

ASIAN RENEWABLE ENERGY HUB

Statement

HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral) [2.14 am]: Understanding the late, or early, hour of this morning, I feel like it is coming into Broome time, because in Broome we get up very early in the morning, so I am getting a little wound up here to start the day! I rise to discuss the Asian Renewable Energy Hub, which is a major project coming to the Pilbara region, and one that I support in principle, but that I believe should be done in accordance with the highest environmental standards, unlike the state government. The project will provide an incredible opportunity to transform the north by creating a sustainable energy source that can deliver outcomes for our iron ore industry, fertiliser industry and hydrogen industry. It can provide additional power for Port Hedland and the Pilbara by creating downstream processing utilising seawater, and renewable power to produce green hydrogen and ammonia as stored renewable energy, replacing the transmission of power to South-East Asia as outlined in the original proposal.

It is noted that the original proposal was to export power by cable. This has been replaced with the idea of a desalination plant with intake and discharge pipelines, and creating ammonia product that would then be exported via pipelines and loaded out into commonwealth waters to be shipped 20 kilometres offshore. There are also plans to replace the fly-in fly-out or drive-in drive-out workforce with a larger accommodation space, and that will be quite considerable. The project will provide three gigawatts of power generation for use for the Pilbara.

The revised project has been rejected under the commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, because of its unacceptable impacts on sensitive wetlands and other habitats in the region of Eighty Mile Beach. However, yesterday—or it might be the day before now; I am a little confused about what day it was!—we heard the Minister for Regional Development blaming the federal government about the EPBC act and the decision, and making rather nonsensical comparisons with the Adani project. As we move into the federal election space, we understand that the Labor Party is particularly focused on garnering as much support as it can from those who have concerns for the environment, but I can assure members that this position simply will not cut it with the environmental movement.

I know people would like to get home to their beds, but the reason I am giving this statement today is that I got a text message from Mr Martin Pritchard, CEO of Environs Kimberley, yesterday, and I want to read it into *Hansard*, because I think it is very important. It says —

Hi Neil, We support minister Ley's decision. Renewable Energy cannot come at a cost of internationally significant wetlands, Australia is a signatory to the Ramsar Convention as well as the JAMBA and ROKAMBA. 80 Mile Beach is a major turtle nesting area, they are a threatened species. We call on the McGowan government to take a responsible approach to development, we have globally significant environmental assets and we welcome the Commonwealth government's approach to assessing development in sensitive areas like this. Cheers, Martin

That came from Environs Kimberley. There was a statement from the minister's spokesperson on 23 June and it came directly from the minister's office. It said —

It is important to note, the original approved proposal for the Asian Renewable Energy Hub that can provide wind and solar renewable energy (approved in December 2020) remains in place.

Minister Ley last week found that a revised proposal, involving expansion through the Eighty-mile Beach RAMSAR site and an ammonia plant, was 'Clearly Unacceptable' in accordance with the EPBC Act.

The proponent can resubmit a revised proposal.

I have one simple comment, and I counsel those opposite who have attempted to make a point out of this to stop trying to blame others and get involved to see whether they can get this proposal to conform with acceptable environmental standards. I live in the region and I am very passionate about the environment in my region, but I am also passionate about economic development. If I were in government, if I were the Minister for State Development, Jobs and Trade, or the Minister for Regional Development, I would take every step I could to work with the proponent to ensure that this project met the requirements and addressed the environmental issues.

So that is my counsel for the morning. I hope people will take it for what it is because I believe that is the right approach. This is a visionary project, but it does not have carte blanche for a proponent to bulldoze its way through the environment, and this should not be the approach of those opposite.