce operating costs and tailor the services they need according to their business.

Finally, this bill seeks to remove the non-reversion policy for regional households and small businesses, and remove the restriction on these customers from returning to Ergon Retail for their electricity. This change will give regional households and small businesses more choice when it comes to their electricity provider and give them the opportunity to reduce their energy costs.

All the proposed amendments provide tangible and effective opportunities for Queensland's small businesses and households to reduce their power costs. The bill complements other measures we have put in place to help small business understand and minimise their energy costs, such as the incredibly successful Business Energy Savers Program and the wonderful ecoBiz program that we run in partnership with the CCIQ.

The Palaszczuk government is committed to making energy more affordable for Queensland small businesses and this bill will help us do it. We want to give Queenslanders stability on energy but, more importantly, we want to give households and small businesses clarity around their options to reduce energy costs because this government values the role small businesses play as the engine room of our economy, as the engine room of employment and growth in local communities, and we want to do everything we can to assist them. I commend the bill to the House.