

28 November 2022

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Trade and Investment Growth
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Secretary

Submission Regarding; Inquiry into Australia's transition to a Green Energy Superpower.

The following submission has been compiled by the Kalapa-Wycarbah Local Action Committee for the parliamentary committee inquiry into Australia's ambition to become a green energy superpower. The members involved come from a broad range of fields which have very relevant and firsthand knowledge of the current push for both QLD and Australia to transition to renewable energy predominantly via wind, solar & hydro. These fields of expertise include electrical, power generation (coal fired), Mining (Coal), Agricultural (farming/beef producing) and education. Our concerns exist due to the lack of consultation and ignorance of the facts out there around these proposed projects from scientists and professionals in the field, let alone the problems and issues that should also be learnt from in other parts of the world. Those nations that have already heavily developed their “renewable” programs based on wind/solar/hydro are suffering due to high electricity prices and unreliable power supply.(1)

Our submission will address the terms of reference which the Joint Standing Committee on Trade & investment have outlined as part of the inquiry into Australia's transition

Where trade and investment activities are already having a positive impact;

The positive impact is the raw materials in which we still ‘mine.’ Yet still export to have the end product manufactured and again shipped back to the country for the construction of these projects. Throughout all this process there is the carbon footprint which is seemingly overlooked given it is for “clean energy”. No matter the

country in which they are manufactured, the process is not 'green' and still contributes to the global issue around the increase of emissions, not just Australia.

Currently, investment activities around proposed or developed wind, solar and hydro projects are having a number of detrimental effects on local communities and the health of the people within the surroundings and the environment.

Local communities are becoming divided due to the fact a landholder living/owning a property in close proximity or adjacent to a wind farm/solar gets no say and even no contact from the project developer regarding the proposal. As an example, under State Code 23, a non-host dwelling only needs to be 1500m as a minimum from the tower as a non-host property.(2) The issue with distance is the noise which is generated. Whilst levels are set for maximum noise generation, there is the fact this is just being imposed onto those in the surroundings when in a large number of instances, landholders in these development areas live in near silence. It is this peace and quiet which people in these areas value and cherish as it is part of the reason people reside in these areas.

Similarly, solar farm neighbours are subject to numerous side effects but a prime example is the photovoltaic heat island effect. Increased temperatures in those areas surrounding solar farms is a known and well documented issue.(3)_

A large concern from individuals around the investment activities is the actual origin and owners of these projects. Whilst almost all of these developers will sell themselves as "Australian" the true origin of ownership and finance is largely unknown, and many would consider their interests in the renewable energy space to be purely as an opportunity to "cash in" on Australia's demand to establish these projects and potential sell out down the track taking profits with them.

Emerging and possible future trends;

A clear emerging trend which is being witnessed is a lack of thorough education for the entire population around the three main renewable alternatives being sold as great for the environment. Like many new trends or changes experienced throughout history there has always been downsides. What we would like to hope is that in our day and age, we as a population and our governments, make informed & educated decisions based on the facts of those who are professionals in the field and learn from countries around the world about the downfalls experienced. It is clear based on the speed at which Australia is moving that a long term plan for the future of reliable energy in the country is being overlooked. For those living in the regional areas, it stands out as this is being done in an attempt to gain votes and appease those on the green side to maintain their positions in government.

As more individuals research or learn of the environmental, human and social effects from proposed renewable alternatives they see that it isn't all that is made out to be.(4) But then speaking up about this or trying to present the facts, people then label you as anti-climate and an environment hater (A sentiment that farmers are well aware of). This is certainly not the case, as our fear is the long term damage we will be left with from an environmental point of view due to the haste at which the government went about approving projects without first considering the long term impacts. Coal seam gas is one of the most recent large scale developments that has not only left the country with side effects of the process but has seen gas prices rise as a result of the profit driven businesses which engaged in this activity.(5) There are numerous issues which could potentially arise long term which have all been well documented ranging from environmental to human. Not to mention the large areas which will be removed from food production to produce electricity, albeit unreliable and expensive.

The role of key commonwealth agencies including Austrade, in identifying new trade and inward investment opportunities, and assisting Australian companies to access these opportunities, including through whole of government coordination of investment;

Our committee believes that commonwealth agencies like Austrade can assist the country better by exploring several different technologies to solve the energy situation of needing to reduce carbon emissions. Clean coal technologies already in use throughout the world, particularly Japan, increase the efficiency of power generation greatly compared to that currently in commission in the country.(6)

Going beyond coal though, we believe that nuclear power generation is a viable alternative to the current energy plan. Nuclear power stations constructed today would be both cheaper to build and operate than a comparable wind/solar/storage system and provide safe, reliable power for fifty years or more. Current wind/solar projects have estimated life spans 20-25 years. When put into perspective against the average human lifetime expectancy (*Average Australian Life Expectancy is 83 years in 2022*), this is essentially only short-term thinking, let alone looking to develop & invest in long term secure power for generations to come.

A grown conversation around nuclear needs to happen as the stigma around previous world events such as Chernobyl immediately puts the topic of conversation in the too hard basket. A nuclear power plant built today would be immensely different to the any facility built in that era and particularly in our country.(7) We don't consider cars from 1986 to be current technology, so given the 36 years since the event, we can no doubt design and build the one of the safest and reliable nuclear power plants. Our country has the resources to do it.

What Australia already has is a thriving Agricultural industry which already feeds many of the world's population. Given the growing world population, our food production industry only stands to gain more in revenue from exports to feed the world. To reduce the amount of land we have available to produce food in the pursuit of attempting to reduce our countries emissions output (which is just over 1% of all global emissions), just seems ridiculous.(8)

All this current renewable energy model will do is increase power prices, decrease reliability, and reduce agricultural production which is one of the country's primary contributors to our GDP. By Austrade expanding our markets offshore and our government keeping Australian country in Australian hands we can keep feeding the world.

Areas of growth, and how can these be accelerated and/or assisted, including through the use of Commonwealth Special Investment Vehicles; and how Australia can capitalise on existing and future trade agreements and economic frameworks with countries or regions around the world.

Future trade agreements need to be in favour of Australia. We are selling our natural resources offshore at the cost of higher commodity prices domestically and driving up cost of living prices. We have the raw materials in this country yet we choose to export overseas to only import manufactured products. Steel is a prime example of this and the Australian steel product is always known for being a better quality product than most of those imported. It would be a near certainty that there is little to no consideration for the emission output in these countries making this steel as it is purely cost based.

Given the scale of the proposed renewable energy target Australia wishes to achieve, the manufacture of these components in the country would give the economy a huge boost, yet nearly all of the products will be imported. Our reliance on imports leaves us vulnerable to global events which threatens our sovereignty as a nation.

In inquiring into this topic, the Committee will have particular regard to the areas that play to Australia's strengths, as identified by the Australian Government in consultation with the states and territories including: renewable energy, battery storage, energy supply and infrastructure, electric vehicle industry, infrastructure; advanced manufacturing, and services and technology.

It is most critical that our strengths are identified, and that government make true and accurate assessments of all facets of the renewable energy industry and not get caught trying to push to meet a target instead of implementing a policy that presents true value for the country without subjecting it to the potential risks that have been well documented around some of these technologies. Currently a number of the above mentioned components that fit into the renewable banner have their issues and limitations on being able to actually deliver a reliable product.

Batteries used for storage and electric vehicles (EV's) are all Lithium products and highly toxic. Mining the raw mineral to begin with, let alone the fact there is no satisfactory way to dispose of or recycle these batteries at end of life doesn't make this a "renewable" product. This doesn't include the fire risk associated with these batteries. These are a chemical reaction and once alight cannot be extinguished and have to be let to burn out. (9, 10)

Many experts have already expressed their concerns around the lack of capacity the power grid has to accommodate the increase in EV's charging from the grid.(11) The ideal of a large percentage of the Australian population owning and being able to charge their EV at home doesn't have the capacity to be a reality. To achieve such a dream would come at what cost to upgrade the national power system? Alternatively, the mobile charging stations appearing around the country powered by generators lack sense, as these potentially consume more fuel to run and recharge the vehicle than what a conventional vehicle with an internal combustion engine does already.

Solar panels and wind turbines again lack the capacity to be entirely recycled if at all. The chemicals contained in 'both' solar panels and wind turbine blades 'present' risks to the environment. For the surrounding residents this is the largest concern living next to a solar or wind farm. The long-term health impacts aren't something that as a country we can gamble with.

Outside of the terms of reference we have addressed in this submission, our local action committee has issues with numerous other facets of the renewable energy plan, particularly that of QLD where we reside. The construction of such large projects does not appear to be subject to the same environmental impact regulations that farmers, mining or civil construction projects must comply with.(12) Given the risk these pose to the health of the soil and water ways utmost importance must be placed on the environmental impact. The ag sector is routinely subject to the message that all run off ends up in the reef, yet it seems fine to destroy anything from virgin scrub through to prime developed agricultural land to place these wherever companies like. Outside of runoff there is a huge release of CO2 stored in this country which will be just released back into the atmosphere. Not to mention the

threat to wildlife in these ecosystems during construction and operation of proposed projects. (13)

To conclude our submission, we are wanting the government to undertake a robust and thorough assessment of the renewable energy industry and the future plans around energy security. We firmly believe that the current plan is not in the best interest of the country due to the impacts on the environment of both Flora, fauna & the reef, the threat to health and safety of our population, the economic cost both having to pay for electricity and cost to construct these projects which are being subsidized. Our food security and impact on our food/ag production should take priority over renewable projects as wind & solar projects cannot truly compliment or work in with existing ag production systems. We urge all levels of government to reassess and develop a complete energy plan that will be in the best interest of the country.

“What is popular is not always right, what is right is not always popular”

An old saying which holds true in this debate. Renewable energy has become a popular topic which has been used as a political tool to appease the general public. There is a campaign of fear around climate change and a message that wind, solar & hydro are the answer to solve this without fully investigating the long-term impacts and potential costs associated with such technologies. Rushing into the first option in front of us without developing a thorough long-term energy plan for the people of our great nation could be one of the greatest mistakes we could make and impact our future generations.

We want to see a plan toward renewable energy that makes Australia a leader in power security and not following a crowd into failure.

Yours sincerely,

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