

11 November 2024

Graham Readfearn
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The Guardian
By email: graham.readfearn@theguardian.com

Dear Graham

RE: CONCERN FOR OUR GRANDCHILDREN

I refer to your article "*Dick Smith's ABC radio rant against renewables overflows with ill-informed claims*" which you wrote about my appearance on *Macca's Australia All Over* on Sunday 3 November 2024.

My claims are not ill-informed, they are based on objective evidence, research and common sense.

The CSIRO GenCost report does include an allowance "for extra costs associated with storing that power", however it is clear to many experts that the CSIRO has greatly underestimated the amount of storage required. This allows the CSIRO to falsely claim that renewables with storage is the cheapest form of energy, and that a modern industrial economy can operate primarily on renewable power.

It's difficult to calculate how much storage the CSIRO has allowed in the GenCost report, and the cost for this. Simon Holmes à Court tells me that it is five hours of storage.

Five hours? That's ridiculous, it's most likely far too low. The CSIRO has based its findings on historic wind and sun conditions from past data. There is no way to know if this will differ in the future as the climate changes.

For example, the \$11.8 million renewable energy project at Lord Howe Island could only afford battery storage for three days, and even that is not enough.

No doubt you have noticed all the wind and solar farms that exist around our country. If the CSIRO claim that wind, solar and storage is the cheapest form of energy is correct, these facilities would include batteries to supply power 24/7 – or at least for five hours. None of them do.

There is one clear explanation for this. That is, the cost of even limited storage results in solar and wind power being so expensive it is unaffordable.

The people of Lord Howe Island accepted the CSIRO claim that renewables with storage is the cheapest form of energy, and supported the renewable energy project. With \$11.8 million of Government subsidies and loans, the power station went ahead.

Now the commercial premises on Lord Howe Island are paying 90 cents per kilowatt hour for their electricity – three times what it would cost on the mainland from coal.

In an article in the *Lord Howe Island Signal* newspaper dated 30 September 2024, Suzie Christensen, the CEO of the Lord Howe Island Board, said the following:

“Operationally, based on those averages, electricity generation and supply for the Island is 43% more expensive than prior to the solar installation, even with the grant from Arena.”

Yes, you are correct – there is less diesel being used, but there is still a colossal amount being shipped to the island. After three and half days of cloud cover, the enormously expensive battery is fully discharged, and the whole island runs 100% on fossil fuels.

You didn't mention this in your article, did you?

If a small population of 400 residents can't rely on renewables – even with an \$11.8 million subsidy, how can the CSIRO claim be correct?

In relation to power outage at Broken Hill, you didn't mention that the solar farm and wind farm have the capacity to provide ten times the amount of energy required by Broken Hill in any 24 hour period. However, the \$45 million battery would only store power for about one hour, and it was unaffordable to also install a stability system that would allow the solar and wind to provide power without the connection to the brown coal grid in Victoria.

You, and many other journalists appear to have genuinely deluded yourselves into believing that Australia can run its entire nation 90% on renewables – including transport and industry. No other country in the world has been able to run 90% on solar and wind, despite the erroneous claims from the ABC Fact Check.

The 90% renewable plan is not only unaffordably expensive but it is also experimental and therefore risky. I support following a proven system. That is, replacing the base load power from coal (which has served us very successfully for over 100 years) with nuclear power.

I have become a supporter of 18 year old Will Shackel and his Nuclear for Australia group. After all, it's his generation that will be affected if we make the wrong decisions now.

Over 30 countries have embraced nuclear at the present time, including poor countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh, and 60 reactors are under construction – so it is clearly affordable.

I have challenged the CSIRO to redo its GenCost report so it accurately reflects the true cost of the amount of storage that would likely be required to give a 90% renewable grid.

In mentioning South Australia and the high levels of renewable energy it can obtain when the wind is blowing and the sun is out, you failed to mention some of the other problems.

For example, look at the attachment. It shows that on 10 September 2024 at 21:50, only 2% of South Australia's power came from renewables.

You don't mention that when the sun isn't out and the wind isn't blowing, the whole system becomes problematic, do you?

South Australia has the Hornsdale \$90 million battery, however it only has the capacity to run Adelaide for seven minutes. This shows the unaffordability problem with storage. There is nothing on the horizon which shows the necessary major reduction in the cost of storage so it is affordable to go to high levels of back up for intermittent renewables.

I've checked with a friend of mine who lives in Adelaide, and they are currently paying 53 cents per kilowatt hour for electricity – which is 50% higher than the Sydney rate.

All around the world, where there are high levels of renewables, there are higher electricity charges. For example, California has high levels of renewables, but also the highest price for electricity in the continental United States.

This goes against the CSIRO claim that renewables with storage are the cheapest form of power.

No doubt you have seen the claim by the Minister for Climate Change and Energy, Chris Bowen, that 1.8 million homes will be provided with “reliable renewable power” from the Illawarra deep ocean floating wind farm project.

You and your fellow journalists have failed to mention that Mr Bowen is completely wrong - wind power is not reliable. In fact, it's the opposite – it's totally unreliable because it doesn't provide any power at all when the wind is not blowing.

No mention has been made by you or your fellow journalists of the unaffordably high cost of storage that needs to go with the Illawarra wind project so that the power would be available when it is required.

Graham, I know you must be concerned about our grandchildren, and the problems that are likely to come from climate change if we reach tipping points. Surely we should have every possible way of reducing carbon on the table.

I challenge you to write an article covering the high cost of renewables when adequate storage has been costed in, and the concept that nuclear should at least be considered as part of the mix as we move forward.

I'm not against renewables, just a realist about the high resultant costs. I drove in the first solar vehicle race from Darwin to Adelaide, and at one stage was one of the drivers that held the record of a solar vehicle from Perth to Sydney.

My electric car is different to the ones owned by most of my greenie friends whose cars are primarily charged from the coal grid. My car, a Nissan Leaf, is powered from the sun through a large battery bank in my garage. But as I said, I'm a realist. My Nissan Leaf costs twice as much per kilometre to drive compared to a petrol Leaf when you add in the replacement battery costs for the vehicle itself (\$10,000) and for the batteries in the garage (\$48,000).

Yes, you can be a renewables enthusiast if you are wealthy.

I request that you publish this letter so your readers can judge whether my claims about renewables and nuclear are ill-informed.

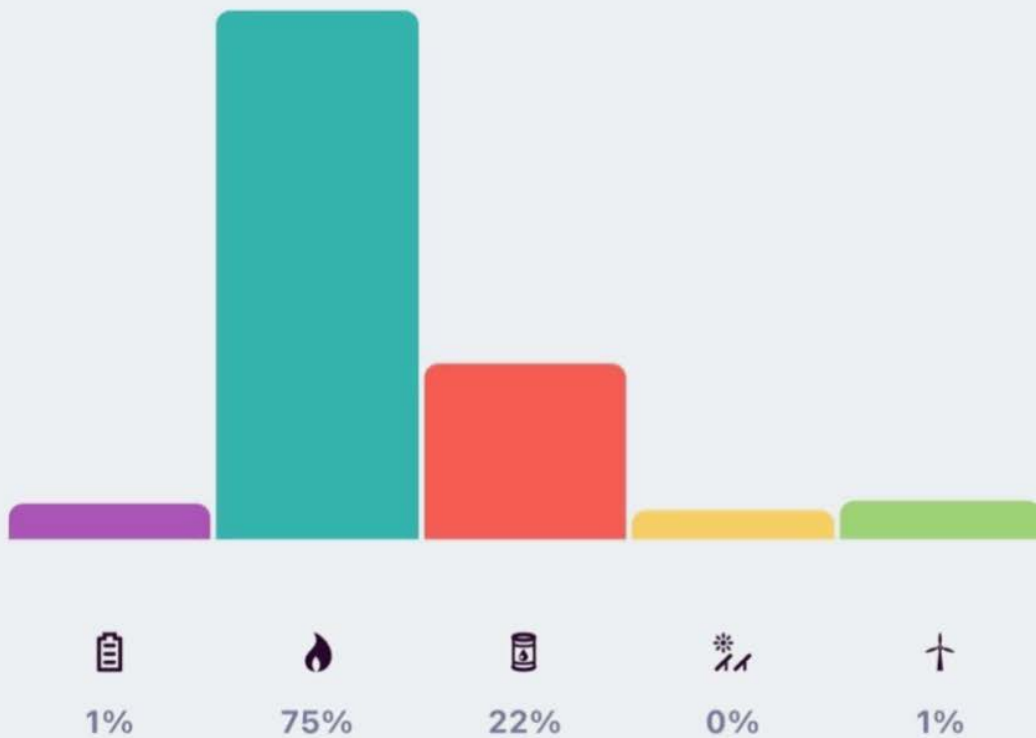
Regards



Dick Smith

Mix Summary (10 September 2024 - 21:50)

Total breakdown of fuel used



At this moment, 2% of South Australia's power is from renewables.