

Senator Watt: Some support what the government is doing, some don't.

Senator CANAVAN: Obviously the majority or the plurality don't. Have you met with an actual affected landowner who's got concerns about a wind farm on their property?

Senator Watt: I've certainly met with landowners that have proposals for windfarms on their property, yes.

Senator CANAVAN: I should rephrase the question: not someone who has got it on their property, because those people get payments and generally do that voluntarily. I'm talking about neighbours really who are affected by the developments.

Senator Watt: I'm not sure that I've met with neighbours of properties, but I've certainly met with farmers whose land is proposed to have windfarms and other renewables built on their land.

Senator CANAVAN: Could I get a commitment from you to meet with some Central Queensland landowners who are concerned?

Senator Watt: Sure.

Senator CANAVAN: Thank you. That would be great. I'll make sure they get an opportunity to come down in the months ahead.

Senator Watt: We could try and do that up there.

Senator CANAVAN: I'm not sure if you're surprised by the results but I certainly am not, because it's the biggest issue, travelling around the bush.

Senator Watt: The National Party is making a lot of statements about it.

Senator CANAVAN: Chair? We were going so well and having a very reasonable discussion. I appreciate the minister's acceptance of an invitation to meet these concerned landowners. But it is certainly the biggest issue that gets raised with me, that is, concerns about the impact on people's amenity, on our natural environment and their ability and rights to farm as well.

Senator Watt: Senator Canavan, also, if you haven't done so already, they are exactly the kinds of people we're keen to hear about through that consultation process Minister Bowen is leading.

Senator CANAVAN: Given you're interested to listen and hear, is there any reason the government has not supported a Senate inquiry? If you were willing to listen to these people why wouldn't you support a Senate inquiry into these issues?

Senator Watt: I would have thought we're getting well beyond the responsibilities of this portfolio.

Senator McKENZIE: You're the minister!

Senator CANAVAN: You're the Minister for Agriculture. When the motion came forward before the Senate, were your views sought on what the position of the government should be?

Senator Watt: Yes.

Senator CANAVAN: So it is relevant obviously for this portfolio. You were involved in that decision?

Senator Watt: I didn't think it was necessary to hold a Senate inquiry into an issue the government is already consulting on. As I say, there's a process underway with Andrew Dyer, the Energy Infrastructure Commissioner, who used to be the windfarm commissioner appointed by the former government. That's doing exactly this at the moment, a review of how we consult communities. I think that's a more productive way to deal with the issue than a Senate inquiry.

Senator CANAVAN: When I speak to farmers, the reason they want the Senate inquiry is they would like a set of eyes, a set of ears that is outside the executive government. All of the consultation you've just referred to are all agencies of or officers of the executive government. Why won't you listen to farmers and give them that opportunity to have a public consultation that's not controlled by the executive government?

Senator Watt: There is an actual way to fix these issues and that is through the consultation process that the government has already started.

Senator CANAVAN: But that's a government consultation. I've just mentioned that. Could you give me a reason why—

Senator Watt: A Senate inquiry might make recommendations. The government of the day might listen to them. There have been many Senate inquiries that have given recommendations over the years. Some get listened to and some don't. We've got an actual process underway that we're inviting people to participate in.

Senator CANAVAN: It's exactly the same deal.