




Speech By
Michael Berkman

MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (7.45 pm): I rise to give my contribution on these two very important bills in a debate that should not be a cognate debate and that should have longer for debate. Labor often complains that the Greens do not give it credit where it is due, so I will start by doing just that. The Energy and Jobs Plan that the energy bill legislates has some long overdue and very positive elements. The proposed 22 gigawatts of renewables by 2035 is almost on a par with a plan the Greens brought to the last election of 20 gigawatts by 2030. A 75 per cent emissions reduction target by 2035 is just short of our proposed 75 per cent by 2030. In 2022 the Australian Greens proposed a job-for-job guarantee for coal and gas workers. Now here we are legislating a job security guarantee for some, albeit not all, energy workers in Queensland. Perhaps it is time for Labor to stop calling our policies fairy dust or pie-in-the-sky pipedreams if it is just going to end up adopting them.

Queensland Labor is welcome to keep copying the Greens' homework. Workers and the climate will thank them for it. If they think we will pat them on the back and leave them alone while their targets fall short of what the science demands while they continue approving new coal and gas and while they maintain the privatisation of our energy system, they are sorely mistaken. As it stands, the job security guarantee in the energy bill does not include workers outside of government owned coal-fired power stations, including gas power station workers, those employed at private power stations and resource workers. Of course, there is no plan for resource workers because there is no plan to wean the resources industry off coal and gas.

The government does not even have any time line, plans or targets to get off gas domestically. In fact, the Energy and Jobs Plan includes a new gas plant at Kogan Creek. What is more, perhaps most hypocritically for a government that talks a big game about public ownership, this bill entrenches a partially privatised electricity system that will continue ripping Queenslanders off. The targets in both of these bills are a dramatic improvement on the status quo, but they are not aligned with the current climate science.

In their submissions, the Climate Council of Australia, the United Nations Association of Australia, Lock the Gate, WWF-Australia and the Queensland Conservation Council all proposed more ambitious interim targets and net zero deadlines. The next decade is an absolutely critical time to rapidly reduce emissions. To date, the world is lagging in meeting commitments to reduce emissions, but in the government's own policy documents it sets out that Queensland's emissions have already reduced by 29 per cent since 2005. Are we simply going to sit on our hands for six years? I know we all hope not.

To maintain a target of a 30 per cent reduction by 2030 would be reckless and irresponsible and we should be able to do better than amendments that leave it open for review. We should be making that change now. Not only that, net zero by 2050 is no longer adequate if we want to limit warming to well below two degrees. Both the WWF and QCC point out that net zero by 2038 offers just a 50 per

cent chance of achieving 1.5 degrees of warming. The government's targets not only keep us on a path to overshoot Paris Agreement commitments, but they leave out Queensland's most significant contributions to global greenhouse gas emissions, namely, our coal and gas exports.

According to the historically conservative International Energy Agency, not one new coal or gas project can proceed if we are to meet net zero by 2050 let alone limit warming to 1½ degrees globally. When we authorise the plunder of natural resources and the destruction of country here in Queensland to export fossil fuels to overseas resource buyers we are directly causing global warming. It is not that hard to understand. The only purpose of extracting coal and gas is so that it can be sold and burned, and the consequence is the emission of greenhouse gases. It is both illogical and unconscionable to pretend that the continued extraction of fossil fuels in Queensland does not matter simply because they will be burned somewhere else.

Since coming to power Labor has approved 38 new coalmines and there are at least 15 more in the pipeline. Collectively, these projects represent over nine billion tonnes CO₂ equivalent emissions across their lifetime. There are currently an estimated 270 billion tonnes remaining in the entire global carbon budget to achieve the Paris target of 1½ degrees Celsius. If this legislation allows nine billion tonnes of that budget to be spent—emissions that can be directly attributed to people sitting in this chamber—what are we doing with this legislation? The government continually refuses to accept this reality, which renders these bills almost useless. For this reason, in relation to the Clean Economy Jobs Bill, I move—

That the words 'now read a second time' be deleted and the following words inserted:

'considered once the Government commits to halt new coal and gas approvals, develop a plan to phase out coal and gas exports, and adopt an emission reduction target of at least 75 per cent by 2030 in line with current science'.

Putting aside the inadequacies of the clean economy bill to address the climate crisis for a moment, I will turn to the public ownership targets in the energy bill. The Greens have long held the view that we should be aiming for 100 per cent public ownership. In 2020 we proposed an end to the privatisation of electricity in Queensland. We proposed bringing existing state owned network and generation companies under an entity called Energy Queensland as a public authority and reversing Labor's privatisation of retail. In contrast, the best this Labor government can do with the energy bill is legislate the status quo, where almost half of our electricity generation here is privately owned and retailers are privatised across South-East Queensland.

I am still concerned that the definition of 'public ownership' remains unclear, although I appreciate that the minister added some clarity in his second reading contribution. Despite repeated requests, I have not been able to get an explicit assurance from the minister that this definition is not capable of being interpreted to capture power purchase agreements, which any reasonable person would agree is not public ownership. I would appreciate clarification of that specific point in the minister's reply. The Greens are proposing amendments to the energy bill, which I table now.

Tabled paper: Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill 2023, amendments to be moved by Mr Michael Berkman MP, accompanying explanatory notes and statement of compatibility with human rights [604](#).

These would create a long-term target of 100 per cent public ownership of all generation assets with an interim target of at least 75 per cent by 2030. We should ensure that Queenslanders own all of our energy assets. To be clear, 100 per cent ownership of generation does not mean we will buy up everyone's rooftop solar panels or stop community ownership of generation assets. The bill's definition of 'generation assets' makes it clear that we are only dealing with major generation assets in this state and those should be publicly owned. Our amendments also include a target of 100 per cent public ownership of electricity retail by 2030.

When Labor privatised electricity retail in 2006 prices nearly doubled. Retailers have since continued to profit from an essential service that every Queenslander needs—wasting our money on inflated marketing costs and executive bonuses while households continue to struggle to pay the bills. ACCC data on the NEM from December last year tells us that retailers' profit margins grew in South-East Queensland during the 2022-23 financial year to about 4.3 per cent, which is much higher than the national average of 2.3 per cent. Even putting aside the pure profit these corporations are taking in, the ACCC reports that around 10 per cent of your bill is still being wasted on retail and other costs—that is, the expenses that come with treating electricity, an essential service, as a private commodity that requires expensive marketing campaigns as though we were buying a new car or shoes. But electricity is not like those things. It is all the same when you flick on the light switch, and these marketing costs are purely a waste of Queenslanders' money—a symptom of privatisation. We should be aiming for 100 per cent publicly owned renewable energy generation, not a mishmash of public and private and a mix of renewables and dirty polluting gas.

I do support the establishment of the Renewable Energy Jobs Advocate and the Energy Industry Council as well as the Job Security Guarantee Fund to support government owned coal station workers with accessing employment and other supports. I would echo the ETU's suggestion that this should be expanded to at least allow other facilities to apply. The Greens, of course, think that the government should have far greater ambitions when it comes to supporting workers through the climate transition, as I previously proposed in a private member's bill that the government did not support.

On the whole, these bills take significant steps in the right direction. In fact, there are substantial elements of them that I would call ambitious, especially for this Labor government. These bills implement many of the things for which the Greens have been calling for years: more ambitious reduction targets; a greater share of renewables in our energy mix; support for workers as we phase out coal domestically; and a commitment to keep at least some parts of our energy system in public hands. There is no plan for gas, no plan for the resources industry; no support for workers outside of government owned power stations, no plan to phase out coal and gas production and no plan to get to 100 per cent ownership. I urge the government to extend their ambitions on these issues and particularly to support the Greens' amendments. It is about time we reverse the privatisation of electricity retail and brought our energy under—

(Time expired)