




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR BANCROFT

Record of Proceedings, 9 September 2020

MOTION

Energy Generation

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (5.36 pm): I rise to speak against this motion tonight. The motion asks the House to acknowledge the vital role cheap coal-fired power plays in jobs and asks the House to commit to providing the cheapest electricity by ceasing costly renewable power mandates, subsidies and investment programs for wind and solar. I have been listening carefully to what the crossbench members have been saying but I really want to hear what the LNP have to say about this. This is one of the great tragedies of this week—that we will not hear what the LNP have to say on this matter. Where are the LNP on this? I want to hear especially what their old Nationals wing have to say on this particular motion.

I would particularly like to hear from the member for Callide. He has a lot of original ideas on this. I suspect that he speaks for a lot of the old LNP but they dare not say it. They want him to express it but they will not line up with him. I do not agree with a lot of what the member for Callide said, but I respect him for speaking his mind and I know he is speaking the mind of a lot of people on the other side as well.

There is a renewable energy boom in regional Queensland. What is more, this renewable energy boom is having a central role in creating jobs and lowering electricity prices. Let us look at this boom. There are 41 large-scale renewable energy projects that have commenced operation, are under construction or have been financially committed since 2015. That represents \$7.8 billion worth of investment. When we came to government, just five per cent of our energy came from renewables, and soon that will be 21 per cent. This industry has exploded and it is happening in regional Queensland.

I will give the House a couple of examples of this \$7.8 billion worth of investment. Work started on Australia's biggest solar farm near Chinchilla which will create up to 400 jobs and generate 400 megawatts of renewable energy. The new \$125 million University of Queensland Warwick Solar Farm has opened. That will generate 64 megawatts and will make the University of Queensland the first in the world to have all of its power come from its own renewable energy asset. That supported up to 100 jobs during construction. I point out also that the \$350 million Rodds Bay Solar Farm south of Gladstone passed another milestone. When that gets going, that will be 300 megawatts of power for Queensland and Gladstone. That translates to 300 jobs in construction.

One of the outstanding features of this boom is the fact it is led by money from the private sector. The smart money is flowing into the regional energy economy. I say to the Katter's Australian Party that they may assume it is being led by costly investment subsidies but the truth is both public and private investment is flowing into this sector. You do not need to pay to lead this sector. The economy is rushing towards this sector to invest. What is more, as I have said, the investment by the public and the private sector in this industry is an investment in regional Queensland.

Let's look at the renewable energy zones and the Renewable Energy Fund that we have just announced. There is \$145 million to unlock three Queensland renewable energy zones across North Queensland, Central Queensland and South-West Queensland. The North Queensland corridor has significant potential for demand for new economy initiatives such as CopperString 2.0, minerals processing, manufacturing and hydrogen as well. The Treasurer announced the renewable energy fund on Monday. That means our own state owned energy corporations can increase investment into commercial renewable projects and support infrastructure.

What is the outcome of this boom that we have talked about? This sector is creating about 6,500 jobs. These are regional jobs. They are part of the future for the blue-collar, white-collar and knowledge workers in regional Queensland and it is delivering the lowest wholesale energy prices on the east coast. A typical household will pay \$62 less on average this coming year for electricity and a typical small business, \$144 less. The bill for a typical regional business will go down by about 5.8 per cent.

(Time expired)