

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Renewable Energy

Mr TED O'BRIEN (Fairfax) (15:55): Today, on the first day in the parliamentary year, hundreds of Australians descend on Parliament House to protest the treatment of their communities by the Albanese government in their reckless rollout of an 82 per cent renewables grid.

Here we have a matter of public importance, a very important procedure of the parliament set aside to host this very debate, yet there's one person missing from this chamber right now. One chamber, one minister—and that minister is missing. The very minister who is responsible has gone AWOL from this very debate. It matters not how profound the contributions might be from either side of the chamber today. What speaks loudest is the minister's absence from this chamber. On the very day that regional communities have come to parliament to say, 'The minister is not listening,' the minister decides he will not even pay the courtesy to the parliament, let alone the Australian people, of attending the debate for which he is responsible! This tells you everything about the business model of the Labor Party: deception and deflection.

Now, we already know their deception. It's not just their broken promise on the stage 3 tax cuts. In the portfolio of climate and energy, there is not a promise they make that they cannot break. There is not a community that they're not prepared to hurt in the process. If you look at their promise of 43 per cent emissions reduction by 2030, after years under the coalition, where emissions were coming down, right now, under this Labor government, emissions are actually going up. They have no chance of achieving their 2030 emissions target—Buckley's chance! But will they come forward and come clean to the Australian people? Of course not.

What about their promise of a \$275 reduction in household power bills? Everybody knows that is untrue. In some parts of Australia prices have gone up by \$1,000 since they came to office, but to this day they refuse to stand at this dispatch box and concede they told an untruth. They still pretend they're going to achieve it. How about the EVs? Sales of EVs by 2030 will represent 89 per cent of all sales in Australia. Their own department says, in fact, it's going to be 27 per cent. Have they conceded? No, they have not. It is all about deception.

But one of their greatest deceptions is the idea of an 82 per cent renewables grid by 2030. It fails on every count. It fails due to economics. It fails due to engineering. It fails due to social impact. It fails due to environmental impact. And how have they gone to date? An unmitigated failure. Under this government that boasts so much about its renewables-only plan, investment in renewables has dropped. It's down by 40 per cent—absolute disaster! You had the market

operator, in its draft integrated system plan released only in December, doing sensitivity analyses. On supply chain constraints alone, drags, at 82, are already down to the early 60 per cents. You've got the Clean Energy Council saying, as a result of the September quarter of deal closures in renewables, that it's running at one-tenth of Labor's plan. They've come into government, and, with all their talk about emissions going down, they're going up; with all the talk about 82 per cent renewables, they're failing.

On our side of the parliament, we've got no problem with renewables. Indeed, look at our track record in government. But the objective is to have the optimum level of renewables, not the maximum level. We believe in an all-of-the-above approach, not a renewables-only approach.

But what happens, especially with this absent minister, with his ideological zealotry, when he knows his targets have fallen short? Desperation kicks in. And that is what we are seeing now. He is prepared to display reckless indifference towards regional communities because he is desperate and he knows he will not reach that target. Now, that is why he is prepared to ensure, as to baseload power, 90 per cent exits the grid by 2034; it's why he's trying to kill off gas—to effectively bring Australia's energy security to a point where there's no choice but to take his 82 per cent renewables. It's why he's introduced a capacity investment scheme with a blank cheque and won't tell us how much it's going to cost—to make sure renewables go through. It's also why—and this is the biggest hit of the lot—he is steamrolling regional communities.

Let's take just one example only. Let's take the Hunter offshore wind zone. Here we have a community that was meant to be consulted about a potential zone. That community has made it very clear: its residents, by majority, didn't even know there was a consultation on. They had made that clear after it came out that a consultation had come and gone. I went there; I spoke to them; I had public forums. The minister has refused to have public forums there. They didn't even know it was on. The union movement was co-opted, encouraged, to make positive submissions into the process. So don't worry about the residents who live there! Don't worry about the business owners whose entire incomes are based on that region! Get the union members to send in positive submissions! There were stories of senior citizens being told they could not submit their written submissions because they were written; stories of basic, normal questions by the community not being answered.

When I was in Norah Head listening to the community on some of this, and doing a fair bit of media, the minister came out and publicly announced that he was going to commission a community engagement review. I have to say: I supported his move. It was a concession on his part; maybe this community engagement review was going to fix the problem that he was recognising. But within only a week—one week later—he'd declared that zone. So think about this. The minister comes out and says, 'I concede the community engagement process is broken,' and then goes on and

declares a zone on the basis of that very broken community engagement process. And he expects that community to be patting him on the back?

And talking about AWOL, by the way, where is the member for Dobell in this chamber? Where is the member for Paterson? They're all back in the minister's office, hiding away, full of deception and deflection on this very debate. There are members of their community in this gallery today, and those members are not prepared to come in this chamber and debate. That is why, for that offshore wind farm zone, we have said to the government they should rescind that declaration and they should fix that community engagement process before reopening for public consultation.

The minister stood in question time just today and said his community engagement review is done and is great. He only mentioned one stakeholder who was apparently there at his announcement, and that was the National Farmers Federation. I'll finish with the National Farmers Federation's media release on that review. It leads, '92 per cent of people dissatisfied with community engagement on renewables.' It goes on to say:

The National Farmers' Federation ... has raised red flags the report's recommendations doesn't even touch the sides in addressing the problems being felt across Australia.

Don't blame the commissioner, who had to draft it. Blame the minister, whose terms of reference made it crystal clear that the objective was to ensure a rapid, accelerated rollout of renewables, not to put communities at the centre, which is precisely what he should be doing.