

**Submission  
No 231**

## **SUSTAINABILITY OF ENERGY SUPPLY AND RESOURCES IN NSW**

**Organisation:** Braidwood Greens

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## **Braidwood Greens**

### **Inquiry into Sustainability of Energy Supply and Resources in NSW**

Thankyou for the opportunity to make a submission.

Braidwood Green is a local group of The Greens NSW and our membership base lies in and around the area of Braidwood in the Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council area.

Although we are not directly affected by coal-mining, there is strong interest in renewable energy possibilities in our region, with at least one community group forming to look at alternatives to fossil fuel-generated power locally.

Public transport options are extremely limited, and reliable, local renewable energy production would consolidate the possibilities for clean, non fossil fuel electric vehicle charging.

Please see our comments below in relation to the terms of reference of the the inquiry. They are not exhaustive and we can be available to contribute more if required.

The over-arching theme of this submission is the need for a holistic approach.

#### **1. The capacity and economic opportunities of renewable energy.**

The Greens believe that both the capacity and the opportunities of renewable energy are enormous, and governments can and must play an important role in facilitating them.

In 2013, when the car industry in South Australia came to an end, the federal government missed a huge opportunity to transform it into an electric vehicle production hub. Not only would this have provided ongoing employment for those who lost their jobs, it would have advanced the development of the electric car and helped to make them more affordable.

Such opportunities exist or can be created in NSW and governments need to proactively and imaginatively drive them forward.

More than ever before, governments need to be innovative, and they need to support local communities to be innovative too.

#### **2. Emerging trends in energy supply and exports, including investment and other financial arrangements.**

New thinking is needed in regard to expanding the existing system to ensure electricity supply, and a holistic approach must be adopted which looks at all aspects including things like the waste of power that results from running long powerlines.

Current solar cells will need replacement in 10 to 15 years. Will there be a government incentive to re-equip the systems that people initially invested in with their own funds?

Similarly, for those who feed into the grid, in the event of a lightning strike, households bear the cost of any damage. The same applies to small (such as smart phones) and large (such as computer-driven washing machines) devices, which are all susceptible to damage during lightning strikes. Voltage clamping, a form of transient power-line suppression, might be a cheap way to reduce these problems and at the very least, governments need to look at providing financial assistance to those whose systems are damaged. Subsidies which currently prop up unsustainable industries could be re-directed for such events.

### **3. The status of and forecasts for energy and resource markets.**

It has to be acknowledged that sooner or later Australia will need to catch up with the rest of the world, much of which is going in the opposite direction and moving away from coal, and other fossil fuels, yet we are carrying on with business as usual by propping up investors like Adani. It makes no sense to use tax-payers funds (or any other) to construct railway lines and other infrastructure that may soon be redundant.

The provision of power has become a means of making profit rather than a service providing a basic benefit, in the same way that buying dwellings is now something people do as an investment, making housing unaffordable for people who need shelter, with the provision of housing as a basic human need and right almost disregarded. Power and housing are now speculative instruments.

### **4. Effects on regional communities, water security, the environment and public health.**

Climate change is already impacting not just regional communities, but the wider population, with extreme weather events and drought affecting many in NSW. Higher temperatures have an impact on our ability to produce food, exacerbate the frequency and intensity of bushfires and threaten our water supplies. Temperature extremes also affect public health, and while the continued mining of coal, its domestic use and its export all contribute to global heating, coal mining itself is also a dangerous industry for the respiratory health of those involved and the communities in the vicinity of the mines.

Bandaid solutions are neither affordable nor effective, especially with public health resources already stretched beyond capacity. We need to look at preventative measures in not only health but in all our planning activities, some examples of which are suggested in this submission.

Innovative solutions as part of a holistic strategy to move us away from fossil fuels to an entirely renewable economy must be front and centre in the development of government policy, and if they are, regional communities will thrive, water supplies will be more certain, the environment can be healed and, in some places, restored, and public health will also improve. All this will require leadership, commitment and dedication on the part of governments in all spheres, but if we can all work co-operatively, it is possible.

### **5. Opportunities to support sustainable economic development in regional and other communities likely to be affected by changing energy and resource markets, including the role of government policies.**

With successive federal governments unwilling to adequately address the worsening threat of climate change, state governments play a crucial role in supporting local communities to move away from fossil fuel production, in the same way that a number of states in the US have independently introduced their own measures to reduce emissions despite national efforts to support the expansion of the fossil fuel industry.

Government policy that allows the coal industry to continue and even grow makes neither economic nor environmental sense, and nor is it sensible from a health perspective. There is little disagreement that the cost of not acting on climate change is going to be far higher than the costs of transitioning to clean energy production, and it is inexplicable that governments do not recognise this. Governments that continue to support fossil fuels will in the near future be viewed as climate criminals and it is likely that there will be class actions against governments and industry as climate change worsens even further.

In Queensland we have seen the ALP government recently approve the opening up of the Galilee Basin to coal mining, despite the huge contribution this will make to global emissions, the effect it will have on water supplies due to the unlimited access to water the approved and future mines will have, and the catastrophic effects global warming is already having on the Reef. The government in Queensland had an opportunity to reject this and all new mines and concentrate on rehabilitating the Reef and supporting the existing, lucrative tourism industry, and in the very near future the ramifications of its support for the coal industry will be recognised for the dangerous folly it was.

Here in NSW, the rejection of the Bylong Valley coal mine this week was welcome news not only for residents but for all those who have despaired at governments' unwillingness to do what is necessary to move away from fossil fuel production. Some in the community are bemoaning the loss of jobs, but what about the job creation from innovative new industries that do not rely on fossil fuels? What about the food production that can result from the land and water that is now not being destroyed by coal-mining? What about the health benefits? Etc, etc.

The development of large scale wind farms has divided many communities, exacerbated when some land-holders receive large payments for turbines situated on their land while those nearby receive nothing.

There are great opportunities for state governments to support small-scale, local, community-owned wind, solar and geothermal energy projects and production that will bring financial benefits at the same time as helping us move away from fossil fuel use. In addition, such projects will help preserve the natural landscapes valued by many.

## **6. Any other related matters.**

Individual households have made a great contribution to lowering emissions through their take-up of solar panels and feeding back to the grid, but with the large reductions in feed-in tariffs for each kilowatt these households generate, they those who are considering similar systems are discouraged from outlaying the investment to go solar.

Energy conservation has not been given enough priority. We are a profligate nation, with an enormous amount of power being used unnecessarily. Turning off the lights for an hour once a year does very little to address our attitude to conservation and is symptomatic of the bigger problem – we have become so used to having relatively cheap access to resources that we have become a nation of wasters. Not only do we use power unnecessarily, we also waste water, food and are large consumers of “stuff”, much of which we do not need. Consequently we generate huge amounts of waste, further increased by “inbuilt obsolescence” which has resulted in a mentality that causes us to buy a new one when the other, not very old version breaks down. Small communities have started their own “fix-it” enterprises but this is not a widespread practice and a mentality shift is required if we are to have any hope of a sustainable future. It is important to emphasise that such a mind-shift does not mean a reduction in “quality of life”. It will, however, require a commitment from industry as well as consumers to change.

There is a plethora of examples of how we use power unnecessarily. One is people using the TV to listen to radio in regional areas, where the reception is so poor or even non-existent that they have no other option. How much less power would be used if they could use a small, power-efficient device. This problem could be addressed by adequate government investment in transmission towers; apart from anything else, it is essential that people can access local ABC in times of emergency.

Another less obvious example is the modern washing machine. They may save water, but their cycles are a lot longer, they use more power and cause clothes to wear out faster as a result of the absence of deep immersion.

Last but by no means least is the issue of land clearing. With changes to native vegetation laws which encourage further clearing, the ongoing logging and wood-chipping of native forests, clearing for residential development and the huge areas of natural bush we are losing from bushfires, we are vastly reducing our capacity to not only soak up carbon dioxide but also to maintain moisture in the soil and air, which in turn affects the amount of rain we can expect to fall, let alone the unacceptable contribution we are making to flora, fauna and fungi extinctions from the loss of habitat.

We need leadership in all areas, and at the moment there is little or none. How we move into the future will depend on whether or not we can adopt a holistic approach to the problems we face. The current State Government and those which proceed it have both the opportunity and the responsibility to act now to ensure that we do everything we can to decelerate climate change and have access to clean energy into the future.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to make a submission and for holding this inquiry in the first place.

Catherine Moore

convenor/secretary  
on behalf of Braidwood Greens  
September 2019  
(by email)