



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Renewable Energy**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 14 November 2023**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

<b>Date</b> Tuesday, 14 November 2023	<b>Source</b> House
<b>Page</b> 80	<b>Proof</b> Yes
<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Responder</b>
<b>Speaker</b> O'Brien, Ted MP	<b>Question No.</b>

**Mr TED O'BRIEN** (Fairfax) (19:50): Labor's reckless indifference towards regional communities is jeopardising their target of 82 per cent renewables by 2030 and up to 100 per cent thereafter. To be clear, the coalition has never supported Labor's renewables-only strategy for decarbonising the Australian electricity grid. We don't believe the renewables-only approach is the way to decarbonise the system. Instead, we back an all-of-the-above approach. We do believe that there's an important role for renewables, but we should be aiming for the optimum level of renewables, not the maximum level. But Labor has adopted this renewables-only approach, and the problem is that their plan is not working.

What we see now from the market experts is that they are publicly saying that Labor's plan is running at half the pace that it should. This won't change anytime soon, because we also know that investment in renewables has now hit its lowest ebb in years. After year-on-year increases under the coalition, we now see that final investment decision in renewables has dropped by about 40 per cent under Labor for new renewable generation projects. Their plan isn't working. You would think that, when their plan isn't working, they would be recalibrating the plan. They might decide to do what they should've done in the beginning and get either Treasury, the department or the Productivity Commission to model the viability of the plan and see the impact that it would have and whether or not they'd be able to achieve it. But they haven't done that. Instead, falling so short, they've become desperate and are steamrolling regional communities—for example, the Hunter region.

The government opened public consultation for the Hunter offshore wind zone in February and closed it in April. It was a 65-day public consultation. My office was inundated with complaints from different communities, in particular Norah Head. I visited Norah Head in July. In an open forum, I heard from the community that most of them didn't even know that there was a public consultation about this offshore wind zone. Residents weren't even told about it. Unions had been coopted to encourage members to make positive submissions. Senior citizens had been denied the right to make submissions that were handwritten. There were too few public consultation forums. I heard complaints about residents asking very reasonable questions at those that were held and not getting enough answers—not getting any answers in some cases. There were complaints about threats to people's way of life and to their livelihoods, whether that be tourism or fisheries.

On the day that I was at Norah Head I gave the government credit, because the minister had come out that very day and announced that he would ensure there was a community engagement review. This was tantamount to an admission that their community engagement process for all such projects wasn't working; it was broken. I gave him credit that at least maybe the government was listening, but within a fortnight the minister then declared that zone.

So, on one hand, he concedes that the process is flawed, but he then goes ahead and announces the zone.

We have therefore called on the minister to rescind that declaration and to fix the broken process before then reopening for public consultations. Let me make it clear: no-one in that community was talking about their concerns being anti action on climate change. It was quite the opposite! None of them were against the technology of wind—quite the opposite! Their concern came down to not giving social consent—a lack of social licence and not being engaged. I'm scared, because I've heard similar concerns out of the Illawarra. They need to listen to communities.