

# Bob Katter, Anthony Albanese take bromance to the bush on renewable energy 'power trip'

By national rural and regional correspondent [Dominique Schwartz](#)

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**Photo:** [Anthony Albanese and Bob Katter are an unlikely pair of mates, who have headed north to tackle energy problems. \(ABC News: Dominique Schwartz\)](#)

**Map:** [QLD](#)

When federal politicians Bob Katter and Anthony "Albo" Albanese get together, sparks fly.

But not in the way you might imagine. Theirs is a bromance which has come of age.

The self-described bush-whacker from northern Queensland and the inner-Sydney Labor stalwart have been mates for 21 years.

"Bob Katter is one of the great characters of the national parliament," Mr Albanese told the ABC.

"He's a mate of mine and I am proud to say that. He is a fair-dinkum bloke.

"That doesn't mean we agree on all issues, of course not, but I respect him."

The feeling is mutual.

## [How to save on your power bill](#)



[Power bills are expensive. Real expensive. So here are some tried and tested methods to help you save.](#)

"He (Albanese) can mix just as comfortably with the rich and powerful as the poor and downtrodden, and be just as comfortable with the city push as mucking around with us bushwhackers out in the middle of nowhere," Mr Katter said.

The middle of Mr Katter's sprawling north Queensland electorate of Kennedy is where they're headed when the ABC joins their charter flight.

It was on another trip, to the Torres Strait in 1996, that their friendship was born.

"I got to know Bob in my first term of parliament when we were on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Committee ... and I was surprised, I must admit, at how warmly the islanders greeted Bob," Mr Albanese said.

"They clearly had respect for him and he had respect for them."

## **NQ projects 'to almost double Australia's renewable energy'**

On this occasion, Mr Katter wants to show the shadow infrastructure and regional development minister "the triangle of power" — three renewable energy projects which he believes could change the face of the electricity generation in the north.

"If we bring this off, it'll take us from 6 per cent renewables to 10 per cent renewables in Australia," an animated Mr Katter explained to his mate across the aisle of the charter plane.

"It's almost a doubling of renewables in this country."



[Photo: Mr Katter and Mr Albanese have been jetting over Queensland's north. \(ABC News: Dominique Schwartz\)](#)

The first stop is the old Kidston gold-mining site, 200 kilometres west of Townsville, which is being transformed into an \$880 million renewable energy hub.

Australian company Genex Power is building a solar farm and pump storage hydro scheme aimed at powering 200,000 homes across much of north Queensland.

"This is the first example of a large-scale energy pump storage project integrated with a very large solar farm, so it's a world first," said Genex chief executive Simon Kidston.

The energy created by more than half a million solar panels will be used to drive hydro turbines that pump water between two, huge, former mine pits, generating electricity for the national grid.

"When the sun goes down and no energy is generated from wind or solar, we can turn on hydro and deliver (six hours of) power instantly into the grid... so it really competes with the peaking generators, which are historically gas, and we are less than a third the cost of gas," Mr Kidston explained.

The solar farm is due to start generating electricity by early next year, with hydro power coming on stream in 2021.



[Photo: Simon Kidston hopes his solar farm and pump storage hydro scheme will power 200,000 north Queensland homes. \(ABC News: Dominique Schwartz\)](#)

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull is a fan of pump storage hydro.

On ABC's 7.30 last week he [described his government's plans for Snowy 2.0 as one of his greatest achievements in the top job.](#)

Genex Power has received both federal and state support for its project, and has applied for funding from the \$5 billion Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF).

NAIF has not granted any concessional loans since being established by the Federal Government in 2015.

India's Adani has also applied for NAIF assistance to build a rail link as part of its giant Carmichael coal mine development in Queensland's Galilee Basin.

Professor Andrew Blakers from the Australian National University told the ABC it doesn't make sense to fund a new coal mine.



[Photo: Kidston's former mining pits will be used to generate hydro-electricity \(ABC News: Dominique Schwartz\)](#)

He said pump storage hydro could be used with solar and wind to create a cost-competitive, reliable, 100 per cent renewable energy system for the nation within the next 20 years.

He said the area around Townsville alone "could provide all the storage space required... for Australia."

Professor Blakers leads an ANU team which is mapping pump storage hydro sites across the Australia.

"We only need a few tens of sites across the country," he told the ABC, and, just halfway through the survey, the team has already found "more than 10,000 sites".

"They are typically, high, dry gullies in mountain ranges in farmland," he said.

He said a national pump storage hydro network would require 500 gigalitres of water over the next half century — less than Adani is expected to need over the life of its Carmichael coal mine.

**Slow action on Hell's Gate prompts fury for a Katter scorned**

Back in the air over North Queensland, Bob Katter — map in hand — is trying to spot the site of the proposed Hell's Gate Dam on the Burdekin River, to the amusement of his travelling companion Albo.

The dam would be used to generate hydro-electricity and to irrigate sugar cane crops whose waste fibre could be used to create the biofuel ethanol.

## Questions raised by Adani's green light on coal mine



[Adani's announcement that it's giving the green light to the Carmichael coal mine in Queensland's Galilee Basin begs more questions than it answers.](#)

The project, which began as the Bradfield Scheme in 1929, has been championed by Mr Katter for years.

After the Coalition's narrow election victory last year, Mr Katter agreed to provide supply and confidence to the Government in exchange, he said, for action on Hell's Gate.

"I am happy in my own mind that we will have a determination to move forward and not to talk about it, but to actually build a dam and create 20,000 jobs in the future," he said at the time, after meeting with Mr Turnbull.

But the maverick Mr Katter is not happy the Federal Government has seen fit to fund only another feasibility study, and has issued a warning to the Prime Minister.

"If you have any political skills or brains you know your Government is one by-election away, one by-election away, from needing my or [Nick Xenophon Team MP] Rebekha Sharkie's vote, and only a very, very foolish person would treat in a cavalier manner, Rebekha Sharkie or myself," Mr Katter cautioned.

The tour's final stop is Hughenden, a rural community in grazing country south-west of Townsville.



[Photo: Windlab believes its north Queensland farms could power nearly 1 million homes. \(ABC News: Dominique Schwartz\)](#)

Fifteen kilometres from town is a ridgeline which will house the first wind turbines for the Kennedy Energy Park, a \$2 billion project combining wind, solar and battery storage.

"About 80 kilometres that way is phase two, which is an enormous plateau of 80,000 hectares with a world class wind resource on it," Roger Price, the chief executive of Windlab, explained to the travelling party.

"That project will support up to 1200 megawatts of wind, enough energy to support nearly 1 million Australian homes."

The Australian Renewable Energy Agency has committed \$18 million to what it has called a trail-blazing project.

Construction is due to start later this year.

## **National energy debate focused too much on gas: Price**

"Wind and solar are by far the cheapest form of technology you can build to produce electricity," Mr Price said.

"If we want to reduce the cost of electricity we need to build more renewables, we need to have a stable policy framework that allows investors to make those 10, 20, 30-year commitments to renewable energy," he added, calling for bipartisan support for a Clean Energy Target, as recommended by the Finkel review into Australia's energy security.

After a day under the north's hot winter sun, Anthony Albanese is calling it beer o'clock.



[Photo: Looks like it's beer o'clock... \(ABC News: Dominique Schwartz\)](#)

There's no argument as the party heads to one of Hughenden's pubs.

"Why is it that a country like Germany outdoes us on solar, with our natural resources? That doesn't make sense," the ALP frontbencher said.

"I mean, how could any Government conceive of the stupidity like another base-load coal-fired power station in North Queensland?" Mr Katter rejoined.

But it didn't take long before the mates were at loggerheads — never to find common ground.

The topic? Rugby league of course.