

Daintree Rainforest Power Committee

Working for the community



Mr Kim WOOD
Queensland Productivity Commission
Po Box 12112
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4003
Via email inquiry@qpc.qld.gov.au

Dear Mr Wood
Re Queensland Productivity Commission Electricity Pricing Inquiry and Solar Feed-in Pricing Inquiry Issues Papers.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to make a submission on behalf of the Daintree Rainforest Power Committee and the residents of the Daintree Rainforest.

Commissioner Wood in 1996 the Far North Queensland Electricity Board (F.N.Q.E.B) had been requested by the Queensland Government to investigate the provision of mains power to privately owned land in areas north of the Daintree river. This in “principal” support was given by State Cabinet in December 1996.
The proposed Daintree project was planned to supply approximately 920 blocks of privately owned land north of the Daintree river with mains power, supplied from the state wide grid. This land was subdivided in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s from what was large rural and farming properties.
The Grid Network has been extended across the Daintree river as far as Thornton Peak Drive at the western end of the Forest Creek settlement.

The F.N.Q.E.B then carried out an aerial survey using a Helicopter to map the extension of the Grid Network to Thornton Beach. At the same time an expression of interest form was mailed out to all land owners to apply for connection to the network. Ergon Energy is now the Distribution Entity

In 1993 the then ALP Goss Government passed Legislation into Queensland Parliament Excluding F.N.Q.E.B. From extending their power network any further into the other Daintree Communities.
An Exclusion Zone was created from the Northern bank of the Daintree River to the Southern bank of the Bloomfield River, banning the extension of Grid Power to all residents within this area.

This Legislation effectively excised the Daintree community from the grid, we are the only community in Australia that has been denied access to grid quality power by a State Government.

In 2014 the Newman lead L.N.P. Government rescinded the Daintree power exclusion policy.

For 23 years the Daintree community has fort to have this policy changed and to be given an Equal opportunity to access all government services that the rest of Queensland enjoys and that have been denied to Daintree residents.

In 1999 the Queensland Electricity Act 1994 sect 40 was emended .
Distribution Authority-No. D01/99
Ergon Energy Corporation Limited
SCHEDULE 2

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Area Excluded from Supply

Section 1 outlines the boundaries of the Exclusion Zone

(2) However the above exclusion-

(a) does not apply to the extent that a customer in the excluded area is-

(i) being supplied electricity using the distribution entity's supply network existing as at 18 October 2000; or

(ii) capable of being supplied electricity using the distribution entity's network existing as at October 2000, but only if in order to provide customer connection services to the customer, it is not necessary for the distribution entity's supply network existing as at 18 October 2000 to be extended in any way other than the installation of a service line to the customer's premises; and

(b) does not prevent the distribution entity from owning or operating a Stand Alone Power System for the purpose of supplying Electricity to a customer in the Excluded area

(as inserted on the 18th October 2000)

Ergon Energy supplies Grid quality power to 33 Remote and Island communities the smallest and most remote islands supplied by Ergon Energy are Warraber and Stephen Islands in the Torres Strait.

All these remote communities have their power provided to them through the Queensland Government's Community Service Obligation (C.S.O), at the same price per KW as all other residents in Queensland except the Daintree.

I would like to point out that the Daintree community on the northern side of the Daintree river is not a remote community it is less than a 30 minute drive from Mossman.

In the early 1990's the Queensland Government committed the Daintree community to what was to become an expensive Renewable Energy experiment using solar panels and backup generators.

The Daintree region is the worst area in Queensland for solar power, scientific research found that on average the Daintree has 263 cloudy days per year and an average of just 3.4 hours of sun per day.

In 2004 during the period of prohibition mentioned earlier, the grid has been extended to several new houses built for the Indigenous residents on the southern side of the Bloomfield River, within the exclusion zone. The Daintree residents have always felt that we have been discriminated against for decades and we believe that this proves it.

The only other residents of Queensland who are in a similar situation to those in the Daintree are people that are living on very remote and isolated properties in Northern and Western Queensland. In many cases these properties are many Hundreds of kilometers from grid power not tens of kilometers as in the case of the Daintree.

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It's difficult in a metropolitan area to comprehend just how our lives revolve around, and are controlled by our power systems. The stress is enormous when we constantly have to worry about having enough fuel to keep the generator going to charge the batteries. We are constantly having to check to see if the batteries have enough charge in them in the evening to make sure the power does not drop out during the night. We worry about whether the generator is going to start, or what to do if the inverter, generator or batteries break down, as there is only one trades person in the community that actually knows about solar systems and he is usually away working.

All generators and Inverters have to be sent away for repairs this is extremely expensive and in many cases can take weeks to repair.

All businesses rely solely on generators to produce their power, if they break down they have no power.

Commissioner several years ago a community based organization carried out an in-depth fuel usage survey for the Daintree region, it found that at the time in excess of 3 million litres of fuel per year was used just to run generators. You can only imagine the economic cost to the residents and businesses not to mention the environment, there are some businesses that are now on 'cash on delivery' for their fuel it is that serious.

To give you an example

A family who purchased a local Cafe spent more than \$80k on renovations and new equipment and opened just after the start of the 2015 Tourist season.

Four months later they had to close the business because the takings were not covering the cost of fuel to run the Generators.

The local Hotel has been in receivership twice in three years by successive owners, with one of the main reasons being the high cost of running Generators.

There is also the environmental cost of running several hundred Generators, with thousands of ton's CO₂ emissions going directly into the World Heritage Daintree Rainforest. Residents recognize this and have tried to implement renewable energy systems but as stated previously the Daintree is the worst place in Queensland for solar power.

Jason Birke owner of Solar Hero's in conjunction with The Daintree Rainforest Power Committee have recently emailed a proposal to the Energy Minister Mark Bailey also to the Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk. The proposed cutting edge power plant has been designed by an American company and uses 100% renewable energy the company is prepared to build and install the power plant at no cost to the state Government or Queensland tax payers, a 3 megawatt power plant is proposed for the Daintree.

The proposal that has been put on the table is exactly the type of initiative that Minister Bailey has referred too in his submission to you the Productivity Commissioner.

But instead of considering the proposal with an open mind he has told us simply to go and talk to Ergon Energy.

The Minister appears not even remotely interested in looking at this cutting edge technology and a totally new concept in Electricity Generation.

The Daintree community collectively has thousands of solar panels in place that could be utilized to feed back into the Grid network if the Palaszczuk Government will support the Daintree community in it's endeavor to secure grid quality Power. The Federal Member for Liechhardt Warren Entsch has committed to find the necessary funding for the rest

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of the infrastructure required for the project.

Over the last 23 years there have been a huge number of cases where people have been seriously injured whilst attending to and maintaining their solar systems, many have fallen from ladders or from their roofs while cleaning their solar panels, we have had residents very seriously burnt while refueling their hot generators, it is extremely difficult for the elderly especially elderly women to lift heavy fuel drums when refueling their generators.

Battery banks have exploded causing serious injuries and fires.

Our local Health Center nurse has on many occasions had to throw out thousands of dollars worth of refrigerated medicine because the power system shut down over night. These are just some of the many incidents that this community has had to deal with over the years.

Commissioner when you factor in the huge upfront cost of our power systems the ongoing cost of fuel, repairs, maintenance, replacement of worn-out equipment the overall cost to produce our power would be 10 times greater than the rest of Queensland.

Hopefully this gives you a small insight into the ongoing hardships that the Daintree community has had to endure over the years.

In closing we feel that it is time for the Government of the day to take a serious look at our situation and finally do something about it for the health and well being of not only the residents but for the survival of the Daintree community. We have seen so many businesses and residents come and go over the years having not been able to achieve their dreams either in business or where they have chosen to live because of the economic hardship endured.

Kind regards

Russell O'Doherty
Chair Daintree Rainforest Power Committee

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