



## **DAVID MORRIS MP**

**Member for Mornington  
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Environment  
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### **Renewable Energy – Think Global, Act Local**

#### **Legislative Assembly 14<sup>th</sup> April 2010**

**Mr MORRIS** (Mornington) — I also wish to make some comments on the Environment and Natural Resources Committee report on its recent inquiry into the approvals process for renewable energy projects in Victoria.

The coalition is ably represented on that committee by you, Acting Speaker, by the member for Swan Hill and by Mrs Petrovich, a member for Northern Victoria Region in the other place. I want to commend the committee in its entirety for its report. While I disagree with at least one of its recommendations, I think it is a valuable body of work.

The issue of energy, particularly renewable energy, will be one of the great challenges of the 21st century, if it is not already such a challenge. Along with water it is one of those things we simply cannot do without. I have a strong personal interest in the issue, but I also have a portfolio interest through my responsibility for the environment and local government. The environment, energy and planning will go hand in hand.

Renewable energy is an important part of any sustainability strategy, particularly in the context of an expected low-carbon economy. It is important that as a state — and I mean all Victorians, not simply the government or the opposition or any particular group — we have a consistent strategic approach.

We want to know where we want to be in 10 years, where we want to be in 20 years, where we want to be mid-century and how we want to get there.

Unfortunately I have seen little or no evidence of effort by the government to bring the community along with it on the journey — to bring the community in and develop a whole-of-state approach. The strategy has been developed in Spring Street or in the adjacent ministerial bunkers. It has been developed in a classic top-down approach.

This committee reference might be an opportunity to change that a bit, but unfortunately the emphasis in the terms of reference — the member for Macedon went through them in some detail — was on things like reducing red tape, the major obstacles facing investors and how Victoria compares to other jurisdictions with regard to relevant approvals.

Quite frankly, comparing Victoria to other jurisdictions is not going to achieve much because we have a long record of successful interaction with the community and a

comprehensive development approach, unlike many of the other states around the nation.

In relation to opportunities to reduce risks and delays for investors, in the detail the emphasis is on imposing the government's view rather than bringing the community along. There has been no effort to engage the community. There has been no effort to develop a shared vision. Quite frankly it is the Brumby jackboot at its best.

The ultimate insult is the recommendation that the responsible authority for the planning approval process become the now thoroughly discredited Minister for Planning.

I was pleased to see the minority report by you, Acting Speaker, Mr Walsh and Mrs Petrovich, particularly the recommendation that local councils be the planning authorities for all wind power plants. In your minority report you rightly identified that the need for renewable energy will continue to grow and that the need for community engagement will therefore continue grow.

Some communities have certainly welcomed the opportunity to be involved and some have not, but it is essential that local knowledge of the topography, the environment, the flora and fauna and the local conditions be taken into account. I also note the concern expressed about the limited environment effects statement process. You simply cannot say that we must have renewable energy regardless of the environmental cost.

I am not suggesting that that is what the committee is recommending, but we need to bear that in mind. We need to be careful to avoid that situation.

I strongly support the minority report because not only do local councils have local knowledge of the physical and social conditions and the likely impact on flora and fauna but they are also community leaders. They are in a position to develop a shared vision, and there is the potential for huge dividends in a shared vision for a responsible, sustainable energy network for our state.

I urge the government to reject the committee's recommendation with regard to the approvals process and to build a truly collaborative approvals process so that we can together develop this emerging industry.