

Thank you for inviting me to speak today. My name is Crystal Falknau and I'm the Coordinator of the North Queensland Conservation Council. NQCC is the peak environmental non-government organisation for North Queensland. Our mission is to promote and protect the natural environment of the North Queensland region.

For many years, NQCC has pushed for a just transition to clean energy. Our ecosystems are already feeling the impacts of climate change. We must reduce our greenhouse gas emissions as rapidly as possible if we are to give our biodiversity and our reef a fighting chance.

We believe that ending our reliance on coal-fired power and transitioning to renewable energy is the quickest, cheapest and safest way to decarbonise Queensland's economy and protect our ecosystems and communities from the worst impacts of climate change.

The Queensland Energy and Jobs Plan lays out a pathway for an energy transition, and we welcome this. Today, we urge the Government and Opposition to support this Bill, formalising renewable energy targets and setting up the frameworks that we need, to deliver renewable energy quickly.

While we support this Bill, we believe that some improvements are needed in the Renewable Energy Zone framework to ensure this transition is rapid, coordinated and centres the needs of regional communities, First Nations people and the environment.

The first improvement we recommend is to include mapping of land-use, biodiversity and cultural heritage. This would help guide the rollout in a way that gives certainty to developers, while protecting our irreplaceable natural values, biodiversity and culturally significant places.

We also would like to see more accountability and transparency, to ensure that projects deliver positive long-term outcomes for regional and First Nations communities. Meaningful community engagement must be a priority for communities impacted by development.

North Queensland has some of the best solar and wind resources in the state. We also have species found nowhere else in the world, and the development of our renewable resources shouldn't come at the cost of biodiversity and habitat. We believe that Queensland's renewable energy system can and should be nature positive, so that we can protect our biodiversity while providing clean, reliable and affordable energy.

We also support distributed energy as a tool to reduce the cost of living for Queensland's most vulnerable. We believe everyone should be able to access rooftop solar, including renters.

In an age of misinformation and division, it is crucial that Queenslanders see strong, bipartisan support for renewables as the way forward. We urge the Government and Opposition to pass this Bill and to start building the framework that is needed to deliver a sustainable renewable energy system that benefits nature and communities.