

**House of Representatives Hansard**  
**RENEWABLE ENERGY (ELECTRICITY) AMENDMENT BILL 2006**  
**Second Reading**

**20/06/2006**

**Mr ANDREN** (Calare) (6.05 p.m.)—Mr Deputy Speaker, I seek your indulgence on a procedural matter.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr McMullan)**—The member did give me the courtesy of advising me in advance of his intention to do this. I make it clear I am not very comfortable with this procedure but I am aware of the precedent and I am aware of the advice that the member has received, so I will hear him.

**Mr ANDREN**—Mr Deputy Speaker, with the curtailing of the debate, I seek leave to have my written speech incorporated in *Hansard*.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**—Leave is granted. Can I make it clear that I think this is a matter that the Procedure Committee might need to look at because it does not reflect the intention of the House and the resolution which it carried. But there is a precedent. The member for Calare has acted in accordance with it and so has the minister.

*The speech read as follows—*

***This bill represents another lost opportunity for this government to get serious about supporting renewable energy sources for the benefit of future generations of Australians.***

In the debate on the Renewable Energy (Electricity) Bill 2000, which introduced the Mandatory Renewable Energy Target – the MRET – I expressed my concern about the adequacy of the government's target of an additional 9,500 gigawatt hours of electricity from renewable sources per year, especially when the original target was to be an additional 2% rather than a set figure.

Apart from the fact 2% target was in itself inadequate I was concerned that as our electricity output increased, the 9,500 megawatt hours target decreases in percentage terms.

The debate about the MRET and greenhouse gas emissions has always been skewed by interpretations of figures, usually by the government trying to put us ahead of the game in comparison to greenhouse gas emission levels in the early nineties.

The parliamentary secretary's introductory speech on this bill still attempts the same trick, celebrating the 9,500 gigawatt hours target as "an increase of over 50 per cent above the 16,000 gigawatt-hour level of renewable electricity generated in 1997".

This debate should not be about fiddling the figures against the past, it should be about the future. The future is why we need renewable energy resources. If future generations are to enjoy the same access to electricity that we take for granted – we need a much stronger, ongoing commitment to renewable energy sources now. Indeed if we take the better option of combining renewable energy development with sensible conservation measures we'd be well on the way to sustainable energy use.

The parliamentary secretary went on to celebrate the fact the current MRET would "bring the renewable share of electricity consumption in 2010 to around 11 per cent." This is not worth a shout when the original intention of the MRET scheme was to achieve a total renewable energy share of 12.7% by 2010.

The fact we are now almost 2% off the pace bears out my concerns that changing the target from a percentage to a set level of gigawatt hours would result in a lesser share of energy coming from renewable sources.

The bill before us now will continue to do this, as it retains the 9,500 gigawatt hours target and extends its lifespan by ten years to 2020. This is entirely unacceptable.

Even the government's own review of the MRET recommended the life of the MRET scheme be extended from 2010 to 2020, with the targets increasing to 20,000 gigawatt hours by this time. Though this would still only represent a 2% target, the government did not accept this recommendation.

The 9,500 gigawatt hours MRET for new renewable energy output puts us well behind other countries. The UK has adopted targets for additional renewable energy of 10% by 2010 and 20% by 2020. Germany has a 12% target for 2010, and the US, India and Greece out-strip our current targets.

The MRET review also found the renewable energy sector currently employs 6000 people directly, and employment in the sector is growing. Undoubtedly such growth would be accelerated with a more robust MRET of 10%. This would also more appropriately reflect the Prime Minister's aim for the MRET scheme, which he stated in 1997, was to: "accelerate the uptake of renewable energy ... and provide a larger base for the development of commercially competitive renewable energy."

This is the energy debate we should be having – not the political distraction of the Prime Minister's nuclear debate. Our lack of commitment to alternative and renewable energy sources is not only pathetic but inherently dangerous and ominous for future generations who will have to deal with our lazy negligence.

Nuclear power stations cost an absolute fortune and consume much energy depleting fuel in their construction. They take 10 to 15 years to get up and running and then use huge amounts of energy to extract the finite and very impure uranium ore required to run them. There is also the little problem of what to do with the indestructible radioactive waste.

Why not encourage a mix of wave, wind, hydrogen, and most importantly solar energy initiatives? Because these are not in the interest of the mining and oil sectors.

Let's talk about solar energy, in which we once led the world until a lack of interest and support from successive governments saw our technological advances go offshore. Forward looking governments in Europe took up our advances while we continued to promote quarrying of climate-destroying minerals for short-term and short-sighted economic gain.

As a global energy crisis looms large, our government and most western governments go for a quick fix nuclear option, followed by emerging economies like India, China and now Indonesia – sitting as it does on an earthquake fault line. All alternative energy sources have their limitations, be they wind, ethanol or hydrogen, but a source of infinite energy shines on the planet every day and has the potential to fuel our homes and our transport.

We need to pick up our development of solar technology. It is not completely off the drawing board, but one can be forgiven for not knowing anything about it, given the government's lack of commitment to the issue.

We have schools at both the University of NSW and the ANU making significant inroads in the development of photovoltaic technology, especially in reducing the cost of producing photovoltaic cells, which is attracting overseas attention. Our government should be doing what it can to encourage such developments here in Australia rather than lose the technology, and those who created it, offshore.

Until the government gets serious about its mandatory renewable energy targets and sanctions at least a 5% target for 2010, or even better 10%, I cannot support this bill.