



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

COMMITTEES

Science and Innovation Committee

Report

SPEECH

Monday, 13 August 2007

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Monday, 13 August 2007
Page 137
Questioner
Speaker Hayes, Chris, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (4.00 pm)—It is a pleasure to speak on this report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Science and Innovation, *Between a rock and a hard place: the science of geosequestration*. It is a report of substance that you will read a little more about in the media for other reasons this evening and tomorrow. It was very timely to look at the issue of geosequestration, for Australia at the moment confronts the challenges of its economic advancement and reliance on fossil fuels as well as its greenhouse gas emissions and its responsibilities to mitigate its effects on the climate.

Before I get too far into it, can I first compliment the chair of this inquiry, the member for Kooyong. A lot of wide-ranging and diverse views came before this committee. The evidence taken over many months and the amount of documentation submitted to the committee gave rise to different points of view being adopted by members of the committee. But I will come back to that a little later on. I would like to also acknowledge, if I may, Dr Anna Dacre, the committee secretary, Dr Alison Clegg and the other inquiry secretaries, Peter Keel and Michael Crawford. Many of us do take for granted sometimes the assistance, dedication and professionalism that is exhibited by committee staff. They work very hard to make us look, in many respects, a lot better than we are. I do thank them for the efforts they have put in on this report.

As I was saying, this is a significant milestone in looking at where we should go in terms of our energy production. One of the things we cannot deny is that the coal industry plays an important part in our economy. At the moment the coal industry directly employs some 30,000 Australians. It is also our largest export earner. Last year I think somewhere in the vicinity of \$24½ billion in export earnings was generated through coal exports.

Currently Australia has 8.6 per cent of the world's black coal reserves. That is in excess of a 200-year supply of black coal. There is something in the vicinity of an 800-year supply in the remaining reserves of brown coal—that is at current production levels. So Australia is very much dependent on our coal industry. Apart from everything else, presently 83 per cent of our total energy is produced from coal sources. One of the things we do need to address in this country, amongst other things in terms of a suite of technologies to take us further—and that includes renewable energies, of which, having worked within that sector, I am particularly partial to—is what can give us a real advantage in using our coal and protecting our environment. So clean-burning coal resources are essential to the future prosperity of this country.

One aspect of that is geosequestration, which is the capture and storage of CO with a view to allowing us to compete and exploit the benefits of our vast coal reserves, while also moving us in the direction of environmental protection and a reduction in the greenhouse gas emissions from our industries. There is no doubt we live in a carbon constrained world, despite what many might think. There is a real potential for Australia not only to fully participate in these industries but also to commercialise its carbon capture technologies.

We pride ourselves on being an innovative nation. It should not take us that long to work out that we are sitting on an abundance of the world supply of coal. If we have worked out that our economy is going to be heavily geared to the export of coal for generations to come, then we should have realised long before now that we should be the world leaders in clean-burning coal resources and technologies such as geosequestration.

There are a number of options that fall to us already in terms of geosequestration. There are a range of storage options that are available to us, including depleted gas and oil fields, unmined or unmineable coal seams and the injection of carbon dioxide into existing reservoirs, which is called enhanced recovery. That is something we have been doing in this nation for a long while, particularly in Western Australia, in trying to exploit the final reserves of oil. It is certainly a known technology.

It became very clear to us during this inquiry that the technologies which are being deployed are not new. They have been finessed and developed, but the whole notion of geosequestration or carbon capture and storage is not necessarily a new technology. We have been doing various aspects of it, including advanced oil and gas recovery by injecting CO into existing oil reservoirs, for some time. We now want to finesse the process to where we

commercialise the technology, not to produce additional hydrocarbon but to ensure permanent storage of liquid CO at depth for centuries, if not thousands of years.

Whilst I had thought that most people involved in the inquiry were singing from the same hymn sheet in relation to this issue, to the surprise of most people, four government members of the committee—which is the majority of government members—chose to submit a dissenting report. It is the right of everyone to question, but when they question not the technology and its commercialisation and whether it is capable of doing something to reduce carbon emissions but question what goes to the very heart of this—whether human involvement is exacerbating climate change—I think the Labor members and other members who formed the majority on the committee find that very hard to accept.

There is ample scientific evidence now that indicates that human behaviour in the modern industrial period has contributed to the build-up of greenhouse gases which has contributed to climate change. I am not a scientist, but I would have thought—from the abundance of material submitted to this inquiry and the abundance of material that is on the internet and even what our children learn in school—that this is not a contested position. Yet a majority of government members on this committee challenge the very fact that human involvement has resulted in greater carbon dioxide emissions to the atmosphere, which in turn is having an impact on climate change.

At this late stage, not of this report or this government but, quite frankly, of our industrial development, we have people in our elected positions now coming before us and questioning whether humans have impacted on the emission of CO and whether we need to take steps to reduce the production of greenhouse gases and saying the jury is out on that. I have to say that, if I were living in the electorates of any of those people, I would seriously consider my position coming up to the next election. I would want people who were actually going to sit down and look at what is good for our future. I endorse the geosequestration report and indicate that it does endorse a number of the existing policy positions already adopted by the Labor Party in terms of geosequestration and its investment in this country. (*Time expired*)