

2007 Federal Election Policy



Farming Renewable Energy

Renewable Energy Development Zones



www.greenaction.org.au

The Greens' *Farming Renewable Energy* policy presents a new, more sustainable and long-sighted vision for rural and regional Australia. It will revitalise regional communities by increasing investment in regional energy infrastructure and boosting jobs in regional Australia.

Greenhouse gas emissions since the industrial revolution have already locked in enough global warming to change the face of Australia over coming decades. Australians have to prepare for the reality that some areas of the country which have been farmed for generations may no longer be viable for traditional agriculture as temperatures rise, evaporation increases, and rainfall declines.

The Greens want to help regional communities grow and prosper by turning the threat of climate change into an opportunity.

Both the Government and Labor have largely refused to grapple with this issue to date. In contrast, in September, the Greens finally succeeded in establishing a senate inquiry into the impact of climate change on agriculture, after having been twice blocked by the major parties. The Inquiry will soon begin the vital work of examining what must be done to help rural Australia adapt to a hotter and drier future.

At the same time, we face the huge challenge in Australia, as around the world, to quickly shift to zero emission energy sources.

The Greens believe that the most obvious and appropriate solution is to bring these two challenges together, matching regions where the viability of agriculture is declining with areas that are well suited to renewable energy developments due to good solar, wind, biomass or geothermal resources, and encouraging farmers to become renewable energy generators.

Ideally, alongside work to develop new agricultural and land stewardship options, this process will help keep people on the land by giving them an alternative way to generate income. It will revitalise rural communities, improve their energy infrastructure and significantly boost Australia's renewable energy production, reducing our greenhouse emissions and reducing the risk of climate change running out of control.

The problem

Due to the failure of the current Government to take either climate change or renewable energy seriously, Australia has no coordinated plans to roll out renewable energy, to keep farmers on the land, or to keep rural communities alive. Instead, we have bandaid handouts in the form of drought assistance packages, and crumbs from the table for renewable energy.

Neither the Government nor the Opposition have set out a strategic plan for the future for either regional Australia or for our energy infrastructure. Instead, they present an array of uncoordinated and ineffective ad hoc arrangements. Relief cheques for farmers assume that the drought will end and that climate

change will not have an ongoing impact on the viability of agriculture across Australia.

Currently, the only large-scale policies to support renewable energy are market measures like renewable energy targets. Targets and price guarantees for renewably generated energy, as advocated by the Greens, will not support the expansion of the industry alone, but can ensure that the renewable energy industries develop in a strategic manner. There is a significant danger that ad hoc decisions will lead to inefficient outcomes. For example, if electricity transmission lines to a new wind farm are installed before wider consultation identifies that a neighbouring property might have been interested in sharing the cost of a higher capacity transmission line, the wind farm would have paid too much for its transmission line, and the neighbouring property may determine that wind development on their property is unviable due to the costs of duplicating the existing line.

Ad hoc, incremental development of our energy infrastructure thus far has led to the evolution of a coal-centric, outdated grid. Ideally, transmission infrastructure built today will serve the needs not just of tomorrow, but for generations to come.

At the same time, farmers and regional communities are suffering due to the continuing drought. Farmers are leaving the land and the incidence of depression and suicide is tragically high. Many regional communities need a new direction.

The Greens' solution

The Greens' *Farming Renewable Energy* policy sets out a strategic plan to meet the twin challenges of revitalising regional Australia and developing a new, renewable energy-focused energy grid by encouraging and helping farmers to become renewable energy generators. It provides a framework to guide both the public and private sector to guide the strategic development of renewable energy networks on a scale and speed sufficient to address the challenge of climate change.

Farming Renewable Energy involves three key steps:

- Mapping to match areas with excellent renewable energy resources areas to areas where the viability of traditional agriculture is declining;
- Building communication links between governments, the communities and renewable energy developers; and
- Establishing *Renewable Energy Development Zones*, streamlining approvals and building connections to the electricity grid to make investment in those areas simple and attractive.

Alongside renewable energy price guarantees (feed-in laws) and the research, development and commercialisation funding set out in *The Sun Fund*, *Farming Renewable Energy* will help Australia achieve the Greens' proposed binding target of 25% renewables in our energy supply mix by 2020, providing a tenth of the emissions reductions necessary to meet our 2020 target.

Mapping

The first stage of the process is overlaying maps of climate vulnerability and renewable energy resources to match those areas where agriculture may become unviable with areas with solid wind, sun (for solar thermal or photovoltaic), micro-hydro (including wave and tidal), biomass or geothermal resources. Other important criteria may include the proximity to an existing electricity grid, or an existing power station capable of taking locally grown biomass fuel.

While there has been some work done on climate vulnerability and renewable energy resource mapping already, there will need to be adequate government funding to bring this work to the level required. Once that is done, it is a very simple process to superimpose the maps and establish the most likely areas for Renewable Energy Development Zones.

Building links

When the initial mapping work is complete, communities within potential renewable energy development zones should be invited to meet with the renewable energy industry and all three levels of government for extensive consultation.

This process is about identifying which communities and industries are interested in going down this particular path, making sure all the relevant information is exchanged, and developing the solid relationships and the level of trust from all stakeholders that will be required for this process to work effectively.

Renewable Energy Development Zones

Where the mapping points to areas where there is community and industry interest, the three levels of government will declare Renewable Energy Development Zones.

The Zones will have three basic features to attract investment:

- streamlined planning approval, due to the process of identifying and establishing Zones, reducing the transactional costs for investors and speeding up the installation;
- using funds collected via an emissions trading scheme to help communities attract and develop the skills to build and maintain renewable energy infrastructure; and
- using funds collected via an emissions trading scheme to install an appropriately sized connection to the main electricity grid.

Alongside a mandatory renewable energy target of 15% by 2012 and 25% by 2020, and feed-in laws to guarantee a market at a predetermined price for the renewable energy generated, these Zones would help create a new Australian energy infrastructure strategically designed for renewable energy and to maintain and revitalise regional communities across Australia.

Australian Greens Policies

Other climate change policies of the Australian Greens include:

- Temperature and emissions targets
 - Global warming must be constrained to no more than 2C above pre-industrial levels in order to minimise the risk of runaway climate change
 - Australia and other developed countries must commit to reducing emissions to 30% below 1990 levels by 2020 and at least 80% by 2050
- Energy Efficiency
 - The *EAS/* scheme to retrofit every house in Australia with energy efficiency upgrades such as solar hot water and insulation
 - Requiring Australia's 250 largest companies to implement any findings of their energy audits which have a payback period of four years or less
 - Commercial building efficiency policies to be released very soon
- Renewable Energy
 - Increasing the Mandatory Renewable Energy Target to 15% by 2012 and 25% by 2020
 - Supplementing MRET with feed-in laws to guarantee market access at guaranteed prices
 - *Farming Renewable Energy*
- Land use and Forestry
 - Protecting our carbon sinks by stopping logging in old growth and high conservation value native forests
 - Stopping land clearing immediately
 - Increasing reforestation
- Roads to Rails
 - Allocating at least 25% of AusLink 2 Commonwealth transport funding (2008-14) to efficient, low-pollution, mass transit options
 - Allocating 50% + of AusLink 3 funding, beyond 2014, to mass transit
- Alternative Fuels Target
 - By 2050, replace 90% of Australia's demand for petrol with renewable energy powered electric vehicles and second generation biofuels
 - An interim 2020 target for 10% of Australia's fuel to come from biofuels
- Better Cars Policy
 - Mandatory fuel efficiency standards for the Australian fleet
 - Government procurement policy ahead of the national fleet, ensuring the purchase, and delivery to the second hand market, of the most efficient vehicles available
 - Australian car manufacturers' subsidies tied to vehicle fuel efficiency
 - Removing favourable tariff treatment for four wheel drive vehicles
- Fringe Benefits Tax changes
 - Removing the fringe benefits tax from company cars
 - Ensuring appropriate support for workers who wish to use public transport