
Committee Secretary
Senate Economics Committee
Department of the Senate

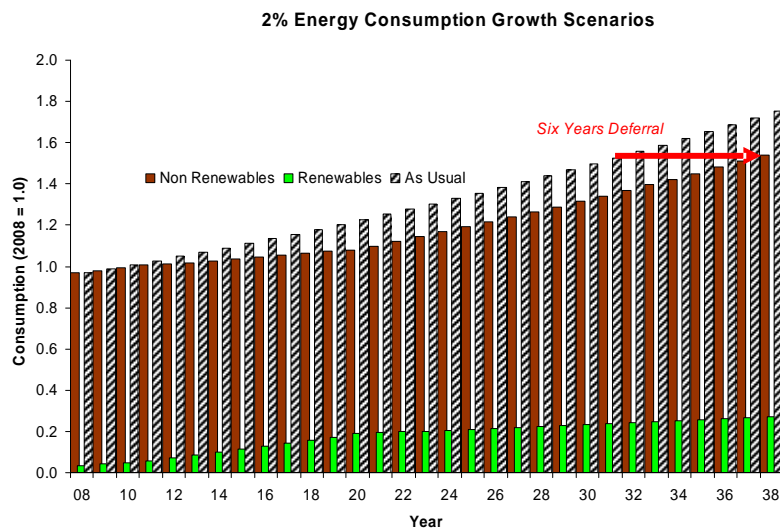
15 April 2008

**Inquiry Submission: Renewable Energy Legislation Amendment
(Renewable Power Percentage) Bill 2008**

Dear Committee Secretary,

Thankyou for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry. I believe that in considering this bill it is important for the committee to have a clear understanding of what the proposed amendment would and would not achieve.

According to ABARE projections, overall electricity consumption in Australia is forecast to grow by an average of approximately 2 percent per year over the next few decades. The following chart incorporates the proposed renewable energy power percentages applied to a 2 percent growth in total consumption.



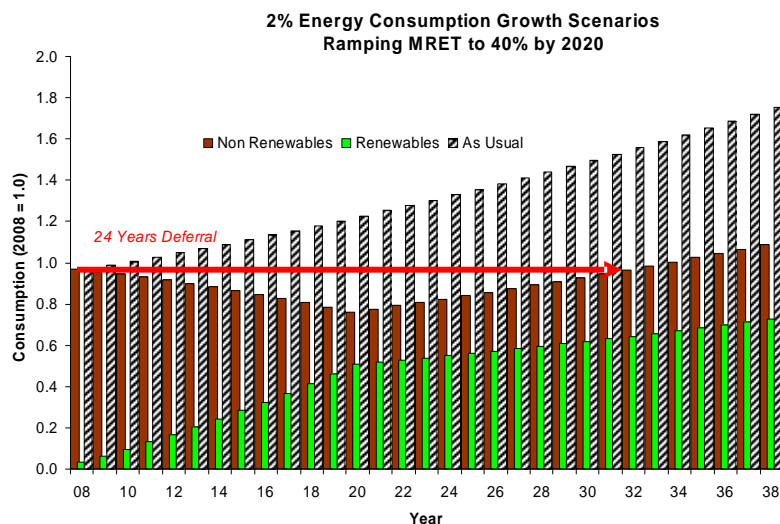
First of all, what is clear is that the proposed changes would *not* lead to a reduction in non-renewable energy consumption (and production) or consequent greenhouse gas emissions. At no time would the total amount of non-renewable energy consumption fall.

The second observation to note is that consumption of non-renewable energy is merely deferred into the future: six years in this scenario. The proposed changes are equivalent to winding the clock back to 2002, no more, and then moving forward again as before.

The proposed renewable energy power percentage changes:

- *would not* reduce greenhouse gas emissions;
- would defer generation/consumption rates by approximately six years.

To further demonstrate the effect of ongoing consumption growth, the same comparison is made for a ramping of renewable energy power percentages to 40 percent by 2020. This is illustrated in the following chart.



Setting aside any questions about the practicality of such aggressive targets, it can be seen that the long term outcome is similar to the 15 percent case. While non-renewable energy consumption would fall while the renewable percentage is increased, non-renewable consumption then rises again in line with overall growth. After 24 years the rate of non-renewable consumption has returned to where it is now. Reduction in non-renewable energy consumption would only be temporary.

The conclusion that I would suggest be drawn from the above illustrations is that the problem faced by society is not insufficient renewable energy; the problem is ongoing consumption growth. Renewable energy percentage targets cannot compete with modest ongoing consumption growth.

The problem of electricity-related GHG emissions is dominated by ongoing consumption growth.

Clearly the underlying objective of the bill is environmental protection. The aim is presumably to attempt to avert undesirable future consequences of energy-related emissions. If this is the case then the effect of the proposed changes is merely to make a relatively small change to the timing of when

these consequences will occur. While laudable, the question may well be asked if it would be worth the effort.

Analysis could be continued with scenarios of ever-increasing proportions of renewable energy, even through to 100 percent. (Oddly enough, sustainable 100 percent renewable energy use was the practice of Aboriginal society for millennia prior to European settlement.) But these scenarios become more and more improbable. Instead I suggest that there is an easier, more cost effective and ultimately more sustainable starting point for bringing the problem under control.

If there is an overriding intent of broad scale environmental protection then the first and foremost objective must be zero population growth. I therefore recommend that this bill be rejected and replaced with a bill directed towards a policy of ramping Australia's population growth down to zero.

I ask that the committee set aside the usual emotive presuppositions that are often made in response to suggestions of population management. If environmental degradation is a serious problem then the immutable realities of the problem must be faced objectively. Preventing further environmental degradation in the face of ongoing exponential population growth is simply impossible. Any appearances to the contrary are illusory. If, and only if, population growth is zero first can there be any possibility of bringing energy-related environmental issues under control on an ongoing basis into the long term future.

Instead of focussing on renewable energy in the face of ongoing overall consumption growth, a policy of moving towards zero population growth should be implemented. Emotive presuppositions in response to such suggestions should be set aside.

The means of implementing a zero population growth policy is a broad subject of debate for another forum: first of all the objective needs to be firmly placed on the agenda.

In economic terms, the only type of economy which is *sustainable* in the true sense of the word is a steady state economy where population growth and tangible consumption growth are both zero. It is mathematically impossible to be otherwise. Substitution and technology improvements are merely conjuring tricks postponing the inevitable. Increasing renewable energy percentage targets is just one such conjuring trick distracting attention away from the core realities of the problem.

With a policy of moving towards zero population growth there is a hope that the problems that this bill is obviously seeking to address can start to be solved.

Yours sincerely,

Matt Brazier