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Greens Senator Scott Ludlam.

Greens look to renewable future as WA gets ready to revisit the polls (Page 1 of 4)

Martin Kovacs, 11 Mar 2014

With Western Australians set to revisit the polls on 5 April after the High Court declared the state's federal Senate election result void, the Senate's ultimate composition again hangs finely in the balance and along with it the passage of high-profile environmental and energy-related legislation.

The Greens have been firmly on the front foot since the likelihood of a re-election became apparent, stating the Australian renewable energy sector will suffer at the hands of Coalition policy should Senator Scott Ludlam lose his seat.

Indeed, with Ludlam having lost his seat in last year's first count before retaining it in the recount, the potential exists for a significant shift in the balance of Senate power.

The Coalition, which campaigned heavily on the repeal of the carbon tax—and which under its Direct Action Plan also plans to abolish the Clean Energy Finance Corporation—will certainly be hoping this is the case, having thus far been thwarted by the current Senate status quo.

In December last year, the Greens, along with the Labor party and crossbenchers, combined to block the passage of the *Clean Energy Finance Corporation (Abolition) Bill 2013*, and the Greens state, with new senators set to take their respective seats on 1 July, should Ludlam hold his seat and Labor win two seats in the re-election, the numbers required to prevent the legislation's passage will be retained.

"In the age of dangerous climate change, there is nothing more important than the rapid adoption of clean energy and the phase-out of polluting coal and gas plants," the Greens claim, stating there are credible renewable alternatives to current fossil fuel generation.

The argument for renewable energy is, of course, compelling on any number of levels, both from an environmental and economic perspective, however it is the economics which are currently a sticking point, and the gas industry, which promotes itself as a cleaner alternative, would certainly take exception at being lumped in with the coal industry.

By way of evidence of the feasibility of renewable energy, the Greens offer up their *Energy 2029* plan, delivered in February 2013, stating it demonstrates the southwest WA grid can become 100% renewable by the year 2029, with up to 26,000 jobs created as a result, at roughly the same cost as business as usual.

In light of the potential for the political situation to change markedly in a little under a month, it is worthwhile revisiting elements of the Greens' plan in the context of the composition, and the ever-present accompanying political push and pull, of the Australian energy industry.

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Martin Kovacs, 11 Mar 2014

The Greens' *Energy 2029* plan builds on five principles, paraphrased as:

1. Harnessing WA's vast and abundant renewable resources: WA receives more solar radiation than most places on earth, yet has among the lowest solar electricity generation of all sunny states; in addition, WA is blessed with plentiful wind, wave, geothermal and biomass energy.
2. Achieving "better than baseload" generation: rather than coal generators providing a fixed amount of energy and gas generators picking up the surplus, renewable sources should provide as much energy as they are capable of producing, and controllable (dispatchable) sources (including biomass, geothermal and pumped hydro and wave generators) then pick up the remainder.
3. Flattening our peak demand profile: using a combination of initiatives, such as the installation of rooftop solar photovoltaic (PV) systems, flattening our demand profile and avoiding new coal or gas-powered stations being built altogether.
4. Deep cuts to energy demand through energy efficiency and fuel switching: although overall energy consumption in WA is increasing, much of this is driven by energy inefficiency—much can be done to cut our energy needs while still maintaining quality of life.
5. A greater reliance on electricity from sectors dependent on liquid fuels: proposing greater reliance on electricity from sectors such as transport, mining and manufacturing; by 2029 reducing the volume of liquid fossil fuels consumed in these industries by 30-50% through switching to renewable energy.

The report, featuring an extract from Sustainable Energy Now's *SEN WA 100% Renewable Energy on the SWIS 2029 – Full Report (2013)*, canvasses three scenarios in its "roadmap" to 2029:

- Scenario one: solar thermal dominant with backup biomass at solar CST (concentrating solar thermal) plants;
- Scenario two: a diverse mix with wind and solar PV dominant, and;
- Scenario three: business as usual without carbon capture and storage or efficiency/waste reduction gains.

Certainly, the *Energy 2029* report is compelling on a number of levels, and more than anything presents a stark case for increased political movement at a state and federal level on renewable energy, along with establishing a

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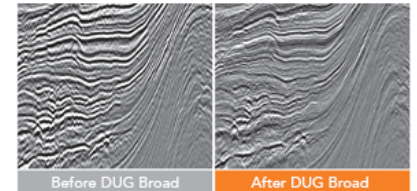
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context as to the importance of making short-term changes.

The Greens claim there is an economic imperative to switch to renewable sources in the (comparative) short term, stating Australia's oil, gas and coal reserves are becoming increasingly costly to extract, with the price of these fossil fuels to continue to rise due to growing demand, dwindling supplies and rising costs of extraction.

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Greens Senator Scott Ludlam.

Greens look to renewable future as WA gets ready to revisit the polls (Page 3 of 4)

Martin Kovacs, 11 Mar 2014

The potential future economic benefits of a move towards renewable generation are evident, yet the short-term link between peak oil and gas and a concerted and collective push to embrace renewable technologies is surely a matter of economics, in that the market will of its own accord determine if an imperative exists and then act accordingly.

Fossil fuels are indisputably becoming increasingly difficult to extract, requiring the development of new technologies to do so, and yet the petroleum industry continues to adapt and innovate, driven by a tangible economic incentive, which has resulted in a number of significant technological breakthroughs in recent years.

By its very nature, the energy industry is defined by its long-term potential, and if fossil fuels become uneconomic, investment will be redirected. Indeed, with Western Australia's petroleum sector valued at a record \$24.7 B in 2013, the market clearly currently holds long-term allure.

As noted in the report, many nations around the world are employing renewable sources in their respective energy mixes, with global investment rising throughout the 21st century. The dichotomy of action, however, is perhaps also illustrated by the report itself, which points out that China, *Australia's biggest customer for fossil fuel exports*, is also a *world leader in renewable energy*, with the most installed renewable power and the largest investment.

Of course, the argument that state and federal governments should be doing more to encourage the growth of nascent renewable energy industries is very much a matter for debate. In fact, to take anything away from the *Energy 2029* report it is a tangible sense of frustration with a perceived lack of political will to implement significant change.

In terms of critique of respective Australian governments' attitudes towards climate change (and along with it clean energy policy), the Greens by any measure have an abundance of material to work with.

On both sides of the political fence climate change policy has been a hodgepodge of broken promises and political opportunism, and consequently has proven a double-edged sword for those who have chosen to wield it, claiming a number of political scalps along the way.

Mainstream political discourse bears a tenuous at best connection with climate change science: proposed emission trading schemes and the carbon tax are evidence enough of this.

As stated in the *Energy 2029* report of the previous federal government:

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"The Australian government is a perfect example of the self-defeating contradiction at the heart of modern climate politics.

"It is hard to imagine a starker act of institutional cognitive dissonance than investing in renewable energy to prevent climate change, while simultaneously promoting a massive and unregulated expansion of fossil fuel exports."

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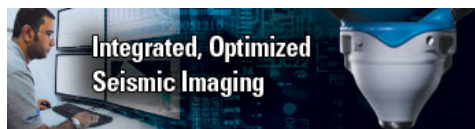
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Greens Senator Scott Ludlam.

Greens look to renewable future as WA gets ready to revisit the polls (Page 4 of 4)

Martin Kovacs, 11 Mar 2014

Pick the bones out of the details all you can, yet the sentiment rings loud and true no matter what your political leaning: Australian governments have now been walking a tightrope of climate change policy over the course of many electoral cycles, often resulting in seemingly contradictory actions and policy backflips.

Perhaps the seemingly inherent link between climate change and renewable energy in political discourse is part of the problem, in that any encouragement of renewable energy is generally cast in the light of taking action on climate change.

What about the pure, standalone benefits of renewable energy in terms of safeguarding our energy future? Regardless of climate change, shouldn't governments of all levels be encouraging growth of various renewable energy sectors? Given fossil fuels are finite, given peak petroleum is even a matter of discussion, is this not in our collective best interest?

"As a Western Australian, I am keenly aware that the debate on renewable energy risks turning into a caricature with the mining industry on one side and everyone else on the other side," Ludlam recently noted in a speech defending the *Clean Energy Act*.

"But I know from experience that such an opposition of interests is not valid. In fact, I strongly believe that regional, Western Australian miners will be the first adopters of large-scale solar. They are not necessarily driven by the same motivation as we are, but that does not matter.

"They will act on the basis of the business case alone, because their survival depends in part on driving down the cost of energy against predicted steep increases in the price of gas and distillate which will blow the marginal impact of the carbon price out of the water."

It is this convergence of interests that may well more than anything drive growth of the renewable energy sector, and a shift in mainstream political discourse towards its economic, as opposed to environmental, benefits may well help the sector's short-term prospects.

In the same speech, Ludlam further noted: "*Energy 2029* demonstrates the profound truth that the clean energy transition will be much cheaper in the long run than the ever-increasing combustion of business as usual."

Industry, of course, can make its own mind up on this, along with other claims made by the Greens about natural gas, and voters will have the chance to (again) have their say at the ballot box in April.

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