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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
NATIONAL GREENHOUSE AND ENERGY
REPORTING AMENDMENT BILL 2009

Second Reading

SPEECH

Tuesday, 11 August 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Katter, Bob, MP

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Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (7.16 pm)—I most certainly have great respect for the minister at the table, the Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare and Youth and Minister for Sport, but it disappoints me that there is not a single public servant over there and there are none of the relevant ministers in the chamber as we debate the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Amendment Bill 2009. In the Queensland state house, where I was for 20 years, for all legislation there was a senior officer of the department there. In saying that, I want to pay tribute to Tony Burke, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, who is the only minister in my 15 or whatever it is years here who has ever come into the parliament to face the music on his own legislation and who has insisted that his senior public servants were in here as well. Not only are these people out of step with the rest of Australia; they are not even in step with their own parliament. They do not even know what the parliament says, let alone what the people of Australia say.

Mrs Mirabella—They don't care.

Mr KATTER—The honourable member who is representing the opposition interjects. I would not be speaking too loudly if I were her, because I cannot remember any of her ministers ever coming into the parliament when they had legislation. We get up here and talk and I just wonder what the value is of getting up here and talking. Is anyone going to be listening? I wonder about the value of it. But, assuming that there is a value in talking in the parliament, in the house of the people of Australia—which I doubt—I will say what I have said here on numerous occasions. Sometimes I agree with Barnaby Joyce. His comments in the *Australian* were dead spot-on. Naturally I think they are very clever, because I have said them about 400 times myself! All that is going to come out of the government's program is a huge windfall profit for the likes of Goldman Sachs, Macquarie Bank and all of these people that buy and sell shares. Whether they are people that do that or not I do not know; I am not familiar with the share market. But I do know this: where they may have had \$100,000 million worth of share value that they could trade, now they will have \$110,000 million worth of securities that they can trade. I speak with authority on that because I did buy and sell securities as an insurance agent in my younger days. That is all that is going to happen here. It is a glorified managed investment scheme. That is all it is. It will be a glorified MIS.

It seems to me that the proposals that are coming forward from the opposition are more sensible, but I do not think that they will achieve any of the goals or objectives that we want to achieve. I scored *Media Watch* a few weeks ago because on a Monday I said that there was no problem and on the Tuesday I said, 'This is how we fix up the problem.' Of course, they pointed out that I had said the day before that the problem did not exist. I reiterate that the problem with CO₂ is 400 parts per million. Imagine if all that roof were illuminated and there were 20 or 30 cockroaches up there. This is like saying that we would not see anything in this room because of the few cockroaches up there. Mr Deputy Speaker, it is 400 parts per million. Are you telling me seriously that the world is going to warm because there are 400 parts per million of CO₂ up there? If you know anything about science, you realise how utterly preposterous that proposition is, how absolutely ludicrous and ridiculous it is. There is eminent scientist after eminent scientist after eminent scientist debunking this. People will be laughing at it, as they did at the Club of Rome's prognosis that the world would be starving to death in 1984. It was fairly unfortunate for the Club of Rome that in fact there was the greatest superfluity of food in all of human history in that particular year and food prices throughout the world tumbled through the floor.

People are just picking up some emotive proposition out there and running with it, without any hard scientific rigour whatsoever. You do not have to be Albert Einstein to figure out that it is under 400 parts per million. Get a light globe and put a little pinhead in front of it and then say that there is going to be no illumination coming from the light globe because of that pinhead in front of it. That is how stupid the proposition is. I must also say—and this is where some will accuse me of speaking with forked tongue—that there has been a massive increase. When you are looking at a 1,000 per cent increase in a period of a century or two centuries or whatever it is, even an anti—I am not a sceptic; I am an anti—will say, 'Maybe we should take a bit of a pull on the reins here.'

I do not come at it from the point of view of CO₂, but there are enormous benefits in reducing the enormous amount of energy that we consume. I had the great privilege and honour of being the mines and energy minister

in the Queensland government. Before that I had very senior portfolios which gave me a lot of responsibility in the energy area. When I became minister, we immediately started preparing cabinet submissions and forewarned the electricity commission that we would be putting solar water heaters on the roof of every single government house in Queensland. With the Housing Commission houses and welfare houses, that amounted to about 15 per cent of all of the houses in Queensland having a hot water system on the roof. We felt that because it would be a mass purchase we could give them at very attractive prices and we might even put a little bit of a subsidy in there. But to every household in Queensland it would be very economically attractive for them to put a solar hot water system on the roof, so we reckoned that about 25 to 30 per cent of the houses would take it. Forty per cent of energy requirements domestically are for heating water, so if you take 20 or 30 per cent of that away and use the sun to heat that water, though you have still got to take it to boiling point if you want to make a cup of tea or something, you take 20 or 30 per cent of domestic demand away. We were looking at an expectation that, instead of having to build another 1,000-megawatt power station in the next two or three years, we could postpone that power station for at least 10 years. We have 40 of those 1,000-megawatt power stations in Australia, but Queensland could have postponed one of them and it would not have come on line, because we were using the sun for the supply of that energy.

It amazes me that the government is going to go forward and create tens of billions of dollars worth of securities which will make the security traders rich. I can bet London to a brick that any intelligent, sensible person in Australia knows that there will be a tax dodge involved here somewhere and it will just be another glorified MIS scheme. There is no doubt about that; that is what it is going to come to. But instead of going down the pathway of doing something practical and real, such as the solar hot water systems, no, we do not do that. The government has put some insulation batts in the roof, but I really think when compared with solar hot water they are a joke. The sorts of savings that you are going to get out of that are very small indeed. Of course, 20 or 30 per cent of Australia's population has a very hot sun. Reflective roofs rather than insulation batts might have brought serious benefit. I would put that forward as a proposition.

I and my colleague from New England, with great support from the member for Lyne, have emphasised the benefits of ethanol on numerous occasions in this place. I am not a greenie, I am an anti-green, but the great patron saint of the Greens, Al Gore, on page 136, I think, of his book *An Inconvenient Truth* names as the first solution ethanol. But have we heard it from the government side of the House? The other side of the House can stand ashamed of themselves. They destroyed the ethanol industry in Australia. We went from 72 megalitres down to 24 megalitres under their regime. They smashed it to pieces, to suit what interests we do not know, but they most certainly were the architects of destruction of the Australian ethanol industry. Whilst America was building 40 ethanol plants a year and Brazil was building 20 ethanol plants a year, Australia built one plant in 40 years. This is something that Australia has a huge advantage in. We still at this point of time have a very sizeable sugar industry. That industry can be very easily converted, 50 per cent of it or even 100 per cent of it, across to producing ethanol instead of producing sugar. Since the average price for sugar has been very poor for the last seven years, it would be a very good thing to do. All I am saying is that in just two projects in North Queensland there are three million megalitres of petrol—one-seventh of Australia's entire petrol needs in just those two projects.

I seriously feel physically sick and uncomfortable when I reflect on the fact that my country is a net importer of food. When I say it I am sure no-one here believes me. We are a net importer of fruit and vegetables. The graph has been heading that way for ages and it has just continued its trend, but now we are a net importer of fruit and vegetables. Five years ago we became a net importer of pork, a very important commodity in food intake in this country and in most countries. Last year we broke through with fisheries: we became a net importer of fish products like prawns, fish and everything else that you get from the fishery industry. So we are now only an exporter really of beef and grains, and sugar, a very minor commodity as far as food consumption goes. Isn't that something to be proud of as a race of people! We occupy a continent in size almost as big as China, almost as big as Canada, almost as big as America, almost as big as Brazil. We are not much smaller than any of those countries. But we are a net importer of food. What is happening? The opposition side of the House decided they were going to close down 40 per cent of the Murray. The honourable member sitting here representing them today is one of those members of parliament. I have to say that if you are then you should have resigned from your party. If any party decides to wipe out the base industry of your electorate, you should do the decent thing. If you cannot talk some sense into them then you should get out and join us over here, move to the cross benches as I had to do.

Let me just reiterate, because there are a lot of people who do not understand what is going on. Sixty per cent of Australia's existing agricultural production—what is left—is coming off the Murray-Darling. There will be those that say 40 per cent, but I would take Ian Causley's figure of 60 per cent. I think he would know more than

anyone else, and I have always reckoned 60 per cent. I will not go into the details of the argument of whether it is 40 or 60 per cent. We are going to take 3 million megalitres of the 8 million megalitres of irrigation water out of the Murray-Darling River. If you want to do the mathematics, you will find out that what existing agricultural production we have in this country will be cut by a further 25 per cent. What a shameful reflection upon this country. If you produce less food, somewhere someone in this world is going to starve. If there is less food out there, there will be more people starving. There are about 1,500 million people that go to bed hungry every night, in a world with a population of about 6,500 million.

All I am saying is that—whether you want to grow sugar to produce ethanol or whether you want to grow food, I do not really care—I think it is immoral, the worst possible type of immorality, to not use the land. I refer to the words of Ben Chifley, who said, ‘If you don’t use this land, you have no moral right to hold onto it,’ which was almost the exact phrase used by Ted Theodore—probably the most important person in Australian history. That was the same phrase used by McEwen again and again in this place. Is it any wonder that thoroughly decent people like the member for Lyne and the member for New England no longer attach to a party that cannot understand that most basic concept?

I speak with some considerable passion because I love my country. All of my forebears were on the ground in this country in the 1870s. We would like to think we have made some sort of contribution to the country throughout that period. There are many others in this place that could claim to have made a greater contribution than my family; that is for sure.

Consider the proposition that we are proceeding with here. Let me be very direct: we only export one commodity now. We do not have any manufacturing. Our agriculture is just about finished and what is left of it will be killed by the Murray-Darling decision. We have only one commodity left and that is minerals. I represent the richest mineral province on earth. We have 500 million tonnes of iron ore. We have never looked for iron ore; we just happen to stumble across it when we are looking for other things. We have just happened to stumble across 500 million tonnes. We have not mined a single tonne of it yet. We have about one or two per cent—I have to check on the figure, so don’t anyone quote me on that—of the world’s reserves of uranium, which is clean energy but with some dangers.

We have the world’s biggest vanadium deposit. Virtually anything made out of steel, anywhere in the world, will have some vanadium in it. We have one of the biggest silver-lead-zinc deposits, which the Chinese have just purchased. And—God bless them—we hope they will open up and start mining because it has been there for 30 years at Dougall River, which we have not touched yet. We have one of the four biggest oil shale deposits in Australia in this area. There are only 24 major phosphate deposits in the world, and we have four of them.

Having said all of those things, I also say that we will not be opening mines in our area. It is mainly copper-silver-lead-zinc—and I have not even mentioned them as I have been going through. We will not be opening mines in our area. We will be closing four mines; there is no doubt about it.

When you say—as one of the previous speakers did, from the government side—that it is not going to affect industry, I am telling you that they are already running at a loss. How much loss do you think the person in Zurich who owns Xstrata is going to take before he starts closing mines? Do you think he is just there to be Santa Claus to Australians, do you? It is rather a novel concept. If a mine is not making a profit, yes, it might be good business to try to keep it open for a few years, but these mines are desperate. This relates to all of the mines throughout that great mineral province, which is producing nearly \$15,000 million a year of export earnings for this country. Many of my good friends go down there and risk their lives, because it is still a very dangerous occupation. There is a limit to how safe you can make a mine. As an ex-miner, I can talk with authority. They are on the cusp. Unless help arrives shortly, they are going to close. Instead of helping, you are pushing them over the edge.

Are there alternatives? Yes, there are. The first solution of the patron saint, Al Gore, is ethanol. The last government smashed ethanol, and this government is clearly determined not to do anything about it. Yes, that is a solution. As far as the electricity industry goes, I have pointed out the most simple of things. When I say 40 per cent of domestic consumption, that is from Szokolay’s book, which is probably the best book ever produced in the history of the world on energy and housing in Australia.

I say with great passion: let us look at serious ways of reducing CO₂ if you are serious about it. If you are not a cynic but an anti like me, you would say, ‘Well, we should give a pull on the reins.’ There is the way to do it, so do that. Do not line the pockets of the slimy, slithering city suits from Sydney. Don’t do that again, please. Don’t

create a glorified MIS. Please, look at reality and do something real, substantial and specific for the Australian economy, as the great governments throughout Australian history have done previously.

When this government talked about nation building, I said, ‘That is about Ben Chifley building the Snowy Mountains— *(Time expired)*