Renewable Energy (Electricity) Amendment (Feed-in-Tariff) Bill 2008

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History has shown changes in energy sources and how they are generated or obtained for life or for comforts of human life cause changes and often great changes in lifestyle. Up till now the progress of Homo sapiens has been enabled by the continuous flow of usable energy. There have been hiccups in that progress but now we are facing limits on just how much energy we can use per head and collectively. This is caused by approaching diminishing energy resources in one of the most useful forms, oil and the downside of fossil fuels affecting climate. The use of these fuels along with Carnot cycle technology also brought about the current capital economy model. These energy sources are point sources which distribute to the consumer and in most cases, electricity particularly, very wastefully.

Trying to build a renewable energy system to replicate the current point source economy is intrinsically impossible as the renewable systems energy does not seem to have the same energy "gain" factor as the current energy technology. Also energy is most efficiently used where it is gained, no transmission losses and distribution infrastructure. Roof tops of most Australian cities are ready built almost ideal structures to support PV and solar thermal energy collectors. Small wind generators are also a very viable home source of energy. Renewable energy technology for adaption to existing buildings is still only in the development infancy with R&D much underfunded, yet a current system is about the same level of technology as a modern motor vehicle. Most importantly the capital cost per watt drops the larger the installation.

Energy gives us the standard of living we have become accustomed too, not money, that is physical reality. To change to a new system will inevitable mean "old technology " will perish but naturally it will fight for existence, even though it may be ultimately doomed. The history of technology has also shown that very few technologies do go extinct but change in their relevance to a changing society.

Changing to a distributed energy generation system also changes the ownership of the energy and the owner becomes “energy empowered”. Although the current practice is to sell surplus energy to the grid, it is quite foreseeable that “human ingenuity” will find a way of more productively benefitting their personal “economy” by utilizing the spare energy some other way. Such a change would be very powerful in kilo Watt terms when multiplied by millions of energy generation units. Basic human nature will direct that energy, forming new society structures, a force that will be difficult to stop.

Current home energy generation packs are generally more a status statement, or at least the homes I have observed mainly in Tasmania. In view of the urgency to reduce climatic change some form of protection and more importantly encouragement is needed by renewable technologies to establish itself and go through the mass “field trial” stage of development.

A feed in tariff seems the most flexible way to break the current fossil fuel energy monopoly and allow, with other measures, a transition to a new style economy. It is after all “energy for living” for each individual that is of importance not the wealth of minority of current vested interests.

A further clause could also be added that of “energy independence” businesses and households should be allowed to disconnect from the grid and pay no standing charges. Water should also be included in this option. This because the distribution costs makes up such a high part of tariffs, in the basic meter charge and part cost, particularly charges to household and small business, in the very high unit charges. This would make locally generated energy more competitive against remotely generated energy both from fossil and renewable sources, particularly fossil fuel having such large hidden subsidies.