

**GRIEVANCE DEBATE: Renewable Energy**

**Mr ANDREN** (Calare) (5.13 p.m.)—*Today I grieve for the failure of this government to put in place meaningful targets for alternative energy development and greenhouse gas reduction.* The Prime Minister says reliable low-cost energy makes our lives easier. It may make our lives easier in the short term, but life will not be easy if we follow our current path. In that same July speech, the PM said that we have extensive renewable energy resources. He cited hydro, wind and solar as representing a small but growing part of our energy mix. The wind power industry, for one, is sadly disillusioned by the lack of incentives for wind power generation at a national level. To date, wind power generation has largely been the product of the existing fossil fuel electricity industry. The Crookwell and Blayney wind farms in and near my electorate are a product of a coal based electricity industry that has no incentive to move away from coal generation to truly build a renewable generation industry. Indeed, I have rarely seen all the Crookwell turbines working. There is little commercial imperative to get them up and running when they do break down. Yet those companies are still happy to flog what they call green energy. Some may come from hydro, but the turbines seem more about PR than about serious green power.

How much better it would be if there were a truly independent green power industry, working in competition with fossil fuel power generation, feeding into the grid with an imperative to be up and running all the time. But to achieve this, we need new independent players in the market—players such as Gamesa Energy Australia and other companies that want to invest but are totally frustrated by the lack of any reasonable mandatory renewable energy targets. Proposals for a 100-megawatt wind farm at Paling Yards, south of Oberon, are stalled for want of a genuine MRET. The Prime Minister's head-in-the-coal response to warnings from enlightened sectors of industry, such as the Business Roundtable on Climate Change, that we need to cut emissions by the equivalent of 10 per cent each decade for the next five decades was dismissed out of hand on last week's Four Corners program.

While solar initiatives for North Adelaide might look proactive, the lack of commitment to an increase in the pathetic two per cent MRET means that the value of renewable energy certificates to install a 300-litre solar water heater in New South Wales has halved since the decision was made to confirm the existing MRE target. Meanwhile, the price of solar units goes up through natural increase while the rebate heads south. Is that a proactive energy policy? Instead of extending the MRET between 2010 and 2020, with targets increasing to 20,000 gigawatt hours, the government has frozen the target at 9½ thousand gigawatt hours. In the meantime, the UK has adopted targets of 10 per cent by 2010 and 20 per cent by 2020. Germany has a 12 per cent target for 2010, and India, Greece and even the US outstrip our current target, which effectively becomes a pathetic 1.1 per cent by 2020. That net negative target is exactly the reason that the Paling Yards wind farm is in a holding pattern. There is no incentive to invest.

As we fiddle with highly questionable carbon sequestration as a means of prolonging fossil fuel power, we do not even maintain a reasonable MRET,

despite the PM talking up hydro, wind and solar as representing a small but growing part of our energy mix—small, yes; growing, I think not. Indeed, alternative energy developments, which are vital to stall and then reduce carbon emissions, are withering on the vine while the government plays with geosequestration and nuclear, which could not reduce carbon emissions in 15 years—even if taxpayer-subsidised work were to begin on a reactor tomorrow.

Cost, time, security and the waste dilemma are four telling strikes against nuclear. It is in no way a clean energy until the Prime Minister, his current inquiry or anyone else can tell me and the rest of the community just how we could safely get rid of the waste. While the suggested growth in nuclear power generation around the world, particularly in India and China, is used as justification for our own venture into such energy production, let me tell you about Sweden. As Sweden begins decommissioning its nuclear power plants, time is running out in that country to find a new way to make 9,000 tonnes of spent nuclear fuel safe for the next 100,000 years. Rather than ramping up nuclear, Swedes voted for the phasing out of this technology, with the last of the country's 12 reactors due to be closed down over the next few years.

Despite some confidence being expressed in a copper canister-bentonite clay encasement for this waste as the safest way to store it 500 metres under the sea, the method is widely regarded as old technology from the 1970s that just will not work. With the US unable to bury its waste under Yucca Mountain or anywhere else because of similar storage dilemmas, such as groundwater contamination and radiation leakage fears, the Swedish Office for Nuclear Waste Review says simply that no-one in the world has a solution. Yet the PM said in July that there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that nuclear power has an important part to play in stabilising atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide. What a way of doing it: with a technology promoted as green that cannot get rid of the most unstable toxic waste known to man—waste that will become the problem of future generations. They will be very grateful indeed that we took that clean, green route!

As well as developing real clean, green alternatives and sensibly phasing out nuclear, Sweden has embarked on a mission to become oil free by 2020. Its Commission on Oil Independence, headed by Prime Minister Goran Persson, has set the ambitious target of reducing oil in road transport by 40 to 50 per cent, eliminating oil from heating, reducing industry oil use by 20 to 40 per cent, large-scale production of biofuels, and injecting much more into public transport. In fact, the Swedish Public Transport Association anticipates an increase of 30 per cent in public transport use during the period 2006 to 2020. It is planned to significantly increase investment in new fast train connections between major cities, with a guaranteed low GST or VAT rate on train journeys. In Australia, the state government in New South Wales has not even the wit to have an Orange-Sydney XPT daily return service for commuters from the central west.

Sweden plans to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases by 60 to 80 per cent by 2050 through a plan that makes our head-in-the sand policies look terminally ill by comparison. In addition, Sweden is planning far more efficient use of electricity in industry and a ramping-up of wind power as one of the ingredients. Solar cells, wave power and hydrogen gas for fuel cells are also part of the equation.

I know that the energy mix is slightly different in this country, but it is absolutely important that we do not just stick our hands in the sand and think that because we have unlimited reserves of coal, that is the answer. While cleaner coal research is important, we are certainly not anywhere near developing alternatives that will meaningfully fill in the energy gap. I will mention here the bill introduced today by my Independent colleagues, the [Fuel Quality Standards \(Renewable Content of Motor Vehicle Fuel\) Amendment Bill 2006](#), and the call for biofuel production, especially ethanol, in this country in far greater quantities. In a speech I gave earlier year, I mentioned things like this. That speech had to be incorporated into Hansard because the government gagged debate on the [Renewable Energy \(Electricity\) Amendment Bill 2006](#). Imagine a government that is so contemptuous of parliament, at this time in our history, that it would guillotine such a debate. Rather than being the unchallengeable measure of progress, GDP could well be the villain in this crisis unless our current energy regime is reviewed.

The WWF—which I know is the government's favourite environmental lobby group—has come out with a report called A prosperous low carbon future. The report suggests, among other things, that we get serious about a carbon tax, an emissions trading scheme or a combination of both. The report outlines an affordable 30 per cent reduction in emissions—not the doomsday or 'midnight' economic scenario of such a greenhouse reduction target that the PM talks about if we were to go down that reduction path. If we do not take these measures, long after he and I have left this planet it really will be midnight.