

Greens leader Larissa Waters ignores pleas to stop ‘destructive’ renewables projects, despite some of her senators backing opponents

By [MATTHEW DENHOLM](#)



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The Greens' federal leader Larissa Waters is refusing to back activists and communities – and some of her own senators and party stalwarts – in fighting biodiversity-damaging renewables projects, underlying schisms within the environmental movement.

Senator Waters on Friday appeared to give support to five key renewables projects that opponents – in some cases her own senators – claim will have a significant impact on biodiversity and natural landscapes.

These include the Robbins Island Wind Farm, proposed for a globally significant wetlands area in Tasmania's northwest that is fiercely opposed by Greens senators Nick McKim and Peter Whish-Wilson, as well as former leaders Bob Brown and Christine Milne.

Another contentious proposal to transform a vast area of Western Australia's Nullarbor into a wind, solar and hydrogen-producing region is also privately opposed by Senator McKim.

Senator Waters also declined to answer calls for help from activists fighting wind farms with significant impacts on threatened species or vital remnant vegetation in NSW, Victoria and Queensland.

Challenged to take a definitive stance on these five projects – seen as among the most damaging of more than 1000 renewables projects nationally – Senator Waters reiterated support for the wind and solar rollout.

She would not respond directly to Ms Milne's call for the green movement to [fight damaging renewables](#) projects, and for a shift to [more rooftop solar and batteries](#) to reduce the scale of the rollout.

“The Greens support both large and small-scale renewables,” Senator Waters said. “The CEFC (Clean Energy Finance Corporation) exists because of the Greens and helps households and businesses make the transition to cheap, clean renewable energy.”

“All big energy projects should be subject to strong environmental laws that consider the impacts of that project on climate and nature.”



Upper Burdekin/Gawara Baya Wind Farm site in Queensland. Picture: Kerry Trapnell.

After becoming leader in May, Senator Waters promised: “I commit to you that as a former environmental lawyer, as a proud feminist, that I will always work for equality, and I will always work for nature and for the community and to help people.”

Ahead of her first sitting week as leader in July, she promised to push the Albanese government “as hard as we can” on environmental protection.

An increasing number of environmentalists and Greens believe that mission should include “calling out” nature-damaging large renewables projects.

Local activists are pleading for greater political support in halting wind and solar plants that threaten key species and habitats, often in “David and Goliath” battles against cashed-up global entities or investment funds.

FIVE MOST CONTENTIOUS RENEWABLES PROJECTS

Interactive map showing Australia’s most controversial
renewable energy developments

5

Major Projects

3,400

Wind Turbines

60 million

Solar Panels



While there is unanimous support for a shift away from fossil fuels within the movement and party, some senior figures want each major renewables project to be treated on its merits, rather than offered blanket support.

Ms Milne, a pioneering environmentalist and climate activist, has led the charge, but The Australian has confirmed her views are backed by other Greens, including sitting senators.

“I find it incomprehensible that you get this line back that you can’t oppose renewable energy, when of course you can oppose renewable energy if it is destroying biodiversity,” Ms Milne recently told The Australian. “The environment movement have been reluctant to stand up and say ‘well, actually, on this particular wind farm or this particular transmission line it’s not appropriate’. They are frightened of being categorized in climate denier (terms) ... Globally, people are saying you can’t destroy biodiversity in the name of climate ... That level of conversation is not common in Australia amongst the environment movement – and it should be.”

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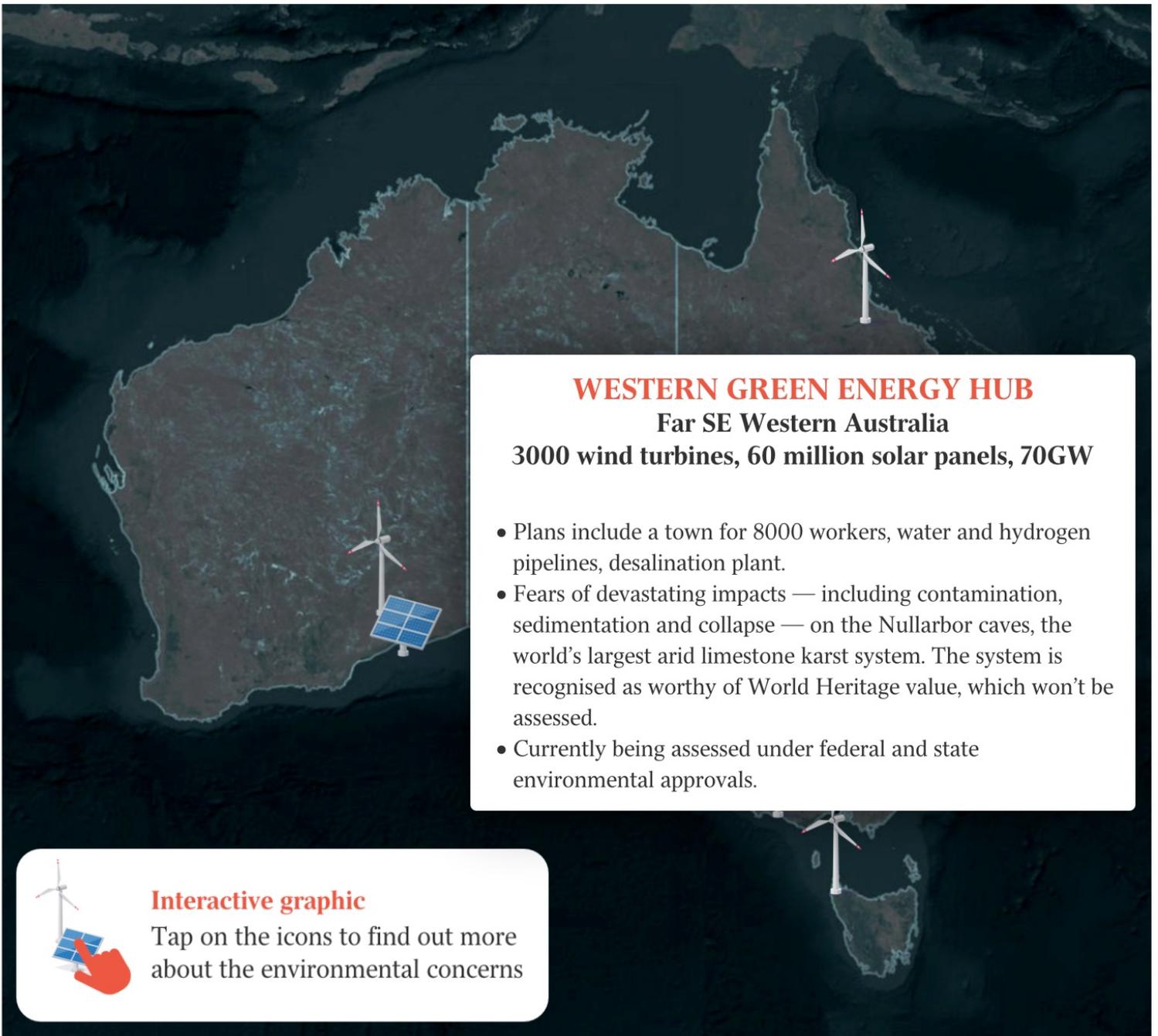
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UPPER BURDEKIN/GAWARA BAYA WIND FARM

Southwest of Ingham, Queensland

69 turbines

- Approved June 2024; construction yet to start. Federal government accepted “significant impact” on range of threatened species could be offset/mitigated.
- Also fears of “significant residual impact” with the planned clearing of 605ha of Sharman’s rock wallaby dispersal habitat, 581ha of greater glider habitat, 614ha of koala habitat and 616ha of red goshawk habitat.
- Proponent — a subsidiary of Windlab Developments, owned by Andrew Forrest’s Squadron Energy — says impacts will be mitigated or offset, including via a bird and bat management plan and support for a koala monitoring program.



Interactive graphic

Tap on the icons to find out more
about the environmental concerns

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WINTERBORNE WIND FARM

Near Walcha, Northern Tablelands, NSW
126 turbines, 700MW, 30km overhead
transmission lines

- Threatened species potentially impacted include tiger quoll, koala, Austral Toadflax, white-throated needletail and fork-tailed swift, and greater glider
- Fears of loss of significant koala habitat, concerns for wider birdlife, including wedge-tailed eagles, and about the site's proximity to Oxley Wild Rivers national park.
- Project under assessment. Proponent Winterbourne Wind argues impacts will be managed, mitigated and offset.



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ROBBINS ISLAND WIND FARM

North-west Tasmania

100 turbines, 900MW

- Area rated Tasmania's most important shorebird site, home to more than 25,000 shorebirds in summer. Bird migratory staging point, including for the critically endangered orange bellied parrot.
- Home to what's believed the only remaining wild population of Tasmanian devils free of the Devil Facial Tumor Disease, estimated to have wiped out up to 80pc of the species. Fears a 1.2km bridge will increase risk of disease reaching the island's devils.
- A state EPA condition shutting down turbines for five months a year to protect orange bellied parrots was overturned on appeal. Project approved by federal government in August. Construction to start after a 3-year survey.



Interactive graphic

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KENTBRUCK GREEN POWER HUB

Between Portland and Nelson, Victoria
105 wind turbines, battery storage facility and
transmission line

- 31 threatened animals thought to be in project study area. Several species of bent wing bats considered at risk of collision with turbines. Potentially 37 threatened migratory bird species, with proponent estimating a "low possibility of impacts on bird species through collision with turbines".
- Concerns about impact on biodiversity values of adjacent protected areas, including Glenelg Estuary and Discovery Bay Ramsar site, and on a nearby community wetland restoration project.
- Proponent HM Capital says impacts will be minimised by design and control measures. Turbines to be "micro-sited" with heights "selected to minimise overlap between rotor swept area and bird flight heights".



Interactive graphic

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Some current Greens politicians and senior campaigners privately agree the renewables rollout is a “disaster”, with insufficient safeguards and planning to protect species and landscapes from profit-driven developers.

Outgoing Wilderness Society national campaigns director Amelia Young recently warned in a leaked email obtained by The Australian: “The renewables revolution threatens nature in many of the same extractive and colonial ways that the industrial revolution did.”

Peak green groups are beginning to respond, with the Australian Conservation Foundation and WWF calling for renewables no-go zones and a focus on using degraded land. However, across Australia activists continue to report little or no assistance from Greens MPs, with the exception of Tasmanian senators and state members, and a mixed response from green groups.

The Winterbourne Wind Farm, near Walcha in the NSW Northern Tablelands, is being fought by locals concerned about its potential impact, including on threatened species including tiger quolls, koalas and wedge-tailed eagles. “Its location is just not appropriate, adjacent to the Oxley Wild Rivers National Park, which incorporates the Gondwana World Heritage Area,” said grazier Cameron Greig, president of Voice for Walcha.

“Runoff from the project site runs off straight into the catchment which runs through that national park.”



Koala at the Upper Burdekin/Gawara Baya Wind Farm site in Queensland. Picture: Dominic Chaplin



Glenelg River Estuary. Picture: Supplied

There were concerns about “the real risk of erosion” from roadbuilding associated with the project and threatened birdlife colliding with the 118 turbines.

The proponent has conceded in approvals documentation that the project could lead to the “fragmentation” of threatened woodland communities, which “could lead to a reduction in essential ecosystem functions”.

Winterbourne Wind, ultimately owned by Danish energy giant Vestas, argues impacts will be managed, mitigated and offset, including via a bird and bat management plan. Locals are unconvinced. “There are timbered corridors which are really important to birdlife, connecting the national park and large remnant woodland areas, on ridgelines that graziers have left standing timber,” Mr Greig said.

“The wind farm’s design puts turbines on those ridgelines, as well as roads that give access to the turbines. Birds need those corridors to move freely without fear of predators. Taking that away is a very direct threat to birdlife.”

Mr Greig said the community had received no support from national green groups or the Greens, but would appreciate some. “We’ve reached out but haven’t received any support or interest at all,” he said. “It’s unfortunate.”



Robbins Island, off the northwest coast of Tasmania. Picture: Rob Blakers

Similar calls for Greens involvement are heard in Queensland, where locals are launching a last-ditch effort to stop the Upper Burdekin/Gawara Baya Wind Farm, south of Ingham.

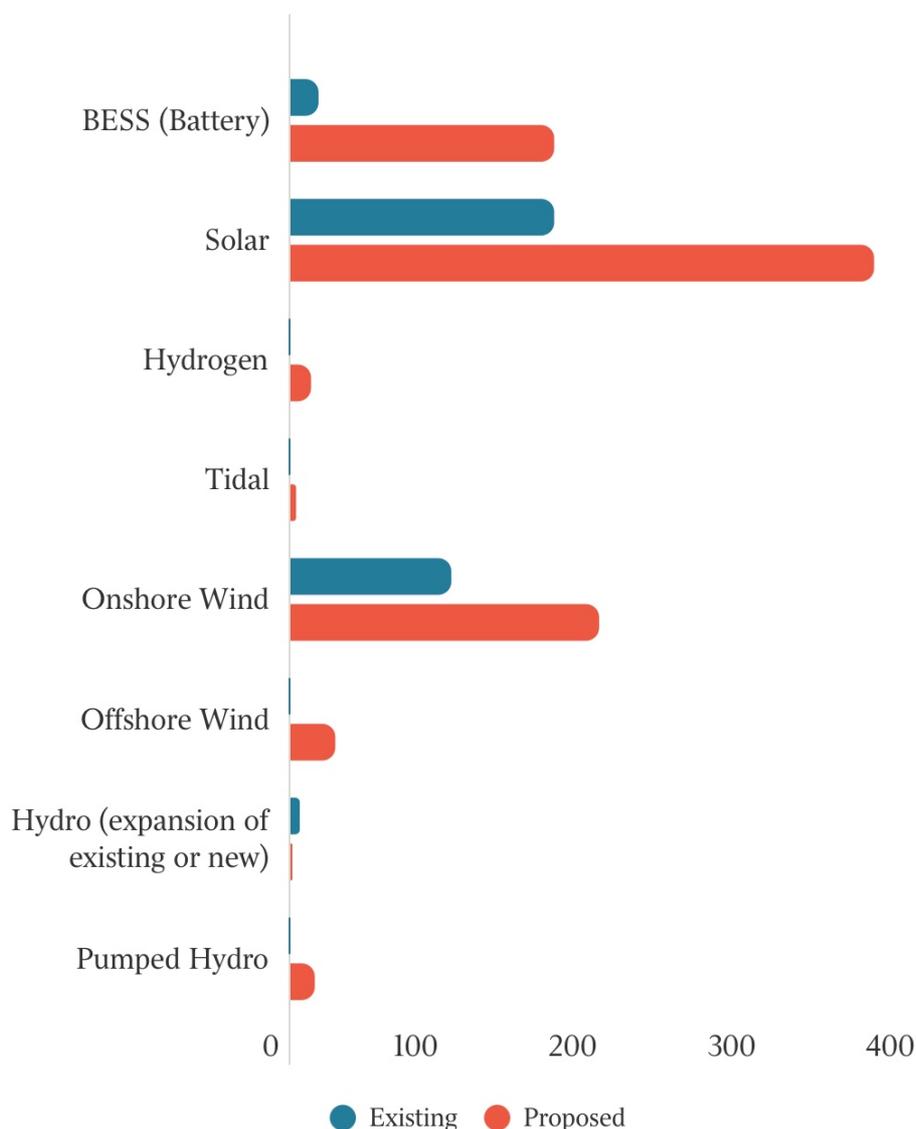
These include former state government principal botanist Jeanette Kemp, who urged Greens MPs to visit the site of the proposed 69 turbines.

“They would be blown away by the rugged beauty of the place and it would help them understand what is at stake,” Ms Kemp said.

The project was approved by the federal government in June 2024. Despite its conclusion that the project would have “significant impact” on a range of threatened species, the government decided these impacts could be offset or mitigated. Those impacts include clearing of 605ha of Sharman’s rock wallaby dispersal habitat with a “significant residual impact on the species”.

As well, there would be “significant impact” from clearing 581ha of greater glider habitat, 614ha of koala habitat and 616ha of red goshawk habitat.

Renewable energy capacity: Existing vs proposed projects by technology type



* Expansion of existing capacity

Source: Rainforest Reserves Australia/S.Nowakowski

The proponent – a subsidiary of Windlab Developments, owned by Andrew Forrest’s Squadron Energy – insists impacts will be mitigated or offset, including via a bird and bat management plan and support for koala monitoring.

Ms Kemp said these offsets were “extremely inadequate”.

“In terms of damage to biodiversity it is currently the worst of all of Queensland’s proposed wind farms,” she said. “Effectively the ... development is allocating this remote and high biocondition area to a future of fragmentation and environmental degradation.”

She said that, while receiving support from the Wildlife Preservation Society, other green groups had “shied away” out of fear of being seen as “supporting coal or nuclear”.

“It’s time that people realise the issue is not black and white – you can be opposed to wind farms in high-biodiversity areas, yet still vote Green or Labor and still fight climate change,” she said. “All I am doing is standing up for our beautiful wild intact areas. If they are destroyed in the name of protecting the planet I just don’t see the point.”

Some Greens are taking up the call, particularly in Tasmania, where the movement was born in the fight against renewable energy in the form of hydroelectric dams.

Robbins Island Wind Farm, in the state’s far northwest, is strongly opposed by not only Dr Brown and Ms Milne but those who have followed them into the Senate for Tasmania, including sitting senators McKim and Whish-Wilson.

Senator McKim has also privately shown support for scientists trying to stop the Western Green Energy Hub proposed for the WA side of the Nullarbor.

This has included tabling a pet

A group of scientists fear it will have devastating impacts on the Nullarbor cave and karst system, the world’s largest arid limestone karst system, recognised as worthy of World Heritage listing.

Multinational consortium proponent WGEH argues these features can be protected via buffer zones and avoidance of significant areas. The scientists disagree.

“These caves are not isolated holes in the ground – they are part of an integrated subterranean drainage system; a cave catchment hidden under the ground,” said cave ecologist Stefan Eberhard. “So to say you can avoid overlay is not true – you can’t.”



Tasmanian wedge-tailed eagle, Robbins Island, off the northwest coast of Tasmania. Picture: Rob Blakers



A cave in the Nullarbor karst Country, inside the proposed footprint of the colossal wind and solar hydrogen hub. Picture: Stefan Eberhard

Dr Eberhard said the federal approvals process did not consider the accepted world heritage values, because WA blocked nomination in 1992. The Save the Nullarbor campaign had been supported by the Conservation Council of WA, the Bob Brown Foundation and senator Nick McKim, he said. “Nick McKim has been very supportive,” Dr Eberhard said. “We’re looking for support from WA Greens – we’ve reached out to them.”

Senator McKim declined to comment but both he and Senator Whish-Wilson have been very public in their condemnation of the Robbins Island Wind Farm.

“This project (Robbins) will have massive impacts on biodiversity and threatened species, including the critically endangered orange-bellied parrot, the Tasmanian wedge-tailed eagle and the endangered Tasmanian devil,” Senator McKim said when federal approval for the project was announced on August 29.

“Robbins Island is critical habitat for migratory birds, and has been identified by the commonwealth as being suitable for an International Ramsar listing ... Its habitats, landscapes and seascapes should be protected under international conventions - not exploited for profit by a multinational corporation.”

Senator Whish-Wilson was also vehement. “The approval of this obviously inappropriate project will only serve to undermine community confidence in our already flailing roll-out of renewable energy and give strength to the pro-fossil fuel interests,” he said. “We need a clean energy transition to large-scale renewable projects to meet our climate targets, but this shameful decision undermines that cause.”



Stefan and Bronwen Eberhard, co-founders of Save The Nullarbor Inc. Picture: Stefan and Bronwen Eberhard

ACEN Australia, the Robbins Island proponent, argues environmental risks can be managed, while rejecting any major impact on the parrot or devils.

In southern Victoria, the absence of major green groups raising concerns over the 105-turbine Kentbruck Green Power Hub has forced the apolitical Nature Glenelg Trust to intervene. It would not comment, but has published a statement warning the project would place “highly threatened” species, including the southern bent-wing bat and Australasian Bittern, “at ongoing risk of collision or reduced habitat availability”. Bitterns, it warns, “are known to make episodic movements through the proposed field of turbines”.

Proponent HM Capital says impacts will be minimised by design and control measures, while the turbines will be “micro-sited” with heights “selected to minimise the overlap between rotor swept area and bird flight heights”.
