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Energy poverty and unemployment rising again in regional Queensland

The Queensland Government today released its Powering North Queensland Plan. The plan includes investment in transmission lines to support three proposed renewable energy projects in North Queensland.

“There is no doubt we are transitioning to a renewable energy future but the investment needs to be at a pace which ensures valuable regional jobs are not lost. “

The Queensland Government states its plan “will help **further** stabilise electricity prices” and put downward pressure on wholesale prices.

“The Queensland Government is totally out of touch if it thinks electricity prices are stable. Power bills for business customers in regional Queensland have risen by a minimum of 15 % in two years. This is hardly the definition of stable,” Ms Brownie said.

The financial pressure faced by businesses is clearly shown in the statistics released by the Australian Energy Regulator this week. Queensland recorded a 73% jump in Queensland businesses being disconnected for non-payment from the December 2016 to March 2017.

“Each business disconnected means more job losses. With high unemployment levels we need every Queensland job.”

Queensland residential disconnections also jumped, increasing by 55% in three months.

“Most worrying is the explosion of homes on payment plans. There are now 42,361 Queensland homes that can’t pay their overdue power bills and have entered into a plan with their electricity retailer.”

Whilst southeast Queensland payment plans jumped 33% in three months, customers served by Ergon Energy in regional Queensland jumped a massive 49 %.

The primary reason for the crippling power bills is the reliance of the Queensland Government on exorbitant dividends from its electricity assets.

Their Powering North Queensland Plan includes a \$150 million reinvestment of Powerlink dividends.

Ms Brownie said this reinvestment of dividends needed to be put in context.

“In 2014-15, the Queensland Government extracted \$1.2 billion from Powerlink and another \$218 million last year. Including Ergon and Energex it took \$4.5 billion in dividends and retained earnings in 2014-15.”

“Unless power bills fall in Queensland, not increase, businesses will close and the need for renewable energy projects in North Queensland will diminish, “ Ms Brownie said.

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