




Speech By
Michael Berkman

MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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QUEENSLAND CLIMATE TRANSITION BILL

Introduction

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (12.30 pm): I present a bill for an act to provide for reduction targets for greenhouse gas emissions and fossil fuel exports for Queensland, to provide for the development and implementation of the Queensland Climate Transition Strategic Plan and other measures to achieve the reduction targets, to establish the Queensland Climate Transition Authority and for related purposes. I table the bill, the explanatory notes and a statement of compatibility with human rights. I nominate the State Development and Regional Industries Committee to consider the bill.

Tabled paper: Queensland Climate Transition Bill 2023 [302](#).

Tabled paper: Queensland Climate Transition Bill 2023, explanatory notes [303](#).

Tabled paper: Queensland Climate Transition Bill 2023, statement of compatibility with human rights [304](#).

This time last year our community was reeling from the impacts of devastating floods: everyday people literally picking up the flood damaged pieces of their lives and mopping up the consequences of yet another climate fuelled disaster. I expect those impacts are burned in all of our memories and certainly in the memories of those members who represented the most affected electorates. I will never forget the conversation I had that week with Ramy, one of the Indooroopilly residents on Witton Road. He told me about the moments before a 34-year-old man tragically lost his life just metres from Ramy's house. He heard the young man's cries for help through a brief pause in the torrential rain and called triple 0 while another young couple desperately tried to call him back to safety. That young man did not make it out of the swollen creek and emergency services located his body soon after.

I remember seeing cars and playgrounds almost entirely submerged in the receding floodwaters, debris stuck to the windows of homes, the high watermark still visible as an indication—an indelible reminder—of the scale of this event. When I picked up food to deliver to local students I heard about some of them sleeping in libraries and in supermarkets, while their ruined possessions lined the streets waiting to be taken to landfill. I also remember how, among the debris, pinned on fences in the flooded streets were these small yellow signs with such a simple message that was more relevant than ever: 'Climate action now'. That is what this bill is about.

This bill will bring Queensland's emission reduction targets in line with the climate science and the Paris Agreement and establish an independent statutory authority, the Queensland Climate Transition Authority, to implement them. Chief among the authority's priorities will be developing a path out of our state's reliance on coal and gas exports by 2030. We can start that process right now by not approving any more coal and gas projects.

The current government went to the last state election telling its city voters that it cared about climate change while advertising a completely different track record to the regions: 18 new coalmines approved, 80,000 square kilometres of land released for gas projects. It is clear to everyone that this

stance carries a fundamental contradiction and one that the government has still not resolved: wherever Queensland's coal or gas is burned it will contribute to global greenhouse gas emissions; it will make climate change worse, including here in Queensland.

Our governments may not count those emissions in their targets or their reports, but that does not make them any less real. This simple reality was accepted and affirmed in the recent Land Court decision on Clive Palmer's Galilee coal project. Our laws still do not allow climate change impacts to be properly considered in environmental impact assessments of new coal, oil or gas projects. I dearly hope the Albanese government will join my federal Greens colleagues in fixing this by introducing a climate trigger into our federal environmental laws.

But we can do our part here in Queensland too. A key premise of the Paris Agreement, to which Australia is a signatory as we all know, is that states should do their fair share to tackle the global climate crisis. Australia's greenhouse gas emissions per capita are essentially the highest in the world. They are certainly the highest in the OECD and only a small number of petrostates, such as Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE, have higher per capita emissions. When we take into account our coal and gas exports, Australia's absolute carbon footprint is among the highest in the world, roughly equal with Russia, and our per capita emissions are nine times higher than China and 37 times higher than India. Australia is one of the largest exporters of coal and the majority of this is mined in and exported from Queensland.

All the experts, including the International Energy Agency—not exactly an organisation of greenie socialists—have been clear that there can be no new coal, oil or gas approvals if we are to reach net zero emissions by 2050. That is this government's own target, but we know from the best, most current climate science that even that target is unlikely to meet the temperature goals of the Paris Agreement. Just to refresh everyone's memory, the Paris Agreement is about keeping average global temperature increases well below two degrees Celsius, preferably less than 1.5 degrees above pre industrial levels. To do that Australia must reduce its emissions by approximately 74 per cent on 2005 levels by 2030 and reach net zero by the mid-2030s. This Labor state government's targets are nowhere near that. They are aiming for a 30 per cent reduction by 2030 and net zero by 2050. Those targets probably sound familiar to folks on both sides of the chamber because they are almost exactly the same as the former Morrison-led Liberal National government's targets, which wanted 26 to 28 per cent reductions by 2030 and, precisely the same as this government, net zero by 2050. Of the Australian states with an emissions reduction target ours is the worst. Other states, even the Liberals in New South Wales, have targets between 45 and 75 per cent. Almost a year ago now voters roundly rejected the Morrison government and its climate denial, yet that same denial is on display here in Queensland by a Labor government whose targets are based on politics, not science and that keeps approving new coal and gas projects.

I know—we all know—that they noticed the federal election result because just a few months after they finally released their long-awaited 10-year energy plan with an absolute backflip on phasing out coal from our energy system. Suddenly, after the Greens' best federal election result yet, they are bringing forward the closure of coal-fired generation, something that had been completely ruled out of hand previously, and it would be replaced with large-scale publicly owned renewable energy. They are even working with unions on a job guarantee. But they missed a few key parts of our policy. They forgot about the resources industry. They have no plan to help those communities and workers get out of fossil fuels and they still want gas in the energy mix.

Let us be clear: gas is a fossil fuel that is just as dangerous for our climate as thermal coal, taking into account its more potent fugitive methane emissions. Sure, it has been branded natural by a powerful industry propaganda machine, but gas is not a transition fuel. What is more, in a state like ours, with an abundance of sun and wind, where we are investing in renewable energy storage, we just do not need it. The fact is we cannot afford it. This government's current climate policy means more devastating floods, fires and heatwaves. It means higher grocery prices, skyrocketing insurance premiums and it will lead to sudden job losses without planning. The IPCC's report on the impacts of global warming at and above 1.5 degrees spells this out clearly. It tells us that if we do not keep the temperature goals in the Paris Agreement under 1.5 degrees, or well under two degrees, the effects on biodiversity, human health and our economy will increase significantly and, in some cases, exponentially beyond those levels.

Some of the impacts the IPCC highlights include the increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events and disasters—think the 2020 summer bushfires; think the 2022 floods or what is happening right now in the gulf where residents are being evacuated following record-breaking inundation. Warming above 1½ degrees would see mass population displacement and involuntary migration due to disasters in sea level rises of between 40 and 90 centimetres. It would mean reduced food and water security due to more heat, drought and flooding events. We have all seen fruit and vegie

prices jump after recent disasters on the east coast. It forecasts failing or compromised key infrastructure, such as when water treatment plants went offline after being affected by sediment and debris from last year's floods. Heating above 1½ degrees means an increased risk of climate-sensitive disease and impacts on physical and mental health, from heat related illness to PTSD. It means loss and degradation of much of the world's forests, reefs and wetlands. In fact, more than 99 per cent of the Great Barrier Reef would be destroyed if we hit two degrees of warming.

For a long time I had despaired at our government's complete inertia. However, when I brought my children into this world—when I had children of my own—my feelings turned from despair into a desperate and urgent realisation that despair was not enough. I feel absolutely furious that my 13-year-old has lived through two one-in-100-year flooding events here in Brisbane. My youngest daughter's first year ended with smoke in the sky, choked by the fires that burnt Queensland forests and rainforests that, as far as we are aware, have never burned before. My oldest daughter is being told by the Premier of this state not to join the school strike for climate action but instead to do it after hours or during lunchbreaks, all the while this same government continues to approve the very coal and gas mines that are pushing our kids' futures further and further beyond the brink of safety.

However, ultimately sitting around in anger gets us nowhere and we need to have hope. This bill is about climate action and it is also about hope. It acknowledges the enormous task that we have ahead of us. It says we can do it and create an even better future beyond coal and gas if we genuinely put the people of Queensland ahead of corporate profits and outdated politics.

This bill will establish an independent statutory authority, the Queensland Climate Transition Authority, to develop the Queensland climate transition strategic plan by the end of 2024. In large part, the authority will be based on extensive consultation and research conducted by The Next Economy in 2021, which recommended a central coordinating body to manage Queensland's transition to zero emissions. The climate transition strategic plan must be developed through a collaborative, place-based approach in consultation with unions and employers in the coal, oil and gas extraction industries as well as people living in towns that are reliant on those industries. It will work across Queensland government departments and existing agencies to develop and implement a plan that immediately bans new coal, oil and gas approvals; phases out coal, oil and gas exports from Queensland by 2030; and supports Queensland to meet new science-based emissions reduction targets of 30 per cent by 2030 and net zero by 2035.

The authority will be headed by a director, to be appointed by the premier. A board of between five and seven members with relevant experience or qualifications, including at least one First Nations member and at least three regional Queenslanders, will oversee the authority. Board members will be appointed by the premier for three-year terms, with one member to be appointed as the chairperson. The authority will report annually on progress towards phasing out fossil fuel exports and achieving the emissions reduction targets as well as implementing the Queensland climate transition strategic plan. Annual reports will be given to the premier for tabling in parliament. Due to the constraints on me as a non-government member, the bill does not allow for any appropriations including for remuneration of the staff of the authority and its board. That, as well as the funding for the transition plans it produces, would fall to the premier and to the government in future budgets.

The authority's first priority will be to develop a transition plan for the resources industry. For all the good stuff that is in the government's Jobs and Energy Plan—and I have to say that I applaud the ETU and other unions that finally convinced the government to provide a job guarantee—it does not cover resources or exports. Even putting aside the scientific imperative to phase out coal, oil and gas—

Government members interjected.

Mr BERKMAN: Is it so hard to listen to? Even putting aside the scientific imperative to phase out coal, oil and gas, economic modelling shows that fossil fuels are on the way out globally. The use of thermal coal for energy is declining and investment in renewables is rapidly outstripping gas. Significantly for Queensland's exports, even metallurgical coal is on track to be replaced with green steel production, which is already ramping up in Europe, China and the USA. It is a great shame that Queensland, which has been identified as a potential leader in green steel manufacturing by experts including the Grattan Institute, the CSIRO and QUT, is already falling behind on this and is, instead, propping up the metallurgical coal industry. One way or another, coal, oil and gas are on the way out and denying that will not put food on anyone's plate.

The impacts will be significant. Although the Queensland Resources Council likes to overstate its importance, in 2022 there were still somewhere between 20,000 and 38,000 people employed by coalmining in Queensland. Oil and gas extraction industries employ about 5,000 people. The transition from coal and gas is inevitable. The question for us, as legislators, is: what will that look like? Will it be orderly or unplanned? Will it seize the opportunities to grow Queensland's economy with new jobs or leave communities scrambling to pick up the pieces after those mines close?

As part of the recent Queensland Resources Industry Development Plan, the government commissioned Deloitte to produce the *New futures, new resources* report. After the report told them that rapid global decarbonisation will likely reduce demand for fossil fuels, they very quickly and very quietly buried it. Eventually the report was uncovered by the Australian Conservation Foundation under right to information. It shows that delaying decarbonisation could minimise short-term negative impacts on the resources industry but will ultimately lead to—and these are Deloitte’s words—‘major risks’ and missed opportunities. The report says that without significant change from current policy settings productivity will decline, innovation and new investment will slow, jobs and growth will decline, and wellbeing standards will slip significantly.

The report says that the best case scenario would be government support for a coordinated approach to decarbonisation. That is why the Queensland Climate Transition Authority will prioritise planning for the resources industry, which has been left out of the government’s current climate plans. That should include a retraining, redeployment and job guarantee plan for workers and economic planning for communities. New jobs could be created by expanded critical minerals mining and processing, supporting local manufacturing including green steel, and more clean exports. The authority can also work with other key emitting sectors like transport and agriculture to help them decarbonise so that we can meet our emissions reduction targets and keep warming below 1.5 degrees or well below two degrees.

To conclude, this is a big bill. It is a big proposition and I make no bones about the fact that the measures in it are significant. Some will even call it drastic, but so is the threat of runaway climate change. This morning there was a giant and frankly terrifying replica of a half-burnt koala outside this chamber. The government has shown its inclination to scold people for escalating their protests for climate action with more drama and more disruption, but their protests are only growing in line with the urgency of the need for action. The experts have told us—

Mr Head interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Krause): Order, member for Callide. I need to hear the member for Maiwar.

Mr Healy interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Cairns, if you wish to interject then please return to your seat.

Mr BERKMAN: The government wants to scold anyone who protests disruptively, whether they protest disruptively on the streets or closer to the chamber. It does not matter where the action is taken—

Mr POWER: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. There is a reference before the Ethics Committee on this issue. We have been asked to restrain ourselves from making commentary on this while it is before the Ethics Committee.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Maiwar, if you could come back to the main purpose of this, which is to introduce the bill, and avoid any reference to anything that may be before the Ethics Committee, it would be appreciated.

Mr BERKMAN: Certainly. The government is absolutely intent on scolding anyone who wants to protest its inaction on climate change, no matter where that might take place.

Government members interjected.

Mr BERKMAN: They scold people. They do: ‘Protest quietly. Do it without disrupting anyone.’ That has been really effective over the history of civil disobedience and progress!

Ms Boyd interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

Mr BERKMAN: Do these people even know what a union is?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Maiwar, resume your seat, please. Member for Pine Rivers, you are on a warning. I ask you to leave the chamber under standing order 253A for one hour.

Whereupon the honourable member for Pine Rivers withdrew from the chamber at 12.50 pm.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Maiwar, you have time on the clock. I will just give you a warning, too, because you continued to talk after I called for order in the House.

Mr BERKMAN: My apologies, Mr Deputy Speaker. It certainly was not my intention to speak over the top of you.

Chastise protesters, introduce laws to crack down on protest for the first time since the Joh era—this proud Labor government is cracking down on people’s right to protest. The protests people are bringing forward in response to the government’s inaction on climate change are only growing in line

with the urgency of the need for action. The experts have told us that it is not too late to save the furniture but only if we undertake transformational changes on a global scale. Queensland cannot exempt itself from that need. The experts have been clear that that means no new coal and gas approvals, at a bare minimum. To make the most of the transition, we need to start now and replace fossil fuel exports with new opportunities by 2030. To save our state from the worst impacts of global warming above two degrees, we need to reach zero emissions by 2035.

Queensland has been a coal state for a long time. Sitting down with people who have worked in the industry for years and with families who have worked in the industry for generations will be hard, but delay and denial will only make it harder. It has been a long time coming. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change dates back to 1992 and the Paris Agreement is now almost eight years old. Governments and corporations which continue to back new coal, oil and gas have been warned for a very long time now that they cannot continue to ignore the science and lie to workers about the future of fossil fuels, sticking their head in the sand to make it to the next election. It is time for a real conversation here in Queensland about what is on the other side of coal and gas exports.

First Reading

Mr BERKMAN (Maiwar—Grn) (12.52 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

Question put—That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

Referral to State Development and Regional Industries Committee

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Krause): In accordance with standing order 131, the bill is now referred to the State Development and Regional Industries Committee.