



Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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**ENERGY (RENEWABLE TRANSFORMATION AND JOBS) BILL; CLEAN
ECONOMY JOBS BILL**

Mr LAST (Burdekin—LNP) (9.12 pm): I rise to speak in the cognate debate on the Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill 2023 and the Clean Economy Jobs Bill 2024 and in support of the amendments moved by my colleague the member for Nanango. Despite the best efforts of those opposite, the member for Nanango spoke about the impacts of renewable projects on people who live in regional Queensland. I am also happy to speak on behalf of those people, particularly those who live in my electorate. It is ironic that during his introductory speech the member for Springwood referred to jobs in regional Queensland, investment in regional Queensland and the fact that regional communities will 'thrive and prosper under this government's plan'. The irony is that under this government those communities are struggling under 28.7 per cent increases in their residential electricity bills. It is in regional Queensland that farmers have seen a 52 per cent increase in electricity bills in just 18 months. It is about time we looked at some of those facts because all we hear from those opposite during this debate is how much cheaper power has become across Queensland.

The fact is that I have had farmers in my area now going back and buying diesel pumps because they are cheaper to run than electric pumps. I have had farmers bring their electricity bills into my office and lay them out on the table to see clearly in black and white just what has happened with their power prices over the past 12 months to two years. I can assure members that those prices have gone through the roof. This Labor government would have us believe that under their watch power has become cheaper. What a load of garbage!

The cheapest form of power, of course, was that generated by base load power stations, and that is why we needed Callide C to come back online. Sure, we need an energy mix. I am the first to admit to that, but not at any cost. We are in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis underpinned by skyrocketing power prices, but this government has the blinkers on.

Then there is the Job Security Guarantee which will, according to the government, ensure a secure future for the people who currently work in publicly owned coal-fired power stations. As usual with this government, the devil is in the detail. As revealed in the explanatory notes, the definition of an 'affected energy contractor' and a 'prescribed facility' will be prescribed by regulation, meaning that the eligibility for this scheme will not be scrutinised by this parliament. What must be on the public record is that the jobs threatened by this bill cannot and will not be replaced by jobs in renewables. The member for Springwood said that there will be no or very few jobs in coal-fired power stations by 2035 due to renewables. The fact is that once those projects are up and running there are few jobs on offer.

I have a number of solar farms in my electorate. I visit them. I can remember sitting in this chamber and listening to the former premier and to the former energy minister talk about the hundreds of jobs that were going to be created in the renewable energy sector. When I visit those solar farms there are one, two and, in one case, three permanent employees. Where are these hundreds of jobs that those opposite keep talking about? Where are they? When I visit these solar farms that are

scattered right throughout the electorate, there are very few permanent jobs attached to those particular projects. What has been more galling for me—and I have spoken about this previously in this place—is solar farms are being constructed on prime agricultural land. Prime agricultural irrigated farmland in my electorate now has solar farms built on it, meaning that that land will never ever return to production.

This government is asking Queenslanders to blindly trust them. Yet it is this government that will not tell Queenslanders how much the Pioneer-Burdekin hydro project will cost. With a project that is a pie in the sky and highlights what a farce it has become, we have a Premier and a Treasurer who cannot even agree on the cost of this project. There is a mere difference of some \$6 billion. What I could do with \$6 billion in my electorate! I ask each and every member sitting in this place tonight: if someone were to come and drop a \$6 billion cheque in their hands tonight, what could they do with that in their electorates? Yet this mob would have us believe that they are all across the detail and that this project stacks up. Is it any wonder that people are sceptical about their ability to deliver these projects on cost and on time?

The amendments moved by the member for Nanango are about transparency, about ensuring more workers are covered by the Job Security Guarantee and about ensuring targets are regularly reviewed. I have a very simple question for the minister—that is, at the moment how many solar and wind farms are currently turned off or operating at reduced capacity in Queensland? How many are turned off or not operating at full capacity because of the oversupply? There is a massive oversupply during the day. We know that. I am getting calls about this every day of the week. I had a call last week from a resident in Normanton who is absolutely fed up with the constant power outages in that community. He asked the question: we have a solar farm down the road that is turned off. Why is that solar farm turned off? It is a good question. It was one I would like the minister to answer during his summing up.

I think Queenslanders deserve to know the answer to those questions. We have all of these renewable energy projects across the state, and we all assume they are out there and they are working at maximum capacity. That is clearly not the case, and that defies logic when our power prices are going through the roof. This government can hand out all the rebates they like, but the fact remains that Queenslanders are sick and tired of seeing their power bills go up. As usual, it is regional and rural Queenslanders who are bearing the brunt of it. I do not know how many times I have had to say in this place that residents, business owners, farmers and community organisations are seriously hurting. In some cases these power prices are the difference between them staying afloat and going bankrupt. They are feeling the pain and there is no relief in sight.

The only thing we can be sure of is that under the watch of this incompetent government there is only one way power prices are going, and that is up. They keep trotting out these tired old lines about nuclear power. We are sick of the spin, we are sick of the lies and it is about time this Labor government owned up to the fact they have mismanaged the power supply in this state. The more important question is at what cost will that be to Queenslanders going forward?