

Jack Gilding speech for March in March, Hobart 16 March 2014

Thanks Margaret. I want to make three points:

1. renewable energy is an essential part of our response to climate change **and** a great source of jobs and income for Tasmania
2. Tony Abbott's attacks on carbon pricing and the renewable energy target are ideologically driven. They're not about saving people money – in fact they will probably cost people money¹,
3. and most importantly, there is important action we can take **now** to support the shift to renewable energy.

Over two years ago, the chief economist at the International Energy Agency – an organisation that has historically represented the interests of the fossil fuel industry - warned that we only had five years to change how we use energy.

He said: "The door is closing. I am very worried – if we don't change direction now on how we use energy, we will end up beyond what scientists tell us is the minimum [for safety]. The door will be closed forever."²

The good news is that we are starting to move in the right direction:

- CO2 emissions from electricity generation in Australia have been going down since 2009.
- We are getting less of our electricity from coal and more from wind and solar.³

The standout success story is the growth of household solar. Five million Australians live in homes that have solar electricity, hot water or both. They are saving themselves money, and they are contributing to lower wholesale electricity prices and reducing network costs.⁴

Tasmania has abundant renewable energy potential: wind, solar, and small hydro, tidal and wave power. Renewable energy in Tasmania already employs more people than native forestry⁵ and there is great potential for expansion of the renewable energy industry here.

But Tony Abbott want to reverse this progress

If, as the International Energy Agency says, the door to a safe future is closing soon, Tony Abbott clearly intends to lock the door and throw away the key.

Let's look at just two policies the Abbott government is attempting to reverse: the price on carbon and the Renewable Energy Target.

The current carbon tax is far less than the real cost of the damage done, but it is achieving the intended effect, making renewable energy cheaper and fossil fuel energy a bit dearer. Tony Abbott opposes the carbon tax not because it costs consumers money but because it is making renewable energy more affordable. The big fossil fuel generators and retailers are losing their control and losing their profits.

The Renewable Energy Target (or RET for short) was recently reviewed and shown to be effective and affordable⁶. In fact the part that supports household solar actually costs consumers nothing. The small cost is offset by the fact that solar power drives down wholesale energy prices.⁷

But Tony Abbott has announced another review of the RET, creating damaging market uncertainty. He has appointed a committee headed by ex-Caltex chairman Dick Warburton⁸ whose position on climate change is, (and I quote) "there's huge debate about whether carbon dioxide is the main cause"⁹.

The stakes in this battle between the fossil fuel lobby and a safe future for all of us couldn't be higher. Despite the \$10 billion dollars a year that the Australian taxpayer subsidises the fossil fuel industry¹⁰, they know their future is under threat. Either the fossil fuel industry dies or our civilisation does, and the result is by no means certain.

What can we do about it?

For better *and* worse we live in a global ecosystem, a global economy and a global society. When glaciers melt in Greenland, sea level rises in the Derwent Estuary. When merchant bankers in the USA resell shonky rural mortgages, and it all comes unstuck, people around the world lose their jobs.

Yes, it is important to take individual actions and reduce our own fossil fuel use. But that is not enough. There is no point in living in well insulated houses powered by renewable energy and riding electric bikes while the Great Barrier Reef is damaged to export coal that can't be burnt without destroying the planet.

I urge you to make your voice heard to both state and federal politicians.

- Tell them that renewable energy is essential and affordable - and a great source of jobs and income for Tasmania
- Tell them that we need a price on carbon
- Tell them that the Renewable Energy Target works

Sign up with Solar Citizens¹¹ to show that you are one of more than a million Australian households that believe that solar power is part of the solution.

Support those courageous people who are taking direct action to prevent new coal mines being built and to prevent prime farm land being destroyed by coal seam gas development.

Don't be disheartened by apparent political set-backs or the enormity of the task. I have spoken to Tasmanian state and federal politicians from of all political parties and found them accessible and prepared to listen. They need to hear the message that a sustainable future is good for the environment, good for jobs, and good for Tasmania – and they need to hear it personally from you.

Thankyou.

jack.gilding@backroad.com.au

¹ RET cuts will slash green investment, destabilise grid, lift prices, Sophie Vorrath on 12 Mar 2014
<http://reneweconomy.com.au/2014/ret-cuts-will-slash-green-investment-destabilise-grid-lift-prices-41224>

² Fatih Birol quoted in *World headed for irreversible climate change in five years, IEA warns*, Fiona Harvey, The Guardian, Wednesday 9 November 2011,
<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2011/nov/09/fossil-fuel-infrastructure-climate-change>

³ pitt&sherry CEDEX® Electricity Update March 2014, <http://www.pittsh.com.au/cedex/> but note the caveats that coal use may begin to increase again, particularly if the RET is cut back.

⁴ Graph of the Day: Australia's 5 million "solar heroes", Sam Parkinson 10 Mar 2014
<http://reneweconomy.com.au/2014/graph-of-the-day-australias-5-million-solar-heroes-52884>

⁵ [Hydro Tasmania](#) employs over 1100 people. The Clean Energy Council estimates that there are around 460 equivalent full time jobs in the solar PV industry in Tasmania (submission to Tasmanian Economic Regulator, October 2013). The Australia Institute estimates that there are currently probably less than 1000 people employed in native forestry in Tasmania ([Chipping away at Tasmania's future](#), p.15).

-
- ⁶ Climate authority gives green light for boom in big renewables, Giles Parkinson 19 Dec 2012,
<http://reneweconomy.com.au/2012/climate-authority-gives-green-light-for-boom-in-big-renewables-41039>
- ⁷ Parkinson 2014, Subsidies for rooftop solar – zero net cost to households, Giles Parkinson, 19 Feb 2014
<http://reneweconomy.com.au/2014/subsidies-for-rooftop-solar-zero-net-cost-to-households-66397>
- ⁸ Disclosure doubts cloud renewable energy target panellists, 24Feb 2014, Peter Hannam,
<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/disclosure-doubts-cloud-renewable-energy-target-panellists-20140224-33cfq.html>
- ⁹ *Business leader criticises ETS but wants carbon tax*, ABC AM, 2 Dec 2008.
<http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2009/s2759246.htm>
- ¹⁰ How your taxes subsidise fossil fuels
<http://www.marketforces.org.au/ffs/where-your-taxes-go/>
- ¹¹ <http://www.solarcitizens.org.au/protecttheret> The Australian Solar Council also has a campaign at
<https://solar.org.au/savesolar/>