



**Alison Byrnes MP**  
**Member for Cunningham**

**SPEECH**

**OFFSHORE WIND TOWN HALL FORUM**

**WEDNESDAY 11 OCTOBER 2023**

**\*\*CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY\*\***

Thank you Uncle Richard Davis for that welcome to country.

I too would like acknowledge the Dharawal people as traditional custodians of the land that we are meeting on, and pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

Welcome everyone to the second Town Hall Forum that I am hosting to coincide with the consultation process that is underway for the proposed Illawarra offshore wind zone.

Today's forum will be made up of two parts. First, we will hear from our panel until 6pm, followed by questions from any of you directly.

Following the panel discussion, I will be remaining back, as will representatives for the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water who can answer questions and take any feedback.

Following Saturday's forum, I received a lot of feedback from the community who were actually there to hear from the panellists and were pretty upset by the behaviour from the some of the audience and some of the misinformation.

To that end, when questions start I will ask that you say your name, suburb and the panellist that you are directing your question to. I will be here for two hours after the panel discussion for you to put forward your views to me.

In the interest of actually allowing the audience to hear from panellists, each questioner will have one minute to ask their question to a panellist and a bell will ring. Questioners will be given an additional 30 seconds after the bell to finish asking their question.

On the Panel today we have:

- Arthur Rorris,
  - Arthur is the Secretary of the South Coast Labor Council, the peak representative body for workers in the Illawarra.
- Yael Stone,
  - Yael is the founder of Hi Neighbour, Hi Neighbour is a not for profit, volunteer lead organisation energised with the power of the past and excitement for the future. She is studying a Bachelor of Sustainable Communities at the University of Wollongong and is dedicated to a positive future that includes everyone.

- Dr Jodi Edwards (UOW Vice Chancellors Research Fellow and NSW Aboriginal Woman of the Year finalist),
  - Jodi has recently been undertaking work on Whale Songlines that connect First Nations along the East Coast of Australia. Jodi will build on her PHD and her whale migration research from RMIT University, bringing it back to the University of Wollongong.
  
- Ty Christopher
  - Ty is an electrical engineer with over 37 years' experience in the electricity supply industry. Ty is now the Director Energy Futures Network at the University of Wollongong.
  
- Ellen Couch.
  - Ellen is University of Wollongong student who is studying a Bachelor of Social Science majoring in Human Geography, and is passionate about combatting climate change and is enthusiastic about the future of renewable energy, particularly in the Illawarra.

When I stood to be your representative at last year's election and people asked me to explain why I was standing, I said for

three things – I care about people, I care about jobs and I care about the planet.

Here in the Illawarra we have helped to build and power our nation for over 100 years – through our local steel works, through our coal mines and manufacturing – by making things.

I grew up in Woonona. My dad was a sparky who worked in the coal mines – firstly as an electrician and then as a deputy. Dad was in and out of work while I was growing up due to the harsh economic conditions in coal and steelmaking in the 1980s and 1990s and mum and dad often struggled to keep our family home.

I will always fight for jobs here in our region.

I want local families to have good, secure, long term and well-paid jobs.

I want your kids and grandkids to have good, secure, long term and well-paid jobs – and to be able to live right here in the Illawarra.

This is one of the reasons why I support offshore wind.

It means jobs for our community and jobs for your children and grandchildren.

Not just jobs in the construction, but jobs in ALL the industries that will benefit from strong, reliable, and renewable energy.

BlueScope steel recently said that they will need fifteen times the current amount of electricity to transition the Port Kembla steelworks to make the same volume of steel using hydrogen-powered direct reduced ironmaking (DRI) technology.

BlueScope currently uses 750,000 Mega Watt Hours (MWH) of grid supplied electricity across the steelworks per year – this equates to the usage of about 150,000 households. Here in Wollongong we have approximately 130,000 households.

The offshore wind proposal for the Illawarra – if implemented at the current size – would generate enough electricity to power 3.4 million houses.

BlueScope will need about two thirds of that amount of energy to keep our local steel works open and producing green steel in the future.

BlueScope currently employs 3,500 people directly in the Illawarra and is responsible for a total of 9,000 jobs in the region including contractors and suppliers.

In other words, just as we have helped build the nation over the last century with our steel, the Illawarra can now help power it.

This energy usage doesn't take into account other local manufacturers like Bisalloy, like Hysata, like BOC Gas, like Manildra, like MM Kembla, like David Brown Santasalo and major energy users and manufacturers in our community.

As a local representative of this community, I will not let these jobs be put at risk by not acting to find sources of strong, reliable and renewable energy now.

There are endless opportunities for local manufacturers with the rollout of offshore wind, just in the steel space it is anticipated the floating structure of one turbine would need 6,000 tons of high-quality steel.

BlueScope's current yearly output is 400,000 tons of domestic plate. That means BlueScope's total output would produce enough steel to manufacture 66 platforms a year. But we are going to need hundreds of these platforms across the country and the region.

People have said but to me won't this use energy? And the answer is yes, but the environmental payback period – the amount of time it takes for a wind turbine to generate the amount of energy used during manufacturing and installation – is estimated to be 5-8 months for a 4.2MW turbine and this is in the context of what might be a 30-40 year working life.

I recently went to Scotland and Denmark, with my colleague the Member for Newcastle, to look at supply chains and how we can responsibly build an offshore wind industry here.

Not just for an Illawarra offshore wind farm – but also for other offshore wind farms in Australia and New Zealand, and even in Asia and the Pacific into the future.

What do we need to do to help our local companies build their capacity? Do we need to attract companies to Australia to set up manufacturing facilities? This is something that I have been exploring over the past few months.

The opportunity for jobs, investment and economic growth here in our region is something we need to talk about as a community. What employment opportunities are we leaving for your kids and your grandkids?



We need to work together to ensure that offshore wind development in our region balances environmental, social and cultural standards. Any plan to develop offshore wind in the Illawarra **must strike a balance between energy needs and environmental responsibility.**

The biggest complaint I always get is the perception that the Illawarra is always ignored. Well this is a huge opportunity to put the Illawarra on the map – as a real City of Innovation one that uses the world's best science together with industry collaboration and excellence to overcome the challenges we face.

My challenge to you and our community is: let's demonstrate that we are that place; a city of steel, energy and manufacturing harmoniously coexisting with stunning ecology, tourism and the marine environment.

This is what we've already done over the last century.

We are at the very start of consultations – this would be a decade long project.

You will not see anything in the ocean for at least 5-7 years.

I am acutely aware that we have only borrowed our planet from future generations – and we need to make sure we leave it to them in better state.

Young people in particular are concerned about our environment. They have seen the effects of climate change – volatile temperature differences, fires, floods, erosion and habitat loss. This worries them.

Natasha Watt from the Teacher's Federation on Saturday talked about how she and other teachers had supported students affected by the Black Summer bushfires and traumatic climate change.

Our kids and grandkids care about their planet and many of them support offshore wind.

This is the moral challenge of our time – generation to generation.

We are at risk of leaving our young people – your children and grandchildren – with a society which is overwhelmingly unfair, unequal and unsustainable.

This is the really hard work we are doing right now– if it were easy, you can bet politicians would have done it by now.

I know change is hard and but I also know, having lived and worked in this community all my life – we have never shirked a challenge here.

We have always pulled together – sure we have our arguments and debates – and this can be messy and untidy and contradictory and frustrating.

But in these very complex times when our problems are great and the solutions are not easy, discussion and respectful dialogue are critical to resolving the issues we face.

There has also been a lot of additional confusion due to the massive misinformation campaign that has been waged – particularly around whales and whale migration – much of this misinformation campaign stems from vested interests in the United States.

As noted by the marine mammals experts with the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration there is zero evidence of a connection between whale deaths along the east coast of the USA and wind farming. Zero evidence.

Greenpeace, who have worked to protect whales for decades, have backed this up calling it a cynical disinformation campaign.

Any renewable energy off the Illawarra coast must be suitable to our local conditions and environment;

When it comes to protecting the environment, we will and must be guided by the science. We will need to draw on our best and brightest in the Australian scientific community to provide their assessment on how we achieve this endeavour safely and with minimal impact on the environment.

I'm happy to have hard, but respectful conversations. And I want you to participate to make sure that our local environment, our marine environment and our birdlife is taken into account. We have to talk about how we play our part here in the Illawarra to lowering carbon emissions. We cannot leave the heavy lifting to our inland friends – particularly given most of our population reside along our coastline.

There is plenty of time to have your say and I am more than happy to talk with anyone who wants to have a chat about it. I have spoken to many people who have already emailed me to date. And I will continue to do this.

I also encourage you to read Saul Griffith's article, which is on my website and available here today, he has called for a Community Benefits Subsidy I prefer to call it a community energy dividend – where a share of the renewable energy generator profits are returned to our community through a local fund or discounts on electricity or incentives to upgrade household appliances or spend at local businesses. There are lots of things we can look at here.

Things like an investment fund for local infrastructure – for our surf clubs, football clubs, netball clubs and other community facilities.

Or perhaps a local marine and environment fund?

Or a local schools fund that could help our local schools purchase equipment for things like STEM, industrial arts, sport, music or art?

Or a local economic development fund to help our local businesses upscale and increase capacity to take advantage of new opportunities.

I have spoken to Minister Bowen about a community benefits dividend and he agrees that local community benefit plans are absolutely a part of the criteria at the feasibility licence stage.

You have my absolute guarantee that I have local people, local jobs and our environment at the heart of this proposal that is before us.

I will listen to you.

I will ensure that all of your views are taken into account.

I will try to answer as many questions as I can.

And that is what my consultation forums are about.

With that, I will start with a question to each of the panellists, before opening it up to questions from the audience.

*ENDS*