




Speech By
Michael Berkman

MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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QUEENSLAND CLIMATE TRANSITION BILL

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (5.51 pm), in reply: I was not expecting a long debate, but I thought perhaps there might have been a little more time or effort put into it by either side than we have heard. I will respond to a few points. There is an apparent inability in the room here to distinguish between whatever work the government is doing—and, yes, let us be clear: we welcome the increased ambition with the new renewables targets—but is it so hard to distinguish between the climate impacts of our domestic emissions being addressed through the expansion of renewables and those emissions that come when we dig up some of the biggest coal resources on the planet and ship them overseas? It is not difficult to understand that distinction, yet we keep seeing this deliberate blurring of these issues by government members and even more so from the opposition.

The distinction between the energy system and the resource sector is missed as well. The transition planning—very welcome transition planning that we have been pushing for many years now that is proposed within the Energy and Jobs Plan—again is great, but it is a different thing from a planned transition for the resource sector and for those resource workers, for the folks working on gas fields and in coalmines who do not have clarity about what their future looks like. All I can assume is that the government's position and the opposition's position is that we are going to continue to dig up coal and export it and to send our gas offshore in perpetuity.

The only outcome from that ongoing behaviour—from ongoing extraction, the opening up of new fossil fuel projects—is an unlivable climate. The IEA, the International Energy Agency—I do not know how many times I have said this in here—made clear some years ago now that if we were to have any chance of succeeding at meeting the objectives of the Paris Agreement we could not continue to open up new coal and gas projects. It could not be more pertinent for a country or a state than it is for Australia and Queensland. We understand—we have talked about this for many years as well—how Queenslanders should be getting a fairer share of the royalties coming out of our resource sector. We have said for years now that the royalties coming on account of our fossil fuel extraction need to hike up in a big way so that we are getting the revenue we need to support those communities through the transition and as we stage a decline in our production and our export of coal, and it needs to happen quickly.

The member for Miller—welcome to the nosebleeds by the way, member for Miller—made the observation that we are talking about unrealistic time frames. This government has been in power for 30 of the last 35 years. Labor owns responsibility for everything that has happened in the last few decades in this state, so to say that somehow the time frames are unrealistic and that it cannot be expected to move more quickly is an absolute cop-out.

Mr Bailey: You don't understand the power system, Michael, do you? You really don't.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Martin): Order, members! The member is not taking any interjections.

Mr BERKMAN: I will take the interjection: that is the level of ambition. That is the level of ambition from Labor: to understand the power system apparently is to truly understand that it is just not possible to actually reduce emissions, and again he is talking about the power system as opposed to—

Mr BAILEY: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. There was a comment there that was clearly misrepresenting what I was saying. I find it personally offensive and he should withdraw.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Maiwar, the member has taken personal offence. Do you withdraw?

Mr BERKMAN: Absolutely; I withdraw. He interjects and tells me that I do not understand the power system, the implication being that the positions we are proposing are impossible. They are not impossible. For years we have had organisations talking about a rapid decline in our domestic emissions, but again it misses the point. This is not a bill that is just about domestic emissions; it is a bill about supporting resource communities as we phase out our fossil fuel production and export. I would almost put money on the fact that any other interjections coming from that side are going to be based on that same kind of deliberately fallacious kind of misconstruing and combining of those issues. In terms of saying that it should have been done previously was too ambitious, we are literally talking about the livability of our planet in years to come. We are talking about our state as one of the biggest producers and exporters of fossil fuels in the world, and somehow we are just not supposed to act with any greater ambition than what the government claims is the best that we can expect.

We have seen how quickly we can move as a state. Overnight, at the stroke of a pen we have gone from an emissions reduction target of 30 per cent by 2030 to 75 per cent by 2035. This is not about what is possible and this is not about practical barriers to action; it is about political will—yes, I am glad to see some more political will and, yes, I am looking forward to seeing the legislation introduced—but the government has to do some work on the resource sector. We have to stop exporting emissions that are going to literally cook the planet. We have to see an end to the drug dealer's defence, this absurd argument that if we do not export our beautiful high-quality coal—which, again, is a complete fallacy if you look at the quality of the coal in the Galilee Basin across the board, but that is a different conversation—then someone else is going to do it so I guess we have no option. We might as well be the person standing on the street corner handing out the crack baggies.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member, I will just caution you for unparliamentary language.

Mr BERKMAN: Sure; I withdraw. It appears that the committee in its work certainly did not go to any great lengths to consider or respond to the 100-plus individual submissions on the bill which I understand would have been sent to the local members of those individual submitters as well. It appears that there is no interest in reading or responding to them in the House here either, so I thought I would finish by putting some of those voices on the record. To everyone who intends to vote against this bill, remember these are your voters. These are the people who will continue to struggle through increasingly frequent and devastating natural disasters year on year on year. Many of the people who asked this parliament to support this bill were parents and grandparents and they spoke about their grave fears for their families' futures, and I have no doubt that those are fears shared by many people in here, despite the inaction.

Jessica said, 'As a mother of three young kids I want a brave, innovative outlook by my government and will vote accordingly.' Roy said—

There is no future for climate denialist politics. People can't close their eyes to reality forever. They will all be affected, one way or another. If we continue to sit on our hands, hoping the problem will go away, it will be too late to do anything about it. History will not condemn us. There won't be any history.

One parent spoke about mopping up water in her downstairs living area at Red Hill and how her kids learned nothing from the first term of 2011 because their school was flooded and they were forced to learn in the gymnasium of another school down the road. She said—

I already know people that have moved to either New Zealand or Tasmania, to get away from what lies ahead for Queenslanders. These are wealthy individuals who can afford to make this change. Most Queenslanders are not in this financial position.

Another submitter, Christine, laid bare the ridiculousness of ignoring exported fossil fuels and their impacts on climate. She said—

What we export as coal and gas, we import as the consequences of climate change—not only for us now, but forever. While it is great that within Queensland this government has planned to transition to renewable energy via the Energy and Jobs Plan, it seems incongruous and contrary—akin to Jekkyl and Hyde, to continue to open new coal and gas—as though our exports have no consequence to us.

That is a distinction that Christine understands and she set it out in simple terms in a submission. Frankly, Christine, like so many of us, is probably fed up with the government continuously doing all it can to obfuscate that distinction.

There were submissions from many healthcare workers who are worried about the health impacts of climate change, from resources industry workers who acknowledge that we need to plan beyond coal and gas, and from farmers who spoke of the impacts of global heating on food supply. Elizabeth, from Central Queensland, said—

Back then, our farm could provide a living for a family from growing wheat, cotton and cattle without irrigation. Today, the same land relies on irrigation for cropping. Climate change is costing farmers big time, and meanwhile the dependency of the local district on mining jobs is providing a false sense of prosperity while the mining is causing the real decline in productivity.

I'm horrified every time I learn that the State Government is giving assistance to, and allowing more coal and gas exploitation with no plan to end these globally polluting businesses. We don't want our farms and communities to be destroyed by the increasing unreliability of our climate if we don't limit global heating to less than 2 degrees. This can only be achieved if governments stop approving fossil fuel extraction & export.

One young woman from Moorooka wrote about studying to be an agricultural scientist. She said—

.... the problems we face in feeding people for the future haunts me every day. You cannot be pro climate action and pro fossil fuels, it is not possible.

How can you justify risking the complete destruction of entire Pacific islands for the fossil fuel industry? Displacing millions of people in Africa for the fossil fuel industry? No economic justification can fly against these horrors; against the disappearance of entire nations and the threats we pose to all young people today.

I want members to really listen to her words, because as they make their decision on tonight's vote—I will suspend my disbelief for a moment and pretend that everyone has not already—I hope they ring in their ears. She said—

I am a young woman who should be allowed to dream, who should be able to hope that one day they will be a mother. This has been stolen from me. Until you stop damning my future, and the future of children today, I will not dream, I will not rest, and I will never stop standing up for what is right.

That is an appropriate note to finish this debate, but before I take my seat and before anything else I do want to thank all members who have expressed their concern for and reached out to convey that to Amy. All of our thoughts are with her. I know that. We have a very small and tight-knit team and it is very difficult to see one of that team go through such a tough ordeal. I will leave it there. Get well, Amy. We are thinking of you.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!