




Speech By
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Record of Proceedings, 17 April 2024

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

 **Mr PERRETT** (Gympie—LNP) (8.24 pm): I rise to speak on this cognate debate of the Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill and the Clean Economy Jobs Bill. These bills seek to legislate renewable energy targets, reaffirm a commitment to ongoing ownership of energy assets, establish a Job Security Guarantee Fund, implement frameworks and advisory function for the transition, and establish mechanisms to achieve those targets including plans for sectors of the economy. Both bills have ambitious objectives.

The renewables bill ambitiously claims it will: build a clean and competitive energy system to assist accelerated growth; deliver affordable energy; support more rooftop solar and batteries; deliver better outcomes for workers and communities; and establish frameworks to deliver the government's goals.

The economy bill ambitiously says it will create policy certainty and create more job opportunities in emerging industries and current industries. Of course renewable energy should be part of any energy mix. It is the implementation that matters. The important thing is what is delivered for the financial, social and local environmental cost and whether true energy reliability, affordability and security is really delivered for our communities, businesses, households and workers.

The jobs bill seeks to deliver its goal through central planning. Targets were announced without determining whether they can be achieved and then industry asked to work it out. Part 3 of the bill enables the government, without consultation with industry, to set emission reduction plans for specific sectors of the economy. This is fraught with unintended consequences. AgForce warned the committee—

It is risky to assume that by simply imposing mandatory emissions targets industry will be able to conform within the stated time frames.

AgForce went on to outline it is dangerous and unrealistic and will result in our farmers' inability to produce the food we rely on and significantly harm our sector and the state. It said they will detract from investment, reduce competitiveness and the ability to decarbonise, and will have negative effects on supply chains that could run counter to the creation of more job opportunities.

Canegrowers said the government imposing a plan with set targets will not benefit the industry and will most likely lead to an increase in costs and reduced competitiveness.

The Queensland Farmers' Federation submitted that unachievable and unrealistic blanket targets will add another cost burden to farming, threatening global competitiveness and viability, and have unintended outcomes with negative outcomes for industry, regional communities and the environment.

Across the board, the constant complaint is the government's lack of consultation. It has form in treating consultation as a box-ticking exercise. Stakeholders do not trust government assurances they will be consulted.

It is telling that a government-dominated committee made three recommendations regarding the renewables bill about additional consultation, the disposal and replacement of renewable infrastructure, and that the Main Roads Department consider upgrading relevant supply chain infrastructure such as bridges and roads. The issues are not new.

I am concerned for my community that these issues remain outstanding, despite being frequently raised with government. For several years, I have raised concerns that the Mary Valley roads need upgrading to deliver the proposed pumped hydro scheme, the disposal of damaged solar panels and the continual lack of adequate consultation with the community. There are years of examples of complaints from many regional and rural areas. These issues should have already been addressed in the legislation. To have not done so means the government is not listening.

For many city members, the most renewable infrastructure they see are rooftop solar panels. Gympie has so much more, with plenty of existing and proposed projects—solar farms, a wind farm and the proposed Borumba pump hydro scheme. Renewable projects are transforming the landscape. Solar farms replace prime agricultural farms, valuable forests are being transitioned into a wind farm, and the proposed pumped hydro scheme will share the water which already supplies the agriculture, industrial and domestic users in our region. More powerlines will crisscross the landscape to transport energy to the grid.

Many in my electorate feel the government is often evasive, lacks transparency and has ridden roughshod over them. Locals said they felt dismissed and ignored when raising their concerns. These projects create years of stress and strain, and communities should not be dismissed with lip-service consultation. Consultation must be a two-way street.

The very real and legitimate concerns of residents should be listened to and taken into consideration. AgForce submitted concerns about renewable companies approaching its members in—
... an unduly alienating manner, causing friction in farming families and regional communities as a consequence of the divisive and disrespectful sales-type tactics ... ignoring such activities could have long-term consequences for a fair and just transition.

From the start, the proposed Borumba pumped hydro scheme caused great angst. Many learned about information sessions after the events. People were justifiably worried about high-voltage powerlines running across their properties. Rural landholders were concerned about the spread of declared weeds because energy providers have a poor record in managing this serious issue. Small landholders were worried about the impact on property valuations. The government boasts about the project, yet it refuses to release the business case and knows that it is still subject to federal government environmental approvals. Borumba is estimated to cost \$14 billion, yet without a business case or a detailed analytical study these figures are elastic. They cannot be trusted.

The government has history in not delivering projects within budget and overseeing massive cost blowouts. For three years it conducted secret discussions about the Forest Wind farm in the Toolara and Tuan forests. It said nothing until six days before Christmas in 2019. Connection to the Woolooga Substation requires more transmission lines running across properties. Consultation was conducted under COVID-19 restrictions over the summer holidays. There was short notice for community meetings. Some 226 large windmill turbine structures will be erected in an area with a current plantation licence which was sold by the Bligh Labor government in an asset sale. They will be clearly visible from the Great Sandy Straits. The government made only an in-principle commitment to 'no net loss of forest production'. After pushback, I am advised that the project owners aim to replace the loss of trees elsewhere.

People are sceptical about government claims about time lines, costs, power-generated job creation and their power bill costs. When four days were still left to comment on the developers' EPBC Act submission, parliament was told that the windfarm project 'marked the successful completion of the detailed assessment stage'. When asked last June about the planning and environmental assessment's time line and completion, Premier Miles said the project was still 'dependent on environmental social assessments due for completion in late 2024'. That makes it five years since the public first learned about it and eight years after the government started its secret meetings.

The Woolooga Solar Farm was claimed to power 63,000 homes and save 350,000 tonnes of carbon a year. Some suggested that its power would run pumps for the hydro scheme, yet last year the government announced on behalf of two private companies that 138,000 tonnes, or 40 per cent of the total output, will go towards producing beer. In 2022 the Auditor-General told a parliamentary committee that there needs to be more transparency about how these renewable targets are calculated. Recommendation No. 3 notes further consideration is needed about the end of life of a project which includes how to decommission a project and recycle equipment.

Two years ago the QAO warned about this in the project costs, saying that 'the end of life is an issue at an entity level. They have to make good the land. I am assuming it will come at a cost.' There is also an environmental cost. In December 2022, a major hailstorm destroyed thousands of solar panels at the Woolooga Solar Farm. It reportedly caused between \$23 million to \$28 million of damage and 68 truckloads were needed to replace the damaged panels. I observed thousands of panels being replaced at the site with pallet after pallet of new panels waiting to replace the damaged ones. Residents were concerned that the waste would either be buried, causing environmental damage, or shipped interstate to be out of sight and out of mind. Renewable energy cannot be just about virtue signalling for the government's members. The government clearly needs these projects, and so much more, from sectors like agricultural industries to meet its legislated targets. It must also recognise that the price it is imposing is massive social disruption, community upheaval, physical change and economic restructuring, risking the viability of the agricultural sectors. I urge support for the LNP amendments.