




Speech By
James Lister

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

Record of Proceedings, 18 April 2024

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

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (11.50 am): I thank you personally, Mr Deputy Speaker, for stepping into the chair, when I should be there doing my job, to enable me to speak. On behalf of the people of Southern Downs I rise to speak on this cognate debate. I want to talk, in particular, about something that happened recently in the town of Allora, in the north-eastern part of my electorate.

A prospective wind farm operator had been going around the rural areas to the east and the north-east of Allora, knocking on doors and spruiking to owners the possibility of having a wind turbine on their property. Obviously it is early days, but that really sent shock waves through the community in Allora. I pay tribute to the community for turning out in their hundreds, on the Thursday night just before the local government elections, to seek answers and to air their views on this. The first I heard about it was when people in Allora told me about it. The very clear message from the community was that they do not want a wind farm on their doorstep.

When I see amendments introduced after the committee considered the Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill 2023, which rootles around in matters like renewable energy zones and giving special treatment to Powerlink, my suspicion is that the government never intended to have these amendments considered by the committee. They did not want them to be seen publicly, along with amendments concerning the ring fencing of the transmission network.

I have been talking to my honourable friend the member for Burleigh. Members in this House will know that often he has a lot to say on this matter because he understands these sorts of things better than most of us, I think. He pointed out that the Australian Energy Regulator allows the transmission companies—Energex, Powerlink, Ergon and so forth—to have a regulated asset base and to recover costs through a regulated process. This amendment strikes me as being a very controversial one. I wonder what the Australian Energy Regulator might have said had they had the opportunity to respond by making a submission to the committee or perhaps appearing. As I say, I suspect that the fact that that did not happen was by design on the part of the government and not because they suddenly realised that they need these amendments.

I am concerned that this will now enable the government to reach in and interfere with the way costs are recovered by the government owned transmission line operators such as Powerlink. Are they going to pick favourites and disadvantage some users or generators of electricity and prop up others? I wonder whether the Millmerran Power Station, in my electorate of Southern Downs, which employs about 200 people with excellent, well-paying and secure jobs that keep the town of Millmerran alive, might be disadvantaged. Will it suddenly find that it is paying more for the transmission of power or will it be less competitive because of the extra costs of transmitting power compared to some favoured renewable project? If the government want to be seen as acting in good faith and having the best interests of Queensland at heart, they really should not be introducing amendments like this that have not been scrutinised by the committee, the community and stakeholders.

One of the things that interests me, particularly in my electorate of Southern Downs, is the cost of electricity to business. We are all paying a lot more for our power. Anybody who has seen and paid a power bill in recent times knows that our power bills have soared. That has a lot to do with the government's energy policies. There is a subsidy that the government is throwing at all of us—and every dollar counts—however, it is not a sustainable and economically wise solution to rely on action after the fact rather than addressing the root causes of the power increases.

When I think about the people of Allora, this particular amendment may affect them in two ways: it is not just the potential for further increases in the power prices that they pay as householders, industrial users, farmers and so forth; my suspicion is that, in spite of all of the talk of the government, they intend to see renewable energy projects put wherever they want and to hell with the local communities that would have to live with the impacts of those. I think the MacIntyre Wind Farm in my electorate is a very good example. If you speak to the Southern Downs Regional Council or the Goondiwindi Regional Council, which have the MacIntyre Wind Farm across their areas, they will tell you that Acciona has not been a very good corporate citizen. I suggest that one of the reasons for that is Acciona knows that in Queensland they have the unquestioning backing of the government against the interests of local communities.

I make my opinions based on outcomes. I look at how little Acciona has contributed financially to the communities that have been impacted by the wind farm, how it has ridden roughshod over the interests of councils and left communities reeling from some of the impacts, such as Warwick where you cannot rent a house because of the wind farm. Local people who have rented houses for years and have never been homeless have been displaced by those who are working on the wind farm project. I make no criticism of those people. However, I do know that, in my electorate of Southern Downs, the impacts of that wind farm have been quite significant and it has not been a popular thing with my people.

All of this is all very well and talk, as I read in the explanatory notes, about giving due regard to communities and so forth looks great when it is here in greens or whites and ends up on the statute books, but it is not happening on the ground. I say to the people of my electorate, particularly those in Allora, that I will not flinch from fighting for the community to make sure that state instruments, such as renewable energy zones and so forth, are not used to impose upon them renewable energy projects that are going to eliminate their way of life. The scenery, the amenity, the traffic—those are things that country people care deeply about. I am sure that I would get agreement from the other country members who sit around—

Mr Perrett interjected.

Mr LISTER: I take that interjection from my honourable friend, the member for Gympie; yes, these are important things. I suspect that, in the quest to secure an avalanche of votes, it is more about the appearance of renewable energy than the execution. I think that everything the government has done there has indicated that. I will not be supporting the Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill 2023. I think it suggests a continuing disregard for the interests, the views and the lifestyles of people in country areas like the ones I represent. I condemn the bill before the House.