



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Mandatory Renewable Energy Targets

SPEECH

Monday, 16 June 2014

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Questioner
Speaker Jones, Ewen, MP

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Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert) (12:46): Paul Keating famously said, 'In the race of life, always back self-interest.' Never has there been a truer word spoken when it comes to the mandatory renewable energy target. No matter where you stand on this debate, it is where your interests lie. As someone who has spent a fair bit of time with Greg Hunt, the Minister for the Environment, I can say that you will not find a more passionate defender of the renewable energy target. In fact, the Howard government brought in the renewable energy target and embedded into the legislation the need to review it regularly, and that is what is happening at the moment.

This debate is about self-interest. You have people opposite who lost the election clearly on the carbon tax, the job-destroying facts of it and that sort of thing. There is the transitional economy that Australia has at the moment where we are losing our manufacturing base, but why are we losing our manufacturing base? If I were an inner-city left-leaning Labor member, I would be very keen to make sure that we push this thing here, because I will be speaking directly to my constituents. If people in my electorate want to maintain manufacturing jobs in hot competition with China, which can land product in the yard next door to them cheaper than they can make it and lift it across the fence, that is the issue.

In the time I have left I would like to tell you a story about why I support the RET and why it is important in my electorate. I think we could have both. We could have coal fired baseload power with zero emissions. The algal project at James Cook University is the perfect example. To develop industry in northern Australia, we must have secure, affordable baseload power. The previous government spent \$2½ million getting a case study on this and the result was that all other forms of energy were simply not sustainable, were not economically viable. The only thing that could be done would be a coal fired baseload power station. If you go to the MBD project at James Cook University, you will see that if we build it into the design of a power station we can produce coal fired power with zero emissions.

That is important for Australia, but it is also important in our region. Whilst we have a commitment to the environment and we are a regional leader on this, places like Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam all have thermal coal. They all have access to this sort of thing, but they may not have the same great drive that Australia has to provide clean energy. So, if we can provide a baseload power station in northern Australia and provide it with zero emissions, we can then export that intellectual property to our nearest neighbours, to the Asia Pacific, and get them on board as well.

This is what we can do. This is what the renewable energy target was set up to do, and this is what we are trying to do in north Queensland. The fact is that when I was a candidate, when they had the launch of big solar—which the previous government walked away from—there was the CopperString project which was going to bring renewable energy all the way through to Mount Isa, and bring Mount Isa onto the grid. The previous government walked away from that—did nothing about it and let it wither on the vine.

At the launch of the project there was a question and answer session and the Labor candidate did not bother hanging around for it, leaving me to answer the questions. The basic question that was put to me was: why don't we support renewable energy or big solar? I said, 'It is not that I do not support it, but who is going to pay for it?' If you give someone a choice to pay an electricity bill of \$500 or \$510 and they both do exactly the same thing 99.9 per cent of people are going to take the \$500 price. That is the fact of life. It comes down to an economic debate.

We live in the north, where a company like Sun Metals Corporation is paying above and beyond, and is only able to work at about 30 per cent capacity because of the cost of power and the price they pay for load shedding and all that sort of thing. That is a major industry. If you are not able to attract more industry to north Queensland then you have a problem. If you are not able to grow your economy that way you have a problem. They are not going to be able to build an energy-intensive refinery and hook it up to the nearest wind turbine; it is simply not going to happen.

I see that there is room for both here. I am a supporter of the RET and I am a supporter of direct action. I thank the House.

Debate adjourned.