



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

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Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

CLIMATE CHANGE

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different times of the year, and in some places in Central Australia, house reading temperatures were close to 50°C. That is huge.

It gets a bit hotter in Katherine than Darwin. We get about 44°C sometimes, and you walk outside of the beautiful air con and it is like being hit with a hair dryer in the face. It can be warm in October and November. It is one of the three or four hottest places in the Northern Territory at that time of the year. Katherine, Ngukurr, Jabiru, Rabbit Flat and sometimes Bulman have a similar temperature in that time of year. In December and January Alice Springs and the Central Desert communities take over and are hot throughout summer.

That material being used in construction, providing comfort and liveability and trying to mitigate the risks of climate change in places that are traditionally hot and getting hotter, is extremely important for sustainability in the Territory.

Ignoring this impending crisis is unacceptable. Scrapping any semblance of an emissions target is not the only backwards step taken by this government when it comes to managing climate impacts and setting up the Territory for a greener future; the CLP has also ripped up our 50% renewables by 2030 target, which was put in place to provide accountability and responsibility of government. The CLP has lied to Territorians about its reasons for doing so.

The CLP tried to claim that it was just too expensive and quoted a ludicrous figure in the billions. This is not true; it is nonsense and a further sign of a government that is not willing to take responsibility and do the hard work on such an important issue. Although the CLP government stopped short of denying climate science, it has no intention of doing anything to reduce the impacts of climate change for Territorians. That will be a disastrous legacy. It is blatant and wilful ignorance. There is no way of keeping with the views of the vast majority of Territorians if the government's members bury their heads in the sand.

Many of the points that the Member for Nightcliff's motion focused on were already in train under the former Labor government. You would think despite the change in government that the new government would still represent Territorians and that the idea of such an important issue like mitigating the impacts of climate change would be seen as a baton being handed from one team to another to continue that work. Unfortunately, that is not what the CLP government has done.

Significant work had been achieved. Much more is still to be done and should be underway, but, unfortunately, we will not see that with this CLP team at the helm. The stark contrast is that the CLP is taking us backwards when it comes to building a strong, resilient, prosperous, healthy future for the environment and our children. It is unacceptable. On behalf of Territorians, the Territory Labor opposition implores the CLP government to do the right thing, continue to work towards net zero emissions and make sure that the future of the Territory is safeguarded for many generations to come.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Mr Deputy Speaker, I will make a brief contribution on this matter. I do so, picking up on the sentiment of the Leader of the Opposition's statement about keeping the baton going rather than dropping the baton. I decided to make a brief impromptu contribution because I see great value in what everyone has said and more good and commonality in it than we might think there is. I see a good-faith effort by the minister to amend this motion to express a position that we can all get behind.

There were thoughtful contributions from everyone in this House, none more so than by the Member for Nightcliff who moved the motion. I extend my gratitude to the member for putting time and work in to explain their position on the climate science, well supported by academic literature and constituency views and not in a histrionic, melodramatic fashion but in a balanced, reasonable and considered parliamentary fashion.

I, likewise, saw the immediate, considered response from the government that asserts that we are not all climate deniers; we care about the climate and are committed, as the Leader of the Opposition alluded to, not to dropping the baton.

I will be clear to all my parliamentary colleagues: I implore everyone to think seriously, carefully and sincerely about voting on this amendment to the motion together because it signals to the Territory that we care, we believe in something common and—although we might disagree on the degree and speed of action that needs to be taken, the possible ramifications and the consequences in their fine-grain detail—we fundamentally do not disagree about the fact that this issue matters. We all should get behind it.

Rather than dropping the baton—or worse still, what we tend to do a lot around here, which is picking up the baton and trying to beat each other up with it—we should try to keep the baton going by passing it along

today. There is wisdom and much in common in what the mover of this motion and the minister in charge of this area said today. I ask you all to seriously give this consideration.

There have been more assertive and critical positions put forward by other members. There is a spectrum of concern when it comes to climate change. It is pretty clear that some people think that it spells imminent catastrophe and doom; others think that it may be a slow burn; and some worry that, in the race to try to solve problems for the long term, we will compromise prospects for current generations.

The challenge is trying to moderate a position and move forward in a measured way, because the reality of it is, as the mover noted, the horse has bolted to some extent; it has definitely bolted. I can speak to that with a limited amount of authority as somebody who was situated within the Oxford University Centre for the Environment for decades-plus and was surrounded by climate scientists, geophysicists, economic modellers and the people who were at the genesis of carbon capture and storage technology.

Carbon capture and storage technology is a good place to dig into this. The fact is that it is contested science. Some people think it is not much more successful than trying to trap wind in your pants, frankly. Other people will tell you that it has been successfully utilised to mitigate the effects of climate change if the geology and conditions are right and if you put in the work to build facilities. That is what the minister is pointing to.

In our government—which is carrying the baton from the last government to a large extent and the work done by the public service for all governments—carbon capture and storage is a commitment for our Department of Mining and Energy. Carbon capture and storage and innovation to try to make sure we do the right thing by people to mitigate climate change is still part of a shared commitment. It is extraordinarily important to recognise that fact. Let us not lose sight of that and that this side has unabashedly, unambiguously expressed that it is backing the Beetaloo Sub-basin and gas development. I freely declare that I am pro-sustainable resource development, whether it is mining or gas. For me, it is important that things add up economically. That is the baseline contingent for me.

Let us remember that the former government was also behind the direction we are going with the Beetaloo development, but slightly less clear and more ambiguous at times. We are simply carrying the baton and the torch in that regard. We are likewise carrying the baton to try to give carbon capture and storage technology the best possible chance it has to work in the Northern Territory.

Good points were made by the mover and the minister. There is so much in common here. I am trying hard to build a bridge. I am saying to all of you that this is a day for us to band together and do something good for future generations in the Northern Territory and not to let the baton drop. It is easier to say, 'You are not trying hard enough' or 'You are trying too hard and getting in the way of progress and development', but this is a real chance to agree on something constructive and productive. I say to the mover of the motion that if you think about the words expressed clearly by the minister, there is much more in common than you realise.

The original motion is detailed and provides specificity, which is a good thing; however, the thing with specificity is that it necessarily also becomes prescriptive. To be clear, I speak in support of my government, the minister and the amendment because I think that we should vote on this today. We should not throw the baby out with the bathwater, move to divisions and just indicate again that we cannot agree and move forward on anything; we should at least try to mutually acknowledge that we want the best for the Northern Territory, albeit the way we want to do it might vary ever so slightly.

Members of the Assembly, look at the minister's amendment. The first thing he says is that we acknowledge the scientific evidence on climate change. We live in a time of rampant climate denialism. We are living in a time when information is being picked and chosen on the extremes. We are starting to get to the point where we cannot agree on basic objective facts; we cannot find anything in common anymore. This is a bold, brave and genuine step by a minister to say, 'Yes, we have heard plenty to say that we are pro-sustainable resource development, but we acknowledge the scientific evidence on climate change'. I implore the opposition and the crossbenchers to think carefully about it; do not dismiss it.

Unlike amendments moved that unfortunately frustrate the intent of the motion, that is not what happened here. Yes, the amended motion will be a simplified version of the original motion, but the spirit and intent of it truly remains the same.

The first point is that we acknowledge the scientific evidence on climate change. I acknowledge the scientific evidence on climate change, and the minister and government I belong to, in expressing this thought, is saying that it believes it as well.

Even more importantly, the second part is we recognise that, with a changing climate, the Northern Territory will be increasingly impacted by more extreme weather patterns. That is a sincere statement and a step forward. There are people in federal parliament who will not commit to that and are genuinely moving total denialism packages, running internal gymnastics that are politically insane, fractious and not bringing Australians together at all. That is a federal problem, not our problem.

We have a chance as parliamentarians of the Northern Territory to genuinely agree on something important, not with a division, and to say that a Greens member who believes in Greens things—which is what Greens do—has said that we should be seriously worried about the environment. Great; that is fine. It turns out that some of us are less worried about it, but we are still worried and do not deny it; we want to acknowledge it.

Recognising that climate change may have geographically disproportionate effects in the Northern Territory compared with down south is huge. I commend my learned colleague, the minister, for being brave enough to say that. Quite frankly, there are Environment ministers in a lot of other jurisdictions at the moment who do not have the guts, gumption, brains or balls to do exactly that; I think he deserves credit for that.

I did not intend to speak on this matter because I fully expected it not to be as collegiate as it has been so far. I implore us all, as a result, to take the time to think carefully about not letting the perfect be the enemy of the good. This is an opportunity to say that we will not drop the baton—as the Leader of the Opposition intimated might happen—or take the baton and beat each other up with it, as we sometimes do. We will move it forward even if a little slower, an inch at a time, rather than getting on the good ship Greta Thunberg.

There is a way forward for us, and the more we can do cooperatively in this parliament, the better the chances are that we can move forward. I am not an Independent; I believe in the major party system and the fact that we have to, at the end of the day, agree to disagree sometimes. We also have to learn how to compromise. I want us to reach, as a parliament, the point when we can collectively compromise and agree that we are not all happy about everything, but we are happy enough with where we have landed on something that we can take it to the federal government together, put our foot down and say, ‘This is what the Northern Territory wants and needs’.

Leadership is not just the job of the person sitting second from the front; it is the job of everyone in this Chamber. Everyone in this Chamber has an opportunity to be a leader, be a statesperson and get behind our institutions and the government of the day. Just in the same way that convention dictates that public servants will execute the agenda of the day, we too carry forward a shared collective responsibility.

I draw on specific points that have been brought up. The motion is not self-congratulatory in the slightest. It is recognising the hard work of public servants and the NT Government, past and present, whose work is ongoing and deserving of our support. I had a tiny part in my stint working in the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, where I was part of the climate mitigation strategy consultation stuff. I went to maybe two or three day-long sessions, and other people had been doing it for months or years and continue to do that work. That is the work the minister pointed out today, which we should be supporting.

For the sake of our public servants, the people who are putting in the work and trying to make this happen, we should collectively be saying, ‘Okay, we are not entirely in agreement about the scale or the speed of the problem, but we are in agreement about the fact there is a problem and will work on it together’.

I will not speak to the mover’s original motion because it is not fruitful. Instead, I will speak on the minister’s words and re-emphasise important things he said, which I implore you all to consider in the back of your mind in the spirit of being collegiate, cooperative and parliamentarian-like.

I am not saying that you are not entitled to disagree; you may disagree on a matter of principle if you feel that is the best way forward. I chose to get up when I was not going to say anything about this simply because this is an opportunity for us to work together for the greater good for future generations.

Anthropogenic climate change is human-induced stuff. There is a range of actors in this country who will not even admit that part. The minister has been good enough to lead with that statement and say that we are referring to changes caused by humans. We acknowledged that they are caused by humans and, more importantly, that it is not a challenge that respects borders—that was his phrase.

We know we have a part to play, but we also have a sense of scale about how important our part is versus how important everybody else’s part is. The minister noted that Australia is committed to net zero emissions by 2050, and so is this government. He noted that, which is a bold and important statement for us to get behind. The government of the day has an agenda for the greater good. The perspective that we require is

exactly what the minister has provided. He pointed out that the reality is the Northern Territory contributes only 5% of total emissions and Australia less than 2%.

Member for Nightcliff, I do not want the perfect to be the enemy of the good. We want to work on this and will, maybe not at the speed and scale the Member for Nightcliff would like, but they had the good sense to bring this to the House. The member has done a kind thing in giving us all a copy of literature, which is in good faith. This is not the only thing that could be read in this area, but it is a great place to start, and for many people here it may be the first thing they have read about this; it may not. The point is that the member has, in good faith, brought something to the House. The minister has, in good faith, said that we do not want something quite as prescriptive and descriptive as this statement, but we, in principle, want to get behind this and band together on something.

I do not want to cherry-pick things from the Member for Mulka, but the bottom line is that he frequently asks us to work together. We can work together on these issues and carefully strike a balance between economic growth and climate responsibilities. That is what has been alluded to.

I hate to break it to you, but the economy is not resolved yet; there are small fledgling signs of positive movement, but look at the figures that came out today on state final demand. The fact is we will not get out of this tomorrow. We still need to develop, grow, build, attract beneficial investment and encourage innovation. We have sectors and projects in the pipeline that will contribute to emissions but are a part of that process, so we should be supporting those projects while thinking about mitigation and supporting what we have to work with by carefully balancing our economic growth and climate responsibilities.

We need to support emissions abatement technologies and renewable energy, which is exactly what the minister committed to. He said that we will support emissions abatement technology such as electrification, carbon capture and storage and the beneficial use of appraisal gas. That is a positive step in the right direction, as well as maintaining a commitment to renewable energy. We have a crazy amount of gas and sun; for the millionth time I reiterate that we will be well placed to do the best we can to utilise both.

As acknowledged today, our largest emitters have their own emission reductions targets. That has been asserted by the minister, as well as the fact that the NT Geological Survey, which has long done great impartial work in the Northern Territory Public Sector and still has great expertise, is working to identify suitable formations for carbon capture and storage. We have the EPA, which we still allow to independently go along with its work. We are looking to protect our natural ecosystems.

Our contribution to all this may be small, but it is still significant. It is important that we work together on this to support innovation. I do not think that multi-partisanship happens often here, but this is a chance for us to do that. Let us do something together for the greater good. Please do not let the perfect be the enemy of the good. I ask everyone in the House to seriously consider their responsibility to future generations and the present generation by signalling to the schoolkids who come in here every day that we can work together and support an amended motion that is sensible and carries forward the baton.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff)(in reply): Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you to everyone who contributed to the debate. I acknowledge the Environment minister's amendment. Yes, unlike the previous amendment from the Attorney-General to my last motion, this amendment is on topic. I thank the minister for that. I appreciate that it retains recognition that the NT is increasingly impacted by more extreme weather events.

I hear you loud and clear, Member for Fong Lim, and I truly respect your desire for this Assembly to come together on something because it is something I also want. I respect that, and I guess I am torn. On one hand it does not matter what I do; the government has the numbers. Whenever I have a motion, if the government does not want it to go ahead, the motion does not go ahead. All the Member for Fong Lim's points are entirely accurate about the first two points being a big step, but the issue with the amendment for me is that there is no action, which is what my motion was about.

Dr Rahman: There is action already happening within the public service.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Fong Lim, do not interject.

Dr Rahman: It is my first one ever.

K McNAMARA: He does not interrupt often.