




Speech By
Samuel O'Connor

MEMBER FOR BONNEY

Record of Proceedings, 29 November 2023

ADJOURNMENT

Renewable Energy Projects

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (7.06 pm): Renewable energy is essential to our state's energy security and to reducing our emissions, but like any major projects those must be thoroughly assessed and their impacts must be managed and offset. There is a genuine issue with how wind farms, in particular, are being approved in our state. Right now, it is a free-for-all.

Those are big projects. They involve significant amounts of land clearing, the construction of many kilometres of roads, huge amounts of water for concrete and the installation of transmission lines. State code 23 is woefully inadequate to manage infrastructure of that scale. It does not get the balance right. The performance outcomes are far too broad and, compounding that, for almost all measures no acceptable outcome is prescribed. There are no minimum offset requirements from protected areas. Those projects could be built right up to the border of a national park. There is no consideration of the impact of construction on biodiversity. There is no requirement for community or local government consultation.

The Energy and Jobs Plan, from September 2022, broadly talked about reviewing those regulations. We heard nothing until August this year when the Deputy Premier announced planning code 23 would be reviewed. Submissions closed in early September. That was months ago and we have heard nothing since. There has been no progress. There must be a better way.

We have world-leading environmental approval processes for resource projects. They provide a blueprint for how other major projects could be more thoroughly and more fairly assessed. My fear is that we are losing, or we may have lost already, the social licence for large-scale wind and solar projects. That makes it much harder to roll them out at the scale and pace that we need.

There are enormous opportunities in renewable energy for regional Queensland and regional Queenslanders and we need to ensure that they are taken on the journey as the infrastructure is built. We must have projects approved that have been adequately assessed environmentally and that consider and recognise the views of the communities closest to the projects. The way that Queensland has developed means that agricultural properties in urban areas are mostly on our flat country. That means that our hills and ridges are vital sanctuaries for vulnerable species. We cannot continue to sacrifice those areas without stronger environmental approval conditions.

This is not about being for or against renewable energy. It is about having regulations that keep pace with development, just as we saw with coal seam gas a decade ago. If neighbouring landholders and regional communities more broadly are continually ignored then they will more readily fight these projects. If these projects are approved in inappropriate locations and without appropriate conditions or offsets then precious parts of our environment will be put at risk. We must get the balance right to take action on climate change and secure our transition.