

Presentation to the “Sun-Powered Queensland” Forum organised by the QCC
in Brisbane on 16 November 2017 from Charlie Prell

I’m Charlie Prell. I’m a farmer from Crookwell, about an hour north of Canberra in NSW. I’m the deputy chair of farmers for Climate Action and also the NSW Regional Organiser for the Australian Wind Alliance.

My expertise is with wind turbines, not solar panels. Why am I here speaking to you today?

Wind is created by solar energy. When the sun shines on different areas at different intensity it creates wind. Wind turbines are harvesting a solar resource just as much as solar panels are. They just harvest this energy in a different way. Also, wind and solar are totally complementary. They work together and enhance each other. I’m sure you’ve all heard the “when the wind doesn’t blow and the sun doesn’t shine” mantra! Well guess what? The wind tends to blow when the sun **isn’t** shining. It is very, very rare for the wind NOT to be blowing AND the sun NOT to be shining.

This is not a wind vs solar debate. The battle we are in is wind AND solar taking down coal AND gas. Please remember this as we make the inevitable shift to the future energy system that this planet so desperately needs.

My subject is: Why are Farmers Embracing Renewable Energy?

That’s an easy question to answer. The bigger question is “why are SOME farmers **not** embracing renewable energy?” I’ll come to that in a minute.

Why **are** farmers embracing renewable energy?

FCA ran a survey in 2016 that found that **83%** of farmers support a move to **100% renewable energy**. Despite this extraordinary result, in August this year the Nationals endorsed a motion at their National Conference not to support renewables! Go figure!

Farmers support renewable energy because:

- The passive income stream that hosting wind turbines and/or solar panels creates can make the difference between being viable or not.
- This creates some insurance against the increasingly frightening effects of climate change and the extreme weather patterns that will become more frequent.
- Wind turbines and solar panels are very compatible with agriculture. There are more issues to resolve with solar panels than wind turbines, but they are all solvable. Imagine running a farm in a coal or uranium mine! Can’t do it, huh?
- Hosting wind turbines and solar panels creates the opportunity for farmers to diversify their income base and become more financially resilient. Farming is a wonderful lifestyle, but it’s a pretty crappy business. All of a sudden we’ve made farming an attractive business as well as an attractive lifestyle.
- Being a farmer who produces food, fibre and energy is a great strategic business move. I get really frustrated when I hear the “my father was a farmer” line. We can change that.
- Renewables don’t use water! Coal, gas and nuclear do. Heaps of it.

- Oh, and by the way. We're helping to save the planet along the way.

With all these benefits, why are some farmers **not** embracing renewable energy??

- I believe that the main reason is the big green spectre of jealousy. If you are not involved then you are excluded. How does this make you feel? (just look at the same sex marriage debate). If you hear or see wind turbines and you're excluded you're probably not going to like them. If you're included you most probably will like them, maybe even love them! This is a rapidly emerging threat to the roll out of large scale solar farms as well.
- Bad or non-existent community engagement and poor communication with small regional communities exacerbates this jealousy.
- Some large renewable energy companies are only pretending to be "green". They are only in it for the money, not for the wellbeing of the planet, or the communities they are working in.
- There's also ideological resistance, but this is a very minor motivator. The FCA survey that I spoke of earlier found that significant numbers of farmers who denied the existence of climate change were still enthusiastic supporters of renewables!

How can we do it better? Be inclusive rather than exclusive? Break down the resistance to renewables in small regional communities??

- Small, sometimes isolated, regional communities need to embrace a "benefit sharing" model. This means the "royalties" from hosting renewables are shared with a much wider group than just those fortunate few who host the turbines and/or solar panels. This can include sharing the equity in the projects, as well as the royalties. Local government can invest in infrastructure in their own backyard which will generate a greater level of return than any bank account. The Australian Wind Alliance has been strongly promoting this "benefit sharing" theory.
- The Australian Wind Alliance is currently assessing the amount being paid to farmers and communities who host wind turbines. Early results indicate that about \$20 million is already being paid into regional communities EVERY YEAR.
- In addition to these royalties there are significant community enhancement funds being contributed to these communities through a wide range of mechanisms.
- In short, if we get this revolution right, we can reinvigorate regional Australia and hopefully reverse the population drift so people and skills are attracted to the regions as well as to the cities! Why would we oppose this vision for "the bush"??

If we just build a few wind turbines and instal a few solar panels **without** changing the ownership of the energy system we may as well not bother. We may as well continue to burn the coal, gas and uranium and bunker down for the rampant climate change that this will inevitably bring. We all need to work together to get this right. Farmers are willing and able to join in this "revolution".