NSW Legislative Council

Portfolio Committee No. 4 - Regional NSW

Final report

Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

July 2026

Report 65

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Published on 29 July 2026 according to Standing Order 238

New South Wales. Parliament. Legislative Council. Portfolio Committee No. 4 - Regional NSW. Report no. 65.

Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

"July 2026"

Chair: Hon Mark Banasiak MLC

A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of Australia

ISBN: 978-1-923392-24-3

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Terms of reference

That Portfolio Committee No. 4 - Regional NSW inquire into and report on the impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales, and in particular:

(a) current and projected socioeconomic, cultural, agricultural and environmental impacts of projects within renewable energy zones in New South Wales including the cumulative impacts

(b) current and projected considerations needed with regards to fire risk, management and containment and potential implications on insurance for land holders and/or project proponents in and around Renewable Energy Zones

(c) the historical, current and projected future financial costs associated with construction and maintenance of large scale projects within Renewable Energy Zones

(d) proposed compensation to regional New South Wales residents impacted by Renewable Energy Zone transmission lines:

  (i) adequacy of compensation currently being offered for hosting transmission lines

  (ii) adequacy of the shared benefits being offered to neighbours of large scale renewable projects

  (iii) financial impact of compensation on the state's economy

  (iv) tax implications resulting from compensation received by impacted residents

(e) adequacy, and management of voluntary planning agreements and payments made to the LGAs impacted by Renewable Energy Zones

(f) current and projected supply and demand levels of manufactured products, raw materials, and human resources required for completion of Renewable Energy Zones and their source

(g) projected impact on visitation to regional areas with renewable energy zones resulting from changes to land use

(h) suitable alternatives to traditional renewable energy sources such as large-scale wind and solar

(i) adequacy of community consultation and engagement in the development of Renewable Energy Zones, and associated projects

(j) how decommissioning bonds are currently managed and should be managed as part of large scale renewable projects

(k) the role and responsibility of the Net Zero Commission and Commissioner in addressing matters set out above, and

(l) any other related matters.

The terms of reference for the inquiry were self-referred by the committee on 30 July 2024.

Committee details

Committee members

Hon Mark Banasiak MLC	Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party	*Chair*
Hon Emma Hurst MLC	Animal Justice Party	*Deputy Chair*
Ms Abigail Boyd MLC*	The Greens	
Hon Greg Donnelly MLC	Australian Labor Party	
Hon Aileen MacDonald MLC*	Liberal Party	
Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC	The Nationals	
Hon Cameron Murphy MLC	Australian Labor Party	
Hon Peter Primrose MLC	Australian Labor Party	

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* Ms Abigail Boyd MLC is a participating member from 5 August 2024 for the duration of the inquiry.
* The Hon Scott Barrett MLC replaced the Hon Aileen MacDonald MLC as a substantive member of the committee from 5 February 2026.
* The Hon Aileen MacDonald MLC substituted for the Hon Scott Barrett MLC from 6 February 2026 for the duration of the inquiry.

Secretariat

Frances Arguelles, Principal Council Officer
Margaret Pollard, Senior Council Officer
Glenn Hill, Council Officer
Chelsea Parker-Burton, Intern
Talina Drabsch, Director

Chair's foreword

The committee's examination of the impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales began in 2024, with the first report tabled in August 2025.

The first report focused on the Central-West Orana (CWO) REZ, as it was the most progressed, and found there was an urgent need for better consultation between the government, renewable energy developers and the Central–West Orana community. The report also highlighted the need for a range of improvements, including the provision of mental health supports, a review of the use of Social Impact Assessments, that payments for land acquisition not be taxed, and that ecological protection and restoration priorities be identified for each REZ.

Fast-forward 12 months, and the committee has now visited each of the five Renewable Energy Zones in New South Wales: New England, Hunter–Central Coast, Illawarra, South West and Central–West Orana. We saw firsthand how renewable energy infrastructure impacts various landholders and heard from rural and regional communities about the effects of the rapid implementation of the REZ. While each REZ has its own unique uncertainties, there were a number of common issues raised by many stakeholders across the REZs, including how the rapid progress of the zones has sometimes come at a cost to regional interests. The committee was also mindful of the impacts of the REZs on neighbouring communities and those hosting renewable infrastructure projects outside of the zones.

Rural and regional communities are at the heart of this inquiry. They are the ones facing significant change to their communities, environment and, for some, their livelihood. The committee is grateful to each stakeholder who took the time to participate by providing submissions and/or attending the various hearings, as well as those landholders who welcomed the committee onto their properties, so we could witness firsthand the impacts of the REZs. We agree that the energy transition should happen *with* communities and not *to* them.

However, the reality has fallen short of this. Key among the committee's findings was that the government has presided over the roll-out of REZ without a coherent, enforceable, whole-of-government planning framework resulting in predictable and avoidable harm to rural and regional communities. Indeed, we found that EnergyCo, as the REZ infrastructure planner, has failed to perform its central coordinating role, particularly in relation to cumulative impact management, sequencing of development and coordination of infrastructure and services. Its community consultation, and that of renewable energy developers, has failed to provide affected communities with the capacity to meaningfully influence outcomes. As a consequence, the social licence for REZ development has substantially eroded in the eyes of a number of stakeholders.

To ensure accountability and leadership of the REZ development, we made two direct recommendations regarding EnergyCo, including that EnergyCo be subject to formal performance and accountability requirements.

We also found that local councils have been left to manage the consequences of state-led infrastructure expansion without sufficient authority, resources, or strategic direction. We recommend that the government provide recurrent funding to local councils in each Renewable Energy Zone to assist with resourcing pressures.

Further, the committee found that the benefits of REZ development have been unevenly distributed. The committee urges the government to expand the compensation and benefit-sharing framework to address land value and insurance impacts; to publish clear eligibility criteria for all community benefit and compensation programs; and to report each year on how community benefit funding has been allocated and expended within each REZ.

While this inquiry has concluded, the energy transition in rural and regional communities is ongoing. Individuals, farmers, families and host communities will continue to be impacted. The government must be accountable for this significant transition that is being experienced by many rural and regional communities throughout New South Wales. While our first report signaled that urgent action is needed, the government's response to the first report was characterised by broad support 'in principle', while failing to commit to substantive structural reform, indicating a gap between acknowledgment and action. This response is unsatisfactory, as it is devoid of clear timelines, deliverables and accountability mechanisms, which undermine confidence in its implementation and the government's commitment to ensuring rural and regional communities are part of the energy transition.

We urge the government to carefully consider its response to this report and have accordingly recommended that the government publish a detailed implementation plan for all accepted recommendations of this report within three months, as part of its response to this report. The plan should set out relevant timelines, responsible agencies and measurable outcomes, with the government reporting to New South Wales Parliament every six months on the progress of its implementation plan.

I thank my committee colleagues for their thoughtful engagement and contributions throughout this inquiry. I also thank the secretariat for their professional assistance.

Hon Mark Banasiak MLC
Committee Chair

Findings

Finding 1 **54**
Given Renewable Energy Zones are an essential part of New South Wales' energy transition, the NSW Government must find a way to deliver the Renewable Energy Zone rollout as a matter of urgency, while ensuring regional communities are meaningfully consulted, adequately supported through the transition, and able to share in its benefits.

Finding 2 **56**
The Renewable Energy Zone model, as implemented in New South Wales, has prioritised the rapid implementation of REZs, sometimes at a cost to regional interests. However, it is important to continue these measures to ensure the economic benefits, reliability and climate benefits.

Finding 3 **56**
The NSW Government has presided over the rollout of Renewable Energy Zones without a coherent, enforceable, whole-of-government planning framework, resulting in predictable and avoidable harm to rural and regional communities.

Finding 4 **56**
Renewable energy development poses a long-term change for some regional communities. There are challenges and opportunities to manage as a part of this to ensure that, on balance, it is a positive change with long lasting benefits.

Finding 5 **56**
While there are strong coordination and community benefit measures within REZ boundaries there are improvements that could be made to planning, appropriate safeguards, and demonstrated community benefits.

Finding 6 **57**
That Renewable Energy Zones development poses challenges for local services such as housing, road infrastructure, water security, waste, emergency services, and local economies. Some of these impacts can be addressed through individual planning consents and others require strategic coordination.

Finding 7 **58**
EnergyCo, as the infrastructure planner for the Renewable Energy Zones has failed to perform its central coordinating role, particularly in relation to:

- cumulative impact management
- sequencing of development
- coordination of infrastructure and services.

Finding 8 **59**
Local councils have been left to manage the consequences of state-led infrastructure expansion without sufficient authority, resources, or strategic direction.

Finding 9 **60**
The NSW Government has failed to adequately address known risks relating to agricultural productivity, land value impacts, and insurance availability, leaving landholders exposed to ongoing uncertainty.

Finding 10 **60**
The benefits of Renewable Energy Zone development are unevenly distributed, while the burdens are concentrated on host communities, resulting in structural inequity.

Finding 11 **62**
That the consultation process undertaken by EnergyCo, government agencies, and renewable energy developers has at times been procedural in nature and did not always provide affected communities with the capacity to meaningfully influence outcomes.

Finding 12 **62**
The consultation model could be improved by:

- whole of area rather than project-by-project engagement
- reducing information asymmetry
- earlier engagement before key decisions are made.

Finding 13 **62**
The State Significant Development framework, as applied to Renewable Energy Zone projects, systematically privileges proponents over affected communities and does not provide equitable procedural rights to landholders.

Finding 14 **63**
That the widespread use of non-disclosure agreements and individualised negotiations has actively undermined transparency, fragmented communities, and exacerbated social division.

Finding 15 **63**
Some witnesses felt that as a direct consequence of the failures in consultation and community engagement, social licence for Renewable Energy Zone development in affected regions has been materially eroded.

Finding 16 **65**
Social Impact Assessments need more consistency of application and adequate scoping, and are incapable of capturing cumulative and intangible impacts. These issues should be addressed via cumulative impact studies.

Finding 17 **67**
The extension of the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW to renewable energy infrastructure has not provided a sufficient mechanism for resolving disputes arising from Renewable Energy Zone development.

Finding 18 **67**
The role of the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW is currently inadequate for addressing the scale and complexity of Renewable Energy Zone-related grievances due to insufficient:

- enforcement powers
- systemic oversight capability
- capacity to address cumulative or cross-project issues.

Finding 19 **67**
That the NSW Government's reliance on the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW as a primary dispute resolution mechanism reflects that it has not established robust, proactive protections for affected communities.

Finding 20 **106**
The proposed economic benefits from Renewable Energy Zones are not consistent with the lived experience of some rural and regional communities.

Finding 21 **107**
That the land acquisition process in relation to renewable energy development is inadequate.

Finding 22 **108**
Decommissioning bonds are a necessary part of any significant infrastructure as they provide reassurance to the community regarding long-term environmental and economic impacts.

Finding 23 **109**
The Renewable Energy Zones and related infrastructure have caused significant concern in the community regarding fire risk and uncertainty around emergency service planning and responses.

Finding 24 **111**
The response of the NSW Government to the first report is characterised by broad support 'in principle' while failing to commit to substantive structural reform, indicating a gap between acknowledgment and action.

Finding 25 **111**
The response of the NSW Government to the first report lacked clear timelines, deliverables, and accountability mechanisms, undermining confidence in its implementation and the commitment to ensuring rural regional communities are part of the energy transition.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 **57**

That the NSW Government review each Renewable Energy Zone and the impacts on each regional community affected while each zone is rolled out.

Recommendation 2 **58**

That the NSW Government seek to amend the *Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020* to expand and clarify EnergyCo's statutory mandate to include explicit responsibility for cumulative impact management, cross-agency coordination, and regional infrastructure and service planning, with enforceable obligations.

Recommendation 3 **58**

That the NSW Government ensure that EnergyCo is subject to formal performance and accountability requirements including:

- statutory reporting on cumulative impacts in each Renewable Energy Zone
- public reporting on mitigation measures and outcomes
- independent audit of its coordination role.

Recommendation 4 **59**

That the NSW Government require all relevant agencies to operate under a coordinated Renewable Energy Zone delivery framework, led by EnergyCo, with:

- defined roles and responsibilities
- mandatory data sharing
- joint planning obligations.

Recommendation 5 **59**

That the NSW Government provide recurrent funding to local councils in each Renewable Energy Zone to assist with resourcing pressures.

Recommendation 6 **61**

That the NSW Government expand the compensation and benefit-sharing framework to:

- include non-host neighbours
- address land value and insurance impacts
- ensure the equitable distribution of benefits
- publish clear eligibility criteria for all community benefit and compensation programs
- provide annual public reporting on the allocation and expenditure of community benefit funding within each Renewable Energy Zone.

Recommendation 7 **64**

That the NSW Government seek to find ways to ensure the consultation process where possible:

- occurs prior to key planning decisions
- demonstrates measurable influence on project design
- includes independent auditing of engagement outcomes
- requires proponents to publish a response explaining how community feedback has influenced project design or, where it has not, the reasons why.

Recommendation 8 **64**

That the NSW Government review the use of non-disclosure agreements in renewable energy project negotiations as they restrict community-wide transparency and inhibit effective consultation.

Recommendation 9 **64**

That the NSW Government review the State Significant Development framework with a view to:

- consider landholder rights
- ensure consultation timeframes are adequate
- consider independent peer review of impact assessments.

The review should specifically consider:

- cumulative impact assessment across multiple projects within a Renewable Energy Zone
- opportunities for earlier strategic planning prior to project assessment
- procedural fairness for directly affected landholders and neighbouring properties
- consistency in assessment requirements across Renewable Energy Zone projects.

Recommendation 10 **65**

That the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure review the Social Impact Assessment process so assessments are standardised, independently verified, and expanded to include consideration of:

- cumulative impacts
- social cohesion
- long-term regional effects.

Social Impact Assessments should be completed before transmission corridors and Renewable Energy Zone boundaries are finalised and should be updated as projects progress through the planning system.

Recommendation 11 **66**

That the NSW Government seek to establish a statutory Community Advocate for Renewable Energy Zone regions to:

- represent landholders
- provide independent advice
- participate in planning and assessment processes.

Recommendation 12 **67**

That the NSW Government undertake an urgent review of the role of the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW in renewable energy infrastructure with a view to significantly expand its powers regarding:

- binding dispute resolution
- systemic investigations
- proactive monitoring.

The review should include an assessment of the effectiveness of cumulative impact management, community engagement, regional economic outcomes, housing impacts and the delivery of community benefit commitments.

Recommendation 13 **107**

That the NSW Government seek to strengthen the land acquisition process by:

- applying the principles of the Private Agreement Guideline so:
  - agreements are tailored to the specific landholder and project
  - agreements are fair, reasonable, and written in plain language
  - reasonable landholder costs associated with entering into or understanding the agreement are paid for by the applicant.
- developing a suite of standard documents, prescribed by regulations, that are required to initiate and complete the acquisition process
- providing an urgent update regarding the review of the *Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991*
- including minimum standards for:
  - independent legal advice funded by proponents
  - valuation processes
  - mediation prior to compulsory acquisition
  - transparent compensation principles.

Recommendation 14 **108**

That the NSW Government reconsider their position regarding decommissioning bonds and consider applying mandatory bonds to new renewable energy developments including requirements for periodic review of financial assurance to reflect actual costs.

Recommendation 15 **110**

That the NSW Government provide additional funding to the local Aboriginal land councils in each Renewable Energy Zone to assist with complex land analysis and negotiations with large-scale developers together with requirements for early engagement in strategic planning, cultural heritage assessment and route selection before project locations are finalised.

Recommendation 16 **111**

That the NSW Government publish a detailed implementation plan for all accepted recommendations of this report within three months. The plan should set out relevant timelines, responsible agencies and measurable outcomes, with the government reporting to New South Wales Parliament every six months on the progress of its implementation plan. The implementation plan should:

- identify the lead agency responsible for each recommendation;
- specify implementation timeframes;
- include measurable performance indicators;
- provide annual public progress reports until implementation is complete.

Conduct of inquiry

The terms of reference for the inquiry were self-referred by the committee on 30 July 2024.

The committee received 157 submissions and one supplementary submission.

The committee held seven public hearings: two at Parliament House in Sydney, one in Dubbo, one in Armidale, one in Singleton, one in Wollongong and one in Hay.

The committee also conducted site visits to:

- the property of Mr Nigel Roberts, in the Central-West Orana region
- the property of Mr and Mrs James and Amanda Bowman, in the Central-West Orana region
- ACEREZ site in Merotherie, located in the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone
- ACEN Australia site in Uralla, located in the New England Renewable Energy Zone
- a property in Uralla in the New England region
- Waratah Super Battery Project site in Colongra, located in the Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone
- Hunter Zero Manufacturing Centre of Excellence in TAFE NSW Tighes Hill Campus, located in the Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone
- the property of Mr Michael Holz in Mitchell's Flat, located in the Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone
- Dinawan sub-station in Bundure, located near the South West Renewable Energy Zone
- the property of Mr Tom Hooke in Wanganella, located in the South West region.

Inquiry related documents are available on the committee's website, including submissions, hearing transcripts, tabled documents and answers to questions on notice.

Glossary

AEMO	Australian Energy Market Operator
CIS	Cumulative Impact Studies
CoREM	Coalition of Renewable Energy Mayors
CWO	Central-West Orana
DCCEEW	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
DPHI	Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EnergyCo	Energy Corporation of NSW
EWON	Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW
GW	Gigawatt
HCC	Hunter-Central Coast
KV	Kilovolt
IPC	Independent Planning Commission
LTESA	Long Term Energy Service Agreements
NE	New England
NEM	National Energy Market
NDA	Non-disclosure agreements
OSOM	Oversize and overmass
P2R	Port to REZ
REZ	Renewable Energy Zones
SBP Scheme	Strategy Benefit Payments Scheme
SEAR	Secretary's Environmental Assessment Report
SEPP	State Environment Planning Policy
SIA	Social Impact Assessment
SSD	State Significant Development
SSI	State Significant Infrastructure
SW	South West
TfNSW	Transport for NSW
VPA	Voluntary Planning Agreement

Chapter 1 Developments since the first report

The energy transition in New South Wales is underway, with the government focused on moving from coal-fired power stations to renewable energy sources. The Renewable Energy Zones (REZ), established in 2020, are presented as a key part of this transition. This inquiry examines the impact of REZs on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales. The initial report focused on the state's first REZ - Central-West Orana, whereas this final report considers all five Renewable Energy Zones in New South Wales. It complements the first report and references issues or terms from it as relevant.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the first report and the government's response to its findings and recommendations. It then provides an update for all five REZs, including outcomes of the government's Regional Major Infrastructure Studies and other relevant information that was not included in the first report.

First report

1.1 The inquiry was established to examine the impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales. Following initial hearings in mid-2025, including a hearing held in the Central-West Orana REZ (CWO REZ), the committee tabled the first report on 21 August 2025.[1] The first report focused on the unfolding situation in the CWO REZ due to it being the most progressed REZ compared to the other zones.

1.2 The first report included an overview of the planned path to energy transition in New South Wales which resulted in the creation of the five REZs, namely the Central-West Orana, New England, Hunter-Central Coast, Illawarra and South West REZs. It outlined the key policies, legislative frameworks and organisations that underpin and will support this transition.

1.3 The first report also contained an overview of:

- the five REZs, including details of their proposed energy output and associated energy projects
- the distinction between network capacity and generation capacity
- proposed economic and social benefits for the REZs
- other infrastructure and related government services.

1.4 The first report made six findings and five recommendations. It specifically addressed key concerns that had been raised by inquiry participants in relation to the CWO REZ, including: the negative impacts of the CWO REZ on the region;

[1] Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales - First report* (2025).

the inadequacy of consultation between the government, renewable energy developers and the CWO community; and the need for a cumulative impact study.

1.5 Some of the other findings and recommendations addressed the following issues.

- Concerns regarding the uncertainty of numerous projects currently in the planning system in the CWO REZ and its cumulative impacts.
- Concerns about the potential impact on the CWO REZ's agricultural industry, with calls for the government to continue to monitor any impacts.
- Landowners who neighbour renewable energy developments and are anxious about the suitability of, and ability to access, public liability insurance for their properties.
- Calls for the government to review its use of Social Impact Assessments.
- Calls for the government to investigate options to ensure payments for land acquisition are not taxed.
- Delivery of mental health support to landowners who are affected by the CWO REZ.
- Identifying ecological protection and restoration priorities for each REZ and encouraging developers to contribute to nature positive environmental regional outcomes.

Government response

1.6 The government responded to the committee's first report on 24 November 2025. In its response, the government advised that 'it supports or supports in principle' all five recommendations of the committee's first report. The government specifically noted its support for:

- the importance of assessing and mitigating cumulative impacts within and surrounding the state's REZs, adding that Regional Major Infrastructure Studies have been conducted for the CWO REZ and the New England REZ (NE REZ) (an overview of these studies is provided in the next section)
- delivering mental health support for all landholders affected by property acquisition
- working with the Commonwealth and other jurisdictions to explore solutions to improve outcomes for impacted landholders to ensure that payments for land acquisition are not taxed
- addressing ecological protection and restoration priorities for each REZ through its Conservation Investment Strategies for the CWO and Hunter-

Central Coast REZ and actively engaging with renewable energy proponents to align with these strategies.[2]

1.7 In addition to the government's response, Energy Corporation of NSW, otherwise known as EnergyCo, provided a further update as part of their evidence at the final Sydney hearing on 31 March 2026. As outlined in the first report, EnergyCo is the statutory authority responsible for the delivery and coordination of all REZs and priority transmission projects. They oversee investment for the network infrastructure and lead community and stakeholder engagement activities to support delivery of the REZs.[3]

1.8 Ms Hannah McCaughey, Chief Executive Officer, EnergyCo informed the committee that the following government measures address some of the concerns regarding community benefits that had been raised in the first report:

- the announcement of $66 million in community employment benefits
- $20 million towards critical water infrastructure in Coolah and Dunedoo (towns located in the CWO REZ)
- $11 million for worker housing in Mudgee (located in the CWO REZ)
- additional mental health support for both landholders and other members of the community in REZs.[4]

Progress of the Renewable Energy Zones

1.9 The first report included an overview of the five Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) across the state: Central-West Orana, New England, Hunter-Central Coast, Illawarra and South West.[5] The location of each REZ is shown in Figure 1 below.

[2] Correspondence from the Hon Penny Sharpe, Minister for Climate Change, Minister for Energy, Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, to the Clerk of the Parliaments, providing government response to the inquiry into the Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales – First Report, 21 November 2025.

[3] Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales - First report* (2025), p 8.

[4] Evidence, Ms Hannah McCaughey, Chief Executive Officer, EnergyCo, 31 March 2026, p 56.

[5] Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales - First report* (2025), pp 13-16.

Figure 1 Renewable Energy Zone locations

Source: EnergyCo, Renewable Energy Zones Locations (25 March 2026) https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/living-in-a-renewable-energy-zone/what-is-a-rez/renewable-energy-zone-locations.

1.10 This section provides a project update for each of these REZs since the first report was published. Key issues regarding the planning and development of the REZs and potential opportunities are discussed later in this report.

Background and key terms

1.11 One of the key recommendations of the first report was that the NSW Government should urgently conduct an independent cumulative impact study on the CWO REZ and ensure identified impacts are addressed.[6]

1.12 This section will discuss the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies (the Studies) that have been completed for the CWO and NE REZ. At the time of writing, no Studies have been completed for the remaining REZs.

1.13 The Studies aim to provide 'a point in time analysis' of the potential impacts and opportunities associated with proposed major infrastructure projects from a range of sectors including energy, mining, manufacturing and national

[6] Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales - First report* (2025), recommendation 1.

infrastructure, in consultation with local councils, government agencies and industry.[7]

1.14 The CWO REZ Studies were completed by the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure and Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water – Water Group, with the assistance of EnergyCo.[8] The NE REZ Studies were completed by EnergyCo.[9]

1.15 'Generation capacity' and 'network capacity' are terms used throughout this report and were outlined in the first report.[10] 'Network capacity' refers to how much electricity the network can carry and is the maximum load the system can handle without overloading. On the other hand, 'generation capacity' describes how much electricity is produced, especially from renewable energy sources such as solar and wind. EnergyCo likened network capacity to 'how wide the pipes are that transport water'[11] whereas generation capacity is like 'water flowing from a tap—the more you open the tap, the more water you get'.[12] In its community update fact sheet, EnergyCo explained that as renewable energy is variable, generation capacity is larger than network capacity, adding that not all sources run at once, and some energy is stored in the REZ.[13]

Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone

1.16 This section will provide a brief update on the CWO REZ region regarding key projects, outcomes from the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies, and relevant government financial support since the publication of the first report in August 2025.

1.17 According to EnergyCo's community update in November 2025, construction of the CWO REZ transmission project is underway with progress towards key infrastructure milestones for 2026. These projects include 'stringing between

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7 NSW Climate and Energy Action, *Regional Major Infrastructure Study – Central West Orana* (2026), https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/nsw-plans-and-progress/major-state-projects/electricity-transition/Regional-Major-Infrastructure-Study.

8 Evidence, Ms Hannah McCaughey, Chief Executive Officer, EnergyCo, 31 March 2026, p 65.

9 Evidence, Ms Hannah McCaughey, Chief Executive Officer, EnergyCo, 31 March 2026, p 65.

10 Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales - First report* (2025), pp 16-17.

11 EnergyCo, *Community Update Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone*, November 2025, p 3.

12 EnergyCo, *Community Update Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone*, November 2025, p 3

13 EnergyCo, *Community Update Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone*, November 2025, p 3.

towers', that is the installation of overhead powerlines onto transmission towers, and the delivery of synchronous condensers, which are large rotating machines that help stabilise the electricity grid.[14] In April 2026, the construction of the first transmission tower in the REZ was completed.[15]

1.18 As mentioned in the first report, EnergyCo has granted access rights to 10 generation development projects, allocating 7.15 gigawatt (GW) of the 7.7 GW generation capacity available in the region.[16] At the time of writing, no other projects have been granted access rights.

Regional Major Infrastructure Studies – Central-West Orana

1.19 The Regional Major Infrastructure Studies for the CWO REZ identified three areas of focus:

- population, workforce, housing and accommodation
- water
- waste management.

1.20 Table 1 sets out a sample of potential impacts for the region, noting that the Studies indicated that these are based on an assumption that all proposed major projects (including non-energy related projects) will be delivered.

Table 1 Impacts identified by the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies – Central-West Orana[17]

Focus area	Potential impacts
Population, workforce, housing and accommodation	• Temporary population in the region to increase to 6,372, with short-term worker accommodation required.

[14] EnergyCo, *Community Update Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone*, November 2025, p 3. For further information about synchronous condensers, see: NSW Climate and Energy Action, *System strength,* https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/nsw-plans-and-progress/regulation-and-policy/system-strength#:~:text=Synchronous%20condensers%20are%20large%20rotating,voltage%20control%20and%20fault%20recovery, 2026.

[15] EnergyCo, *Landmark moment for Australia's first renewable energy zone*, Media release, 02 April 2026. See also: EnergyCo, *Community Update Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone*, November 2025, p 2.

[16] Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales - First report* (2025), p 27. See also: EnergyCo, *Community Update Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone*, November 2025, p 6.

[17] NSW Government, *Regional Major Infrastructure Studies, Central West Orana*, Fact Sheet (December 2025), pp 2-4.

	• Sufficient housing is available in some areas such as Dubbo and Gulgong. However additional housing will be needed in Mudgee.
Water	• Many local water utilities have limited capacity to provide potable, or drinkable, water and wastewater servicing to projects. As such, developers will need to treat their own water and wastewater on-site rather than use local water facilities operated by councils. • There is likely to be enough water entitlement[18] in the region to meet anticipated requirements for water, but developers are required to confirm availability in the water sources closest to their projects and to plan for dry periods.
Waste management	• The peak periods of construction activity (2026-2031) could see waste volumes rise to more than 340,000 tonnes per year across area, with 70,000 tonnes attributed to renewable energy projects. This increase will be driven primarily by construction and demolition waste, organic waste from land clearing, and packaging materials. • Existing waste infrastructure is not evenly distributed across the region and is not located near project sites in some instances. Developers will need to consider this during the development assessment phase.

1.21 In response to the Studies, the government indicated that it is already taking action in response to the issues raised including:

- funding $128 million for the upgrade of roads and intersections from the Port of Newcastle to the Central West
- awarding the first $66 million of $128 million in grants under the Community and Employment Benefit Program to improve liveability and community amenity in the CWO REZ
- investigating and planning worker accommodation to house new workers

[18] Water entitlements are rights to an ongoing share of water within a system: Department of Planning and Environment, 'Water trading in coastal NSW', Fact Sheet, July 2022, p 3.

- developing future chapters of the *Waste and Circular Infrastructure Plan*[19] to understand the barriers regional communities are facing and to address their unique waste and landfill needs
- working with the Commonwealth and other states and territories on a national solar panel recycling scheme.[20]

New England Renewable Energy Zone

1.22 The committee visited the New England Renewable Energy Zone (NE REZ) and held a hearing in Armidale in July 2025. This section provides an overview of project updates regarding the NE REZ and outcomes from the relevant Regional Major Infrastructure Studies.

1.23 Since the first report, a key focus of the government has been the network infrastructure project. Some developments are noted below.

- Early-stage assessment of a new network infrastructure project, noting that some infrastructure will need to be developed outside the NE REZ boundary to enable connection to the main transmission network.
- Completion of updates to the transmission corridor between Bayswater Power Station near Muswellbrook (Hunter–Central Coast region) and the Central South Hub (substation, a facility where electricity is converted from one voltage level to another[21]) near Walcha (within the NE REZ).
- Finalisation of the community feedback process for the transmission corridor update.
- Delivery of a competitive procurement process to appoint a network operator for the NE REZ network infrastructure project. As explained in the first report, the network operator designs, constructs, finances, operates and maintains new transmission lines and related infrastructure, such as energy hubs (substations), that will connect the REZ to the state's grid.[22]

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19 The Waste and Circular Infrastructure Plan is a planning document by the NSW Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) that guides the government's decision-making and investment in critical waste infrastructure including energy from waste. Source: NSW EPA, *Waste and Circular Infrastructure Plan,* https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/Your-environment/Waste/waste-and-circular-infrastructure-plan, 2026.

20 NSW Government, *Regional Major Infrastructure Studies, Central West Orana*, Fact Sheet (December 2025), p 2.

21 EnergyCo, *What are electricity infrastructure projects?*, 2 June 2026, https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/electricity-infrastructure-projects#:~:text=Substations%20and%20switching%20stations%20are,safety%20features%20and%20control%20systems.

22 Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales - First report* (2025), p 27. See also: EnergyCo, *New England REZ*

Regional Major Infrastructure Studies - New England

1.24 The Regional Major Infrastructure Studies for the New England Renewable Energy Zone identified five areas of focus:

- training and skills
- workforce accommodation
- water and wastewater
- waste and circular economy
- local supply chains.[23]

1.25 Table 2 sets out a sample of potential impacts of the REZ in relation to the New England region, should all proposed major projects (including non-energy related projects) be delivered.

Table 2 Potential impacts of the NE REZ as identified by the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies[24]

Areas of focus	Potential impacts
Training and skills	• While the NE REZ is expected to bring more than 6,000 full-time construction jobs and 2,000 ongoing operational jobs, the capacity of the existing regional workforce is limited, with low rates of unemployment across the region.
Workforce accommodation	• Accommodation is required for about 4,800 non-local construction workers at peak construction, as a significant proportion of workers will travel to the region. • Rental vacancy rate is low therefore temporary workforce accommodation will be needed to accommodate additional workers and help minimise pressure on existing housing and short-term accommodation.
Water and wastewater	• Water is required for the construction of REZ related infrastructure, including workforce accommodation.

network infrastructure project, 2026, https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne#-next-steps-.

[23] NSW Government, *Regional Major Infrastructure Studies, New England*, Fact Sheet (December 2025), pp 1-4.

[24] NSW Government, *Regional Major Infrastructure Studies, New England*, Fact Sheet (December 2025), pp 1-4.

	• Construction activities will also produce wastewater which will need to be managed and treated. • Developers will need to provide solutions to address increased water needs and additional water treatment infrastructure may be required in local government areas with more development.
Waste and circular economy	• Most waste will be generated during construction of major projects in and around the REZ. Renewable energy-specific waste streams (such as solar panels, wind turbine blades and batteries) will contribute a smaller proportion of total waste but present greater management challenges due to their complexity and recycling opportunities. • Without intervention, the volume of waste generated from major projects may exceed the existing capacity of local waste infrastructure, such as landfills, which are typically set up to manage residential waste. • Local waste systems may need to be upgraded to manage expected volumes and types of waste, especially during peak construction.
Local supply chains	• Demand for goods and services, including construction services, transportation and plant and equipment hire, is expected to increase and local industries in key supply chains are well placed to support the delivery of the REZ. However, some specialist skills and equipment will be needed from outside the region. • While there are some challenges, materials businesses are well placed to adapt to supply major infrastructure projects. However, without additional support, small businesses may not be equipped to service new large-scale projects in addition to existing clients.

1.26 According to the government, government agencies will use the findings of the Studies to develop the NE REZ in a way that supports growth and sustainable demand for skills, services and infrastructure across the region in the years to come.[25] A sample of the potential opportunities and ways to ensure they are realised, as outlined in the Studies, is below.

[25] NSW Government, *Regional Major Infrastructure Studies, New England*, Fact Sheet (December 2025), p 1.

- Developing new courses at existing training facilities like the University of New England and TAFE.
- Building workforce accommodation to help provide for future growth by providing homes that can later become permanent residences for the community or providing utilities connections for future development.
- Continuing to ensure that community benefit schemes are providing legacy benefits to regional communities including improving water treatment capacity.
- Developing a regional waste facility database and a digital system to track project waste and recovery and coordinate waste planning across the region.
- Supporting small and medium businesses to partner and tender for work on large-scale projects.[26]

Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone

1.27 In September 2025, the committee conducted site visits in the Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone (HCC REZ) and held a hearing in Singleton.

1.28 The HCC REZ will be the first Renewable Energy Zone in Australia to upgrade existing distribution poles and wires. According to the government, this approach 'significantly reduces the impacts on surrounding communities and the environment'.[27]

1.29 As mentioned in the first report, the HCC REZ's intended network capacity is one GW. Further information regarding the HCC REZ and its intended network capacity is noted below.

- The initial intended network capacity would be sufficient to cater for the expected generation in the area given the variable nature of wind and solar energy generation.[28]

[26] NSW Government, *Regional Major Infrastructure Studies, New England*, Fact Sheet (December 2025), pp 2-4.

[27] EnergyCo, *Upgrades to existing network proposed for Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone network infrastructure project*, 17 December 2025, https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/news/major-energy-infrastructure-upgrade-approved-hunter.

[28] EnergyCo, *Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone*, https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/our-projects/hunter-central-coast-rez, 24 June 2025.

- The network capacity of the HCC REZ is likely to increase over time with the retirement of coal-fired power stations, re-purposing of mining land and the growth of offshore wind.[29]
- The intended network capacity does not include the Hunter Transmission Project (HTP), which would deliver up to eight GW of additional transfer capacity from inland REZs to support the decarbonisation of existing industries (such as Tomago Aluminium located in the HCC region) and the growth of emerging technologies (such as hydrogen).[30]

1.30 The HTP is a major infrastructure project in addition to the REZs. Located primarily in the HCC REZ, the HTP is designed to carry electricity from the CWO and NE REZs to the rest of the state.[31]

1.31 At the time of writing, other network project updates in the HCC REZ include:

- the building of two new energy hubs (substations)
- upgrades to 85 km of sub-transmission lines
- augmentations to existing infrastructure.[32]

1.32 In addition, as mentioned in the first report, there are several state road intersections that involve the movement of oversize and/overmass vehicles from the Port of Newcastle to the CWO and NE REZ.[33] These routes use roads within the HCC REZ.[34]

Illawarra Renewable Energy Zone

1.33 The Illawarra Renewable Energy Zone, known as the state's first 'urban REZ', has an intended network capacity of one GW. However, the capacity of the Illawarra

[29] EnergyCo, *Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone*, https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/our-projects/hunter-central-coast-rez, 24 June 2025.

[30] EnergyCo, *Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone*, https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/our-projects/hunter-central-coast-rez, 24 June 2025.

[31] EnergyCo, *Our Projects*, https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/our-projects, 24 March 2026.

[32] EnergyCo, *Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone Network Infrastructure Project*, https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/our-projects/hunter-central-coast-rez/network-infrastructure-project, 11 December 2025.

[33] Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales - First report* (2025), p 22. See also: Submission 44, NSW Government, p 19.

[34] Evidence, Councillor Jeff Drayton, Mayor, Muswellbrook Shire Council, 25 September 2025, p 3.

REZ may increase over time with the growth of emerging industries such as green hydrogen and green steel manufacturing.[35]

1.34 According to the government, the Illawarra REZ will integrate consumer energy resources such as rooftop solar systems, home batteries and community-scale batteries. In addition, spare government land and commercial roof space will be used to minimise impacts on surrounding communities and the environment.[36]

1.35 Further, it is noted that the Illawarra REZ will underpin the growth of new low carbon industries that could service both domestic and export markets as the world decarbonises and shifts towards green manufacturing.[37]

1.36 The committee held a hearing in Wollongong in October 2025. During the hearing, a number of stakeholders discussed the impact of the development of floating offshore wind as a source of renewable energy in the region.[38] This issue will be discussed in the following chapters.

South West Renewable Energy Zone

1.37 The South West REZ (SW REZ) has an intended generation capacity of 3.56 GW, in which four renewable energy and storage projects have been granted access rights.[39] In addition, the SW REZ will include two transmission lines: Project Energy Connect and Victoria NSW Interconnector West, connecting the electricity grids in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia.[40]

1.38 In February 2026, the committee conducted site visits in the SW REZ and held a hearing in Hay.

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35 EnergyCo, *Illawarra Renewable Energy Zone*, https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/our-projects/illawarra-rez, 16 March 2026.

36 EnergyCo, *Illawarra Renewable Energy Zone*, https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/our-projects/illawarra-rez, 16 March 2026.

37 EnergyCo, *Illawarra Renewable Energy Zone*, https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/our-projects/illawarra-rez, 16 March 2026.

38 See for example: See for example: Submission 43, Responsible Future (Illawarra Chapter) Inc, pp 2-11; Evidence, Mr Mark Horne, Individual, 29 October 2025, pp 10-11; Evidence, Ms Madeleine Holme, Good for the Gong, 29 October 2025, p 21; Evidence, Ms Yael Stone, Founding Director, Hi Neighbour, 29 October 2025, p 21.

39 EnergyCo, *South West Renewable Energy Zone Access Scheme*, https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/industry/access-schemes/south-west-rez-access-scheme, 23 April 2025.

40 Tabled document, the Hon. Sarah Mitchell MLC, *Transgrid and Elecnor Australia - EnergyConnect Community Newsletter - dated Q4 2025*, p 1; Submission 121, Murrumbidgee Council, p 2.

First Nations community engagement initiatives

1.39 In addition to other community engagement activities that were outlined in the first report, the government highlighted their commitment to genuine and meaningful engagement with local Aboriginal communities as part of the energy transition.[41]

1.40 Under section 4 of the *Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020* (EII Act) (discussed in the first report), the Minister is required to issue guidelines about consultation and negotiation with the local Aboriginal community in relation to relevant projects for the purposes of increasing their employment and income opportunities.[42] The Minister for Energy and the Consumer Trustee (ASL, previously called AEMO Services)[43] must take the First Nations Guidelines into account when exercising their functions under the EII Act.[44]

1.41 The First Nations Guidelines consist of two parts: General First Nations Guidelines and the Region-specific First Nations Guidelines. The General First Nations Guidelines aim to:

- ensure the economic benefits of the energy transition under the NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap (discussed in further detail in the next section) are shared with local Aboriginal businesses and communities
- provide support for Aboriginal people and communities to build skills and capacity to take advantage of opportunities into the future
- provide details about best practice approaches to consultation and negotiation with local Aboriginal communities.[45]

1.42 The Region-specific First Nations Guidelines provide details about local engagement protocols, and identify the goals and aspirations of the local Aboriginal community and their preferred method of engagement with project proponents and the government.[46] The Region-specific Guidelines aim to inform workforce development and job opportunities for local Aboriginal communities and develop pathways for local Aboriginal businesses to access tendering

41 Submission 44, NSW Government, pp 12-13.

42 *Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020,* s 4(1).

43 For further information regarding the Consumer Trustee, please see Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales - First report* (2025), p 12.

44 Submission 44, NSW Government, p 13. See also s 4 (1) of the *Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020 (EII Act)*.

45 Submission 44, NSW Government, p 13.

46 NSW Climate and Energy Action (NSW Government), *First Nations Guidelines* (17 May 2024), https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/nsw-plans-and-progress/major-state-projects/electricity-infrastructure-roadmap/first-nations.

opportunities and secure work packages within the development and operation of the REZs.[47]

1.43 At the time of writing, region-specific Guidelines for the CWO, HCC and SW REZs have been published. Planning for the development of Guidelines for the NE REZ has commenced. [48]

1.44 Further, the government advised that they engage and collaborate as part of REZ coordination and delivery through stakeholder forums such as the First Nations Group.[49] A First Nations Outcomes team was established within EnergyCo to work with First Nations stakeholders, such as local Aboriginal land councils and communities, to ensure benefits of the energy transition are secured for First Nations people.[50]

Legislative and policy updates

1.45 The first report included an overview of the NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap (the Roadmap), which set out the government's plan for the state's energy transition.[51] Since the Roadmap was published in 2020 there have been further reviews examining the state's progress in its energy transition. This section sets out some of these and includes key policy and legislative updates relevant to this inquiry, including the *Energy Legislation Amendment Act 2025*.

1.46 In 2023, the independent report, *Electricity Supply and Reliability Check Up*, was published. The report aimed to help the government understand how the energy market and policy landscape has evolved since the Roadmap. Following the Check Up, the government implemented several recommendations including delivery of the first round of grants under the Community and Employment Benefit Program in the CWO REZ (as discussed in paragraph 1.8); amendments to the Biodiversity Conservation Regulation 2017 to introduce a new biodiversity offsetting pathway for major energy transition projects; and publishing the Transmission Planning Review.[52]

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47 NSW Climate and Energy Action (NSW Government), *First Nations Guidelines* (17 May 2024), https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/nsw-plans-and-progress/major-state-projects/electricity-infrastructure-roadmap/first-nations.

48 Submission 44, NSW Government, p 13. See also: NSW Climate and Energy Action (NSW Government), *First Nations Guidelines* (17 May 2024), https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/nsw-plans-and-progress/major-state-projects/electricity-infrastructure-roadmap/first-nations.

49 Submission 44, NSW Government, pp 12-13.

50 Submission 44, NSW Government, pp 12-13.

51 Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales - First report* (2025), p 1.

52 NSW Climate Energy and Action [NSW Government], *Electricity Supply and Reliability Check Up* (2026), https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/nsw-plans-and-

1.47 The 'Transmission Planning Review' was commissioned by the government and was finalised in September 2025. The Review considered the best way to coordinate transmission planning between Transgrid,[53] EnergyCo, Australian Energy Market Operator,[54] and ASL.[55] The government published its response in October 2025. A key aspect to implementation of the Review's recommendations was the *Energy Legislation Amendment Act 2025* which passed Parliament on 21 November 2025. The next section discusses the aims of the Act in more detail.

Energy Legislation Amendment Act 2025

1.48 The *Energy Legislation Amendment Act 2025* (ELA Act) amended six pieces of legislation.[56] This section discusses the context leading to the creation of the ELA Act and key objectives in relation to this inquiry.

1.49 According to the Hon Penny Sharpe MLC, Minister of Climate Change, Minister for Energy, Minister for the Environment, and Minister for Heritage, the Transmission Planning Review (the Review) found that the current planning and approval arrangements for REZs were 'overly complex, creating uncertainty for investors, project proponents and host communities. This leads to delay and, in the end, higher costs for New South Wales electricity consumers'.[57]

progress/regulation-and-policy/electricity-supply-and-reliability-check. See also: Environment and Heritage, *About strategic offset delivery agreements*, https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/animals-and-plants/biodiversity-offsets-scheme/strategic-offset-delivery-agreements/about-strategic-offset-delivery-agreements, 2026.

53 Transgrid is the manager and operator of the high voltage electricity transmission network in New South Wales and is part of the National Electricity Market (NEM). See also: Farrier Swier Consulting Pty Ltd, (appointed by the Minister for Energy under section 21(2)(b) of the *Energy and Utilities Administration Act 1987*), *NSW transmission planning review Final Report*, 8 September 2026, pp 31-32.

54 Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) is the national agency which administers and operates the gas and electricity markets and power systems within the NEM: AEMO, 'Who we are', (2025), https://aemo.com.au/about/who we-are.

55 NSW Climate and Energy Action, *NSW Transmission Planning Review 2025,* https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/nsw-plans-and-progress/regulation-and-policy/nsw-transmission-planning-review-2025, 2026.

56 The *Energy Legislation Amendment Act 2025* amends the *Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020*, the *Electricity Supply Act 1995*, the Electricity Supply (General) Regulation 2014, the *Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal Act 1992*, the *National Electricity (New South Wales) Act 1997* and the *Residential (Land Lease) Communities Act 2013*.

57 The Hon Penny Sharpe MLC, Minister of Climate Change, Minister for Energy, Minister for the Environment, and Minister for Heritage, Second reading speech: Energy Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, 14 October 2025.

1.50 The Review made a number of recommendations for immediate reform. In her second reading speech for the Energy Legislation Amendment Bill, Minister Sharpe emphasised that the bill aimed to implement some of these so as to:

- streamline authorisation of Renewable Energy Zone network infrastructure projects to reduce delays and give project proponents the certainty they need to invest
- strengthen the regulatory arrangements governing how new networks connect to existing networks
- clarify who is responsible for planning and delivering system strength in Renewable Energy Zones in New South Wales.[58]

1.51 Further, Minister Sharpe indicated that the bill would deliver on 'these important reforms to give the certainty needed for new renewable energy zones to proceed'.[59]

1.52 The Minister also acknowledged this committee's inquiry during her second reading speech, emphasising that the legislation would address some of the concerns about the adequacy of consultation processes and pressures on regional development that were raised in the first report:

> The bill furthers the Government's efforts to date to ensure that communities who are supporting the energy transition are properly recognised and supported. This bill expands eligibility and supports delivery of benefit sharing programs so that communities and landholders adjacent to new infrastructure and renewable energy zones can benefit. The bill also allows investment in local employment, skills and training across impacted regions, not just for workers directly affected by the transition but for anyone seeking new skills or job opportunities.[60]

1.53 In addition, the bill expanded the types of infrastructure covered by Long-Term Energy Service Agreements[61] and provided more flexibility regarding the types of landowners who can receive payments through the Strategic Benefit Payment Scheme.[62]

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58 The Hon Penny Sharpe MLC, Minister of Climate Change, Minister for Energy, Minister for the Environment, and Minister for Heritage, Second reading speech: Energy Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, 14 October 2025.

59 The Hon Penny Sharpe MLC, Minister of Climate Change, Minister for Energy, Minister for the Environment, and Minister for Heritage, Second reading speech: Energy Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, 14 October 2025.

60 The Hon Penny Sharpe MLC, Minister of Climate Change, Minister for Energy, Minister for the Environment, and Minister for Heritage, Second reading speech: Energy Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, 14 October 2025.

61 For more information see: Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales - First report* (2025), p 5.

62 For more information see: Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales - First report* (2025), p 19.

1.54 The bill passed Parliament on 21 November 2025.

Committee comment

1.55 The purpose of the committee's first report was to focus on the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone (CWO REZ) as it is the most progressed zone. The committee visited the CWO REZ in May 2025, conducting site visits and holding a hearing in Dubbo. The first report considered the key issues reported by stakeholders from the region including local councils, landowners, farmers, residents, community organisations and renewable energy developers. The first report included six findings and five recommendations.

1.56 The government responded to the first report in November 2025 and acknowledged that it is committed to continuous improvement and will continue to work with communities across all REZs.

1.57 The committee has subsequently travelled to each of the four remaining Renewable Energy Zones. This report continues the committee's important work of collating the evidence received from rural and regional communities across the other REZs. This introductory chapter provided brief project updates for each REZ, including the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies and other relevant information regarding the government's progress towards the energy transition. The next chapters will address issues raised across the REZs collectively, whereby issues regarding the planning and development of the REZs and their potential opportunities are examined.

1.58 The committee recognises that the transition to a more diverse and secure energy system presents significant opportunities for New South Wales. Renewable Energy Zones have the potential to support investment, improve energy reliability, create employment, strengthen regional economies and contribute to the state's long-term energy security and emissions reduction objectives. Realising these benefits, however, depends upon effective planning, genuine community engagement and a coordinated whole-of-government approach that ensures regional communities share in the opportunities created by the transition.

1.59 The committee notes that the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies represent an important step in identifying cumulative pressures associated with Renewable Energy Zones. However, stakeholders questioned whether the measures identified through those studies have been implemented consistently or at sufficient scale to address the impacts being experienced by regional communities.

Chapter 2 Implementation and development of the Renewable Energy Zones

The implementation and development of the Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) has transformed rural and regional communities, through rapid large-scale planning and the construction of renewable energy infrastructure across New South Wales. This chapter examines issues around the strategic planning of the REZs, including leadership and coordination of the rollout, as well as its size, scale and impact on landholders. It then considers the mixed experiences of community consultation and engagement, and the inherent power imbalances involved, before exploring ways in which these processes could be improved. Finally, this chapter discusses the cumulative impact of the zones on local services, and the particular challenges faced by local councils.

Strategic planning issues

2.1 Many stakeholders in rural and regional communities throughout the Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) acknowledged that the energy transition is underway.[63] However, the importance of this transition being in partnership with rural and regional communities was stressed, with one stakeholder advocating for it to occur 'with us, not to us'.[64]

2.2 Mr Brett Stonestreet, Interim Executive Officer, Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation, a network comprised of local councils in the South West region, emphasised the integral role of regional communities in the energy transition. He declared that it is 'regional New South Wales that is essentially providing the key to the door to have renewable energy introduced to the state and to the nation'.[65]

2.3 Stakeholder concerns included a perceived lack of strategic planning in the implementation and ongoing management of the REZs, particularly in relation to:

- the leadership and coordination of the REZs roll-out
- the size, scale and gaps in REZ development
- the impact on landholders.

2.4 These are explored in this section.

[63] See for example: Evidence, Ms Annette Killar, Convenor, Climate Action Armidale, Sustainable Living Armidale, 17 July 2025, p 23; Evidence, Mr Tim White, President, Valley Alliance, 17 July 2025, p 30; Evidence, Councillor Jeff Drayton, Mayor, Muswellbrook Shire Council, 25 September 2026, p 4; Evidence, Ms Alison McLean, Executive Manager, Economic Development and Tourism, Hay Shire Council, 18 February 2026, p 2.

[64] Evidence, Ms Alison McLean, Executive Manager, Economic Development and Tourism, Hay Shire Council, 18 February 2026, p 2.

[65] Evidence, Mr Brett Stonestreet, Interim Executive Officer Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation, 18 February 2026, p 11.

Leadership and coordination of the rollout

2.5 As mentioned in the first report, various agencies are responsible for the implementation and management of the state's energy transition in relation to the REZs.[66] Nonetheless, the role of Energy Corporation of NSW (EnergyCo) is significant as it is the statutory authority responsible for leading the delivery of REZs and Priority Transmission Infrastructure Projects.[67]

2.6 Under the *Energy Infrastructure Investment Act 2020*, EnergyCo serves as the infrastructure planner for all five REZs. Its responsibilities include:

- leading the planning, technical design, delivery and coordination of REZs and priority transmission projects
- contracting and overseeing the suppliers delivering the REZ transmission network infrastructure
- leading community and stakeholder engagement activities to support REZ delivery.[68]

2.7 When asked whether shared responsibility for delivery of the REZs dilutes accountability, the government emphasised that 'roles are clearly defined'.[69] They also advised that regulatory oversight and governance fosters accountability at each stage. Relevant agencies also participate in multi-agency forums to ensure the effective delivery of the 'Roadmap', that is, the state's plan for the energy transition.[70]

2.8 Despite this, stakeholders spoke of government leadership and coordination being 'absent'[71] or 'inconsistent'[72] in the implementation and management of the REZs.[73]

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66 Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales – First Report*, 2025, pp 7-12.

67 Submission 44, NSW Government, p 5.

68 Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales – First Report*, 2025, p 8.

69 Answers to supplementary questions, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, 1 May 2026, p 3.

70 Answers to supplementary questions, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, 1 May 2026, p 3.

71 Evidence, Ms Emily Sims, Strategic Planning Officer, Uralla Shire Council, 17 July 2025, p 5.

72 Evidence, Councillor Jeff Drayton, Mayor, Muswellbrook Shire Council, 25 September 2025, p 3.

73 See for example: Evidence, Ms Emily Sims, Strategic Planning Officer, Uralla Shire Council, 17 July 2025, p 5; Evidence, Councillor Jeff Drayton, Mayor, Muswellbrook Shire Council, 25 September 2025, p 3; Evidence, Mr Richard Coughlan, Secretary, Bundure District Landholders Group, , 18 February 2026 pp 17-18.

2.9 For instance, Councillor Eric Noakes, Mayor, Walcha likened the situation in the New England REZ (NE REZ) to the Central-West Orana REZ (CWO REZ), describing it as 'building an aeroplane when flying'[74] and that 'the communities that [he] represent[s] are sitting in that plane and actually flying without staff … and everybody else is sitting and watching'.[75]

2.10 Another inquiry participant, Councillor Sam Coupland, Mayor, Armidale Regional Council expressed that the lack of leadership and coordination of the NE REZ had 'squandered' the opportunity for his region.[76] Councillor Coupland argued that the NE REZ could 'represent a once-in-a-generation opportunity' but instead 'the reality has fallen far short of this'.[77] He added that this was due to the following:

- the absence of an integrated strategy for identifying the potential barriers and impacts of the creation of the REZ
- 'a distinct lack of leadership about how to roll out the REZ'
- no meaningful community benefits.[78]

2.11 Mr Sam Lobsey, Manager, Development Division, Tamworth Regional Council further argued that the current approach for REZ planning was 'retrospective' and lacked the typical planning process.[79] He maintained that they 'were not convinced that … the typical planning occurred' when the REZ was established, elaborating that if local councils attempted to rezone in the same fashion, it would be subject to further scrutiny.[80] At the hearing, Mr Lobsey described how the REZ planning process occurred without the usual level of scrutiny resulting in confusion, concern and mistrust:

> In a normal rezoning planning proposal process, council would be required to address essential infrastructure and service capacity issues to ensure that the right outcome can be achieved. If council had attempted to rezone land in the fashion in which the REZ was adopted, it would have received a very strongly worded letter from the department requesting more

74 Evidence, Councillor Eric Noakes, Mayor, Walcha Council, 17 July 2025, p 10. See also: Evidence, Mr Murray Wood, Chief Executive Officer, Dubbo Regional Council, 16 May 2025, p 3; Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales – First Report*, 2025, p 31.

75 Evidence, Councillor Eric Noakes, Mayor, Walcha Council, 17 July 2025, p 10.

76 Evidence, Councillor Sam Coupland, Mayor, Armidale Regional Council, 17 July 2025, p 2.

77 Evidence, Councillor Sam Coupland, Mayor, Armidale Regional Council, 17 July 2025, p 2.

78 Evidence, Councillor Sam Coupland, Mayor, Armidale Regional Council, 17 July 2025, p 2.

79 Evidence, Mr Sam Lobsey, Manager, Development Division, Tamworth Regional Council, 17 July 2025, p 10.

80 Evidence, Mr Sam Lobsey, Manager, Development Division, Tamworth Regional Council, 17 July 2025, p 10.

> information. The current approach here, however, we believe is retrospective and causing the confusion, the angst and some of the mistrust.[81]

2.12 According to Dr Sanaz Alian, Convenor, Renewable Energy, Education, Advocacy and Community Health, Sustainable Living Armidale and Lecturer in Urban and Regional Planning, University of New England, the planning for the REZs, particularly for the CWO and NE REZ, occurred subsequent to their announcement by the government. This resulted in accelerated planning, where REZ locations and some developments appear 'fragmented and rushed, lacking in good governance and community engagement process'.[82]

2.13 Other participants highlighted how varying decision-making processes across agencies exacerbate the impact of an absence of leadership in the coordination of REZ related projects and collaboration with regional communities.[83]

2.14 As such, a number of inquiry participants called for a 'whole-of-government' approach to lead and coordinate the development of the REZs and related projects, to ensure that regional communities are supported as part of the transition.[84] Ms Alison McLean, Executive Manager, Economic Development and Tourism, Hay Shire Council, stressed the importance of all levels of government being involved:

> What the transition … require[s] is a coordinated approach from Federal, State and local governments to ensure that our communities are protected and supported through this transition. We require a whole-of-government approach to ensure that the infrastructure needs of these communities are met, that the impacts are mitigated and that the benefits flow into the communities directly impacted. We need support to ensure that the opportunities available are realised. We need all agencies, from EnergyCo to Transport for NSW, to engage early and often and to

[81] Evidence, Mr Sam Lobsey, Manager, Development Division, Tamworth Regional Council, 17 July 2025, p 10.

[82] Evidence, Dr Sanaz Alian, Convenor, Renewable Energy, Education, Advocacy and Community Health, Sustainable Living Armidale and Lecturer in Urban and Regional Planning, University of New England, 17 July 2025, pp 23-24. See also: Evidence, Councillor Jeff Drayton, Mayor, Muswellbrook Shire Council, 25 September 2026, p 3.

[83] See for example: Evidence, Ms Emily Sims, Strategic Planning Officer, Uralla Shire Council, 17 July 2025, p 5; Evidence, Councillor Eric Noakes, Mayor, Walcha Council, 17 July 2025, p 10; Evidence, Ms Annette Kilarr, Convenor, Climate Action Armidale, Sustainable Living Armidale, 17 July 2025, p 23.

[84] Evidence, Ms Emily Sims, Strategic Planning Officer, Uralla Shire Council, 17 July 2025, p 5. See also: Evidence, Councillor Eric Noakes, Mayor, Walcha Council, 17 July 2025, p 10; Evidence, Ms Annette Kilarr, Convenor, Climate Action Armidale, Sustainable Living Armidale, 17 July 2025, p 23; Evidence, Mrs Mary-Anne Crawford, Manager, Development and Environmental Services, Singleton Council, 25 September 2026, p 8.

acknowledge the critical role that local government plays as a lead agency in these communities.[85]

Size, scale and gaps

2.15 Many stakeholders identified issues relating to the size and scale of REZs, as well as gaps in their development. As mentioned in Chapter 1, each REZ is currently at a different stage of development. Accordingly, while there may be similar issues across the REZs, the specific context of each zone should also be taken into account.

Size and scale of the REZ development

2.16 For instance, in the New England REZ (NE REZ), some stakeholders were concerned by what they considered to be the disproportionate size and scale of some of the proposed generation and transmission developments and accordingly called for a reduced gigawatt (GW) capacity within their region.[86]

2.17 According to Mr Mark Robinson, Engineering Manager, Wild Rivers Engineering, who is based in the NE REZ, EnergyCo is 'documenting' up to 20.1 GW of generation infrastructure despite initially announcing eight GW of network capacity.[87] To illustrate his point, Mr Robinson argued that this equated to 4,500 turbines, 450 square kilometres of solar panels across 5,200 square kilometres, a third of the size of the NE REZ.[88]

2.18 In addition to generation capacity concerns, Mr Damien Timbs from Voice for Walcha, a community group comprised of residents in Walcha, highlighted that the size and scale of EnergyCo's central south energy hub (substation) means that it has the capacity to connect 4,000 megawatts of projects. Mr Timbs emphasised that this is almost the same scale of development as for the entire CWO REZ yet is concentrated on Walcha, a town with a population of 3,000 people.[89]

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85 Evidence, Ms Alison McLean, Executive Manager, Economic Development and Tourism, Hay Shire Council, 18 February 2026, p 2. See also: Evidence, Mr Jack Bond, Chief Executive Officer, Edward River Council, 18 February 2026, p 3.

86 See for example: Evidence, Mr Stuart Grills, Property Owner and Grazier, 17 July 2025, p 46; Evidence, Mark Fogarty, Director, Bushtricity and Member, ReD4NE, 17 July 2025, p 47; Submission 151, Mr Tony Menkens, p 6.

87 Evidence, Mark Robinson, Engineering Manager, Wild Rivers Engineer, 31 Mach 2026, p 23. See also: Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales – First Report*, 2025, p 31.

88 Evidence, Mark Robinson, Engineering Manager, Wild Rivers Engineer, 31 Mach 2026, p 23.

89 Evidence, Mr Damien Timbs, Member, Voice for Walcha, 17 July 2025, p 31.

2.19 With this in mind, some inquiry participants called for a reduction of the NE REZ generation capacity from eight GW to three GW.[90] For example, Mr Stuart Grills, Property Owner and Grazier, explained how reducing the GW capacity in New England would lessen the impact on landholders, highlighting that the average size of a property is around 500 to 1,000 acres.[91]

2.20 As discussed in Chapter 1, network and generation capacity represent distinct measures and reflect different aspects of the energy system. In response to some of the concerns about the size and scale of the NE REZ, EnergyCo clarified that the eight GW refers to network capacity for the region.[92]

2.21 Furthermore, Ms Hannah McCaughey, Chief Executive Officer, EnergyCo, noted that the generation capacity for the region has 'various projections' and is currently at six GW network capacity to support 12 GW of generation capacity.[93]

2.22 While some stakeholders advocated for a reduction in the scale of Renewable Energy Zone development, other evidence received by the committee focused on improving strategic planning, sequencing, infrastructure coordination and community benefit arrangements to better manage impacts associated with the energy transition.

2.23 As mentioned in the first report, an access scheme helps govern the volume and quality of projects that may be granted the right to connect.[94] However, evidence was received that the Hunter-Central Coast REZ (HCC REZ) may not get an access scheme.[95]

2.24 Nonetheless, Mr Justin Fitzpatrick-Barr, General Manager, Singleton Council, observed that 'some of these [generation] projects are just popping out of nowhere'.[96] Mr Fitzpatrick-Barr, advocated for a strategic approach to identifying suitable locations for generation infrastructure. He noted that some renewable energy developers attempt to establish projects before access to the network is

[90] Evidence, Mr Tony Menkens, Beef Cattle Producer and Chair, Batting for Boorolong Community Group, 17 July 2025, p 46; Evidence, Mr Stuart Grills, Property Owner and Grazier, 17 July 2025, p 46.

[91] Evidence, Mr Stuart Grills, Property Owner and Grazier, 17 July 2025, p 46.

[92] Evidence, Ms Hannah McCaughey, Chief Executive Officer, EnergyCo, 31 March 2026, p 64.

[93] Evidence, Ms Hannah McCaughey, Chief Executive Officer, EnergyCo, 31 March 2026, p 64.

[94] Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales – First Report*, 2025, p 4.

[95] Evidence, Mrs Mary-Anne Crawford, Manager, Development and Environmental Services, Singleton Council, 25 September 2025, p 15.

[96] Evidence, Mr Justin Fitzpatrick-Barr, General Manager, Singleton Council, 25 September 2025, p 6. See also, Submission 40, Singleton Council, pp 4-5.

confirmed. This can cause unnecessary angst in the community, 'when a project may never get up'.[97]

2.25 Further, Mr Fitzpatrick-Barr considered that the HCC REZ may not be suitable for categorisation as a REZ as it will 'primarily be a transmission zone for renewable energies with limited output from generators'.[98] He stated that most of the generation projects would be in the CWO and NE REZ.[99]

2.26 Another inquiry participant, Mr Michael Holz, a HCC REZ resident and representative of Singleton Solar Standoff community group, also argued for generation developments to be constructed in the 'right location' within the local government area so they do not impact on either rural residential communities or productive farming land. In the case of the HCC REZ, Mr Holz argued that other locations would be better suited to such developments, including mining, industrial and army bases.[100]

2.27 Mr Andrew Abbey, Policy Director, NSW Minerals Council, similarly gave evidence that former mine sites provide a significant opportunity to locate large-scale renewable energy projects with minimal land use conflict. Previously disturbed and rehabilitated land, including voids, could be used and existing mine infrastructure, including transmission lines, could be repurposed, thereby minimising new or additional impacts elsewhere.[101]

Other related issues

2.28 The issues identified so far in this chapter are not necessarily confined to REZ-bound communities, with similar concerns also voiced by some inquiry participants who reside outside the REZs.[102]

2.29 For example, the committee heard that the South West REZ (SW REZ) 'has been poorly planned',[103] with key infrastructure projects located outside the REZ and impacting communities beyond the zone itself. Bundure District Landholders

97 Evidence, Mr Justin Fitzpatrick-Barr, General Manager, Singleton Council, 25 September 2025, p 6. See also: Evidence, Mr Michael Holz, Resident and representing Singleton Solar Standoff community group, 25 September 2025, p 45.

98 Evidence, Mr Justin Fitzpatrick-Barr, General Manager, Singleton Council, 25 September 2025, pp 12-13.

99 Evidence, Mr Justin Fitzpatrick-Barr, General Manager, Singleton Council, 25 September 2025, pp 12-13.

100 Evidence, Mr Michael Holz, Resident and representing Singleton Solar Standoff community group, 25 September 2025, p 45.

101 Evidence, Mr Andrew Abbey, Policy Director, NSW Minerals Council, 13 May 2025, p 63.

102 See for example: Evidence, Mrs Selena Sylvester, Hills of Gold Preservation Inc, 17 July 2025, p 38; Submission 156, Voice for Cabonne Committee, pp 1-2; Submission 51, Temora Shire Council, p 2.

103 Evidence, Mr Richard Coughlan, Secretary, Bundure District Landholders Group, 18 February 2026, p 23.

Group, a community group comprised of farmers who neighbour generation and transmission infrastructure near the SW REZ, highlighted that projects, such as the Dinawan substation and 14 per cent of approved renewable infrastructure, sit outside the SW REZ.[104]

2.30 In the Illawarra REZ, stakeholders had a variety of views on the potential impact of offshore wind farms on the region, from its effect on the fishing industry to repercussions for community cohesion in the region, while others voiced concerns about possible environmental risks.[105]

2.31 Responsible Future, Illawarra Chapter, a community organisation based in the Illawarra REZ, expressed strong concerns about the impact of the proposed floating offshore wind projects.[106] They emphasised that they are not anti-renewable but seek a credible, sustainable energy transition.[107] Concerns included the lack of transparent and effective community consultation, risks presented by offshore wind infrastructure to marine environments and local fisheries, and the economic viability of offshore wind and green hydrogen.[108]

2.32 Moreover, Mr Alex O'Brien, President, Responsible Future, Illawarra Chapter, contended that the Illawarra REZ is dependent on floating offshore wind and green hydrogen technologies, but these are 'unproven at commercial scale, not currently viable and would drive prices up dramatically'.[109] On this basis, he called for a 'pause on this project'[110] pending an independent cost and environmental analysis, improvement in the consultation process and local buy-in before proceeding with large-scale projects.[111]

2.33 Local lobster fisherman, Mr Mark Horne on behalf of Mr Scott Westley, was also concerned about the impact of offshore wind farms on the lobster fishery industry. He noted that the location of the proposed wind farms could impact the

104 Submission 152, Bundure District Landholders Group, p 2.

105 See for example: Submission 43, Responsible Future (Illawarra Chapter) Inc, pp 2-11; Evidence, Mr Mark Horne, Individual, 29 October 2025, pp 10-11; Evidence, Ms Madeleine Holme, Good for the Gong, 29 October 2025, p 21; Evidence, Ms Yael Stone, Founding Director, Hi Neighbour, 29 October 2025, p 21.

106 Evidence, Alex O'Brien, President, Responsible Future, Illawarra Chapter, 25 October 2025, p 12. See also: Submission 43, Responsible Future (Illawarra Chapter) Inc, p 2.

107 Evidence, Alex O'Brien, President, Responsible Future, Illawarra Chapter, 25 October 2025, p 12.

108 Evidence, Alex O'Brien, President, Responsible Future, Illawarra Chapter, 25 October 2025, pp 12-13; Evidence, Mrs Amanda De Lore, Vice-President, Responsible Future, Illawarra Chapter, 25 October 2025, pp 14-15.

109 Evidence, Alex O'Brien, President, Responsible Future, Illawarra Chapter, 25 October 2025, p 12.

110 Evidence, Alex O'Brien, President, Responsible Future, Illawarra Chapter, 25 October 2025, p 13.

111 Evidence, Alex O'Brien, President, Responsible Future, Illawarra Chapter, 25 October 2025, pp 13.

migratory pattern of lobsters along the coast of New South Wales. He also referred to international studies that indicate potential harm to crustaceans as a result of electromagnetic fields produced by subsea power cables and related infrastructure.[112]

2.34 Mr Horne emphasised that while the industry is not against renewable energy or wind farms in general it does oppose those projects that significantly impact the 'lobster fishery, the marine environment, and our way of life'.[113] Mr Horne highlighted the potential economic repercussions for the state as well as those families who rely on the industry, should it be negatively impacted.

> At present, the New South Wales Rock Lobster Fishery is arguably the most successful fishery in the state, generating a GVP (Gross Value of Production) of around $12–14 million annually. There are 9,621 shares spread across roughly 100 businesses, with about 70 vessels actively fishing. A collapse of this fishery would bring financial ruin to hundreds of families and associated industries—and would also deprive the public of access to local, sustainably caught lobster or if able to, catch one themselves.[114]

2.35 Other stakeholders in the Illawarra REZ voiced their support of the REZ and the renewable energy transition.[115] For instance, Ms Madeleine Holme, Good for the Gong, a community group based in the Illawarra, welcomed the establishment of the REZs and the transition towards 'clean renewable power'.[116] Ms Holme highlighted the economic opportunities associated with renewable energy development such as local employment, as well as the chance to strengthen the manufacturing sector and protect the environment.[117] The economic opportunities in the Illawarra REZ are further explored in Chapter 3.

2.36 When asked about offshore wind targets in the HCC or Illawarra REZs, Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability Group, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, advised that the department is maintaining a 'watching brief' on technology developments and adopting a 'technology-agnostic' approach while monitoring overseas progress to assess the potential for New South Wales. This is due to the form of offshore wind that would be required in New South Wales, that is, floating

112 Evidence, Mr Mark Horne, individual, 29 October 2025, p 10.

113 Evidence, Mr Mark Horne, individual, 29 October 2025, p 10.

114 Evidence, Mr Mark Horne, individual, 29 October 2025, p 10.

115 Evidence, Ms Madeleine Holme, Good for the Gong, 29 October 2025, p 21; Submission 24, Hi Neighbour, p 1; Evidence, Mr Francis Vierboom, Chief Executive Officer, Rewiring Australia, 29 October 2025, p 21.

116 Evidence, Ms Madeleine Holme, Good for the Gong, 29 October 2025, p 21.

117 Evidence, Ms Madeleine Holme, Good for the Gong, 29 October 2025, p 21. See also: Submission 137, Good for the Gong, p 2.

offshore wind, still being in a nascent stage and yet to be deployed at large scale internationally.[118]

2.37 As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Illawarra REZ's intended network capacity is one GW and the REZ will integrate consumer energy resources such as rooftop solar systems, home batteries and community-scale batteries. At the time of writing, offshore wind is not featured on the Illawarra REZ webpage.[119]

Impact on landholders

2.38 Various landholders voiced concerns about the impact of the development of the REZs on agricultural productivity, land value and the cost of public liability insurance. While these themes were discussed in the first report in relation to the CWO REZ, it became clear throughout the inquiry that they were issues for the other REZs as well. These concerns are explored in this section.

Agricultural productivity

2.39 Agrivoltaics relates to the dual use of land for solar energy and agriculture.[120] Many stakeholders were apprehensive about the increasing use of agricultural land for renewable energy development.[121] Mr Peter Dawson, Property Owner, Salisbury Plains, argued that renewable energy development is incompatible with farming and voiced concerns about potential food security issues.[122]

2.40 Professor Ivan Kennedy, Professor Emeritus in Agriculture and Environmental Chemistry, School of Life and Environmental Sciences, Institute of Agriculture, University of Sydney, was also troubled by the lack of environmental risk assessments under Australian field conditions in relation to renewable energy development and the potential risks for the agriculture and rural industries. Professor Kennedy highlighted his uneasiness that wind farms may dry out the landscape and voiced concerns around the toxicity of solar panels as they contain significant amounts of heavy metals such as silver. Professor Kennedy

[118] Evidence, Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability Group, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, 13 May 2025, p 5.

[119] EnergyCo, *Illawarra Renewable Energy Zone*, 16 March 2026, https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/our-projects/illawarra-rez.

[120] Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales – First Report*, 2025, p 46.

[121] See for example: Submission 7, Mr Ian McDonald, p 3; Submission 121, Murrumbidgee Council, p 1; Submission 139, Murray River Council, p 3.

[122] Evidence, Mr Peter Dawson, Property Owner, Salisbury Plains, 17 July 2025, p 42. See also: Submission 112, Mr Peter Dawson, p 1.

warned that sheep will not be able to be sold on the market if they are contaminated with silver from solar panels while grazing under them.[123]

2.41 While acknowledging that this would take some time to happen and that solar panels do not leak heavy metals, Professor Kennedy reiterated that environmental risk assessments of renewable wind and solar energy within the REZs are nonetheless lacking.[124] As such, he called for further research into these risks, stating that 'we have to be aware of these possibilities. We have to do research beforehand'.[125]

2.42 There were varying views as to whether the impact of renewable energy projects on agricultural productivity would be positive or negative. Ms Myree Russell, a farmer based in the HCC REZ, highlighted the impacts of the Hunter Transmission Project on farming land, including changes to the landscape and its future productivity. Ms Russell contended that 'once a transmission line is built over a piece of land, you drastically reduce its potential. If our farming capabilities are lost, we lose the ability to feed our nation and its ever-increasing population'.[126]

2.43 RE-Alliance was of the view that renewable energy projects are compatible with agricultural practices.[127] Nonetheless, they highlighted that the rollout of renewable energy within the agricultural industry should:

- incorporate regional voices, including those of farming communities to manage any conflicts and develop lasting legacy of community benefits[128]
- establish 'collaborative frameworks' to minimise conflicts between agricultural and renewable energy land uses and 'maximise synergies' and shared benefits across both sectors[129]
- develop 'further research and incentives that guide industry to work closely with farmers and graziers to work co-location into project design'.[130]

123 Evidence, Professor Ivan Kennedy, Professor Emeritus in Agriculture and Environmental Chemistry, School of Life and Environmental Sciences, Institute of Agriculture, University of Sydney, 31 March 2026, p 44.

124 Evidence, Professor Ivan Kennedy, Professor Emeritus in Agriculture and Environmental Chemistry, School of Life and Environmental Sciences, Institute of Agriculture, University of Sydney, 31 March 2026, pp 44-45.

125 Evidence, Professor Ivan Kennedy, Professor Emeritus in Agriculture and Environmental Chemistry, School of Life and Environmental Sciences, Institute of Agriculture, University of Sydney, 31 March 2026, p 45.

126 Evidence, Ms Myree Russell, Farmer/Landowner, 25 September 2025, p 46.

127 Evidence, Ms Lu Allan, Advocacy Director, RE-Alliance, 13 May 2025, p 51. See also: Submission 64, RE-Alliance, pp 2, 10.

128 Submission 64, RE-Alliance, p 10.

129 Submission 64, RE-Alliance, p 10.

130 Evidence, Ms Lu Allan, Advocacy Director, RE-Alliance, 13 May 2025, p 51.

2.44 Andrew Locke, Farmer and Member, Farmers for Climate Action, who will host renewable energy developments on his land, considered renewable energy development to have increased the productivity of his land, as seen in the case study below.

Case study: Mr Andrew Locke, Farmer, New England REZ[131]

Andrew Locke is a farmer based in Walcha, in the heart of the NE REZ. Mr Locke is also a member of Farmers for Climate Action, a not-for-profit organisation representing farmers across Australia. He runs a grazing property with his family and, for the past fifteen years, has been one of thirty-six landholders working collectively to get Winterbourne Wind Farm approved. Appearing before the committee, he was straightforward about his reasons: this was a deliberate business decision, made by his family, for their farm.

The income from hosting would sit alongside their existing farm income. Mr Locke reflected that it 'improves our business resilience' and 'gives us drought protection', 'we're about to go into a dry season right now, so that's very front of mind'. The additional revenue would allow him to employ more people and put succession planning within reach.

On productivity, he was unequivocal: the turbines are planned for ridgelines, livestock continue to graze around them, and their footprint on a 1,500-acre grazing property is 'very, very small'. He had visited established wind farms at Wellington and Glen Innes and spoken with host landholders there; none reported lasting impacts on agricultural output. In Mr Locke's view, the development would not reduce the land's productivity, it would effectively double it: 'We're producing rural income but we're producing energy income'.

The landholders negotiated and secured a code of conduct with the developer, a decommissioning clause, and compensation for the construction period. The broader community stood to benefit too, with Walcha Shire Council set to receive '$1 million at financial close', followed by '$750,000 per year' indexed, to administer a community benefit fund.

Mr Locke did not present the transition as straightforward, having friends on both sides of the debate and describing the arrival of large-scale renewable energy as a 'big change management issue' for rural communities. In terms of additional resources to assist communities, Mr Locke considered that independent organisations like CWA or Local Land Services, could help communities manage the social impacts of the transition. He noted that local developer offices are available to the community, but they represent the developer's interests rather than being an independent source of support for community members trying to make sense of change. In his opinion, most of his fellow host landholders are 'quietly very supportive', they just 'aren't noisy' about it. In a close-knit community where the issue runs deep, some people find it easier to stay silent.

[131] Evidence, Mr Andrew Locke, Farmer, Farmers for Climate Action, 31 March 2026, pp 18-21.

2.45 The committee notes that the evidence also demonstrated that, where negotiations were undertaken in good faith and appropriate safeguards, compensation arrangements and community benefit mechanisms were established, some landholders reported more positive experiences. This highlights the importance of consistent standards and early engagement across all Renewable Energy Zone projects.

2.46 To address concerns about agrivoltaics, EnergyCo published an agrivoltaics handbook 'to help landholders navigate solar infrastructure on farmland'.[132] The handbook:

- explains how renewable energy can successfully coexist with farmland
- provides landholders and solar developers information and case studies on grazing within solar farms, growing crops and horticulture
- sets out best practice guidelines before entering contracts with solar developers.[133]

Impact on land values

2.47 Some stakeholders expressed concerns about the impact of renewable energy projects and associated infrastructure on land values.[134]

2.48 For example, Mrs Jenny Bailey, who is based in the New England region, argued that neighbouring landholders who do not host renewable energy projects may experience a decline in land values. Referring to one development in her community, she contended that 'five landholders stand to gain enormously from the income derived from hosting [a development], while 59 surrounding landholders will be negatively impacted'.[135]

2.49 Another inquiry participant similarly argued that the financial gains of a REZ and related projects benefit the host landholder while neighbouring properties do not receive any compensation despite being impacted by the developments.[136] The participant outlined how 'the financial benefits are massively skewed toward those hosting the infrastructure, while those neighbouring such facilities are exposed to all the negative impacts … yet receive a pitiful amount of recompense'.[137]

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132 Evidence, Ms Hannah McCaughey, Chief Executive Officer, EnergyCo, 31 March 2026, p 71.

133 EnergyCo, *Agrivoltaics Handbook,* 17 December 2025, https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/agrivoltaics-handbook.

134 See for example: Submission 85, Mrs Jenny Bailey, p 4. See also, Evidence, Mr Tim White, President, Valley Alliance, 17 July 2025, p 30; Evidence, Mr Richard Coughlan, Secretary, Bundure District Landholders Group, 18 February 2026, p 17.

135 Submission 85, Mrs Jenny Bailey, p 4.

136 Submission 79, Name suppressed, p 2.

137 Submission 79, Name suppressed, p 2.

2.50 Hosting transmission infrastructure can also reduce the value of smaller rural 'lifestyle' properties. Mr Peter Dawson, a property owner in Salisbury Plains within the NE REZ, contended that infrastructure development has a particular capital value downgrade impact on rural lifestyle blocks. According to Mr Dawson, this situation is recognised by local real estate agents yet is not acknowledged by EnergyCo:

> One other thing that EnergyCo refuses to acknowledge is the potential capital loss of rural land impacted by its transmission corridor, specifically as it applies to rural lifestyle blocks in the Salisbury Plains area. The Salisbury Plains area is comprised mainly of smaller holdings and rural lifestyle blocks. By that I mean—the rule of thumb is that any block around that 300-, 400- or 500-acre size is a rural lifestyle block. It's governed by different market dynamics so, therefore, any infrastructure development has a particular capital value downgrade impact. This is one thing that EnergyCo seems as though they refuse to acknowledge. I've spoken to various agents in the Uralla-Armidale area, and the consistent message that I've got is that, obviously, if you've got a lifestyle block, you buy it for a specific purpose. It's got a specific market structure. If you put infrastructure on there, obviously it's going to affect its market value. That impact is significant, I believe.[138]

Public liability insurance

2.51 Another issue that emerged throughout the inquiry was the potential impact of renewable energy projects on the cost and availability of public liability insurance for landholders.

2.52 As explained in the first report, the installation of renewable energy infrastructure may result in land use being reclassified as industrial rather than agricultural, with associated changes to various outgoings including council rates and insurance.[139] This may include 'prohibitive increases in public liability premiums … and limited availability of appropriate insurance cover'.[140] According to the Law Society of NSW, costs can be affected by the risk of fire damage stemming from a landholder's property, when the landholder is host to, or adjoining, renewable energy development.[141]

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138 Evidence, Mr Peter Dawson, Property Owner, Salisbury Plains, 17 July 2025, pp 40-41.

139 Submission 70, The Law Society of NSW, p 2. See also: Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales – First Report*, 2025, pp 48-49.

140 Submission 70, The Law Society of NSW, p 2. See also: Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales – First Report*, 2025, pp 48-49.

141 Submission 70, The Law Society of NSW, p 2.

2.53 Mr Xavier Martin, President, NSW Farmers Association, explained how landholders with properties adjoining renewable energy projects face challenges in finding an insurer that will provide sufficient cover:

> I haven't found [a policy cover] yet. A typical farm pack is $20 million public liability. It's prohibitive once you start looking for multiples of that, and I'm not aware of any of the major insurers that do offer that. What I hear at meeting after meeting is members saying, "Hang on. What they're proposing next door to me is hundreds of millions of dollars. Are we all going to man the truck and the fire trailers and get there and put it out before it gets into those solar complexes or it burns one of those wind complexes?" Or vice versa—if they light the fires, who's going to get the blame and how do we know how this is all going to work? There's a massive gap in liability cover.[142]

2.54 In response to these concerns, Transgrid told the committee that insurance is covered for landholders who host their easements. Further, there are ongoing discussions between Transgrid, the community and relevant government authorities in relation to addressing the issues regarding neighbouring properties.[143]

2.55 In addition, Deputy Commissioner Ben Millington, Operational Coordination, NSW Rural Fire Service highlighted that under section 63 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997*, landowners and land managers, including renewable energy developers, are required to ensure that they take all steps practicable to prevent and minimise bushfire risk. Deputy Commissioner Millington further added that some developers have also engaged private firefighting or emergency response capabilities as part of their site arrangements.[144]

2.56 The relationship between fire risk and renewable energy projects and infrastructure is discussed in Chapter 3.

Community consultation and engagement

2.57 As mentioned in the first report, the renewable energy planning process is underpinned by numerous policy and legislative frameworks, as well as community consultation processes in relation to proposed developments. The government advised that they are committed to working closely with communities on the planning and rollout of REZs and associated renewable

[142] Evidence, Mr Xavier Martin, President, NSW Farmers Association, 13 May 2025, pp 58, 60. See also: Submission 50, NSW Farmers Association, pp 5-6.

[143] Evidence, Mr Michael Johnson, General Manager Community and Social Licence, Transgrid, 18 February 2026, p 30.

[144] Evidence, Deputy Commissioner Ben Millington, Operational Coordination, NSW Rural Fire Service, 31 March 2026, pp 49 & 52.

infrastructure, emphasising the role of community engagement activities in the transition.[145]

2.58 Stakeholders had varying experiences and their views differed regarding the adequacy of community consultation as conducted by renewable energy developers and relevant government agencies. While similar issues were considered in the first report, further evidence was received about the nature of community consultation for all the REZs. This section explores the concerns raised in greater detail.

Interactions between communities and key stakeholders

2.59 A number of stakeholders, particularly some local councils, noted that their relationship with EnergyCo and renewable energy developers had been improving and was better than it had been in the past.[146] The following are some reflections:

- 'In the last 12 months, [since January 2025] EnergyCo has actually really stepped up to the mark'.[147]
- 'Some of the proponents have done really good engagement more recently. I think we're seeing a shift in the way they're actually getting out there. They're acknowledging that there's a lot of work to be done with the neighbouring properties, particularly, and then the broader community. So we're absolutely seeing a change'.[148]
- 'We had troubles initially engaging with EnergyCo, around a number of the projects that were happening, but we've since formed some better relationships in the past year and have had some good, ongoing engagement there. But I will say it was difficult in the first couple of years'.[149]

2.60 On the other hand, many stakeholders, including landholders, residents, community organisations and other local councils viewed the consultation process as either inadequate or lacking in meaningful engagement. A sample of comments regarding the consultation process follows:

- 'No genuine consultation - it is obvious from our experience that the developers are purely ticking boxes when they meet with community

145 Submission 44, NSW Government, p 12.

146 See for example: Evidence, Ms Emily Sims, Strategic Planning Officer, Uralla Shire Council, 17 July 2025, p 4; Evidence, Mr Sam Lobsey, Manager, Development Division, Tamworth Regional Council, 17 July 2025, p 14; Evidence, Mrs Mary-Anne Crawford, Manager, Development and Environmental Services, Singleton Council, 25 September 2026, p 5.

147 Evidence, Mr Jack Bond, Chief Executive Officer, Edward River Council, 18 February 2026, p 2.

148 Evidence, Mr Sam Lobsey, Manager, Development Division, Tamworth Regional Council, 17 July 2025, p 14

149 Evidence, Mr Justin Page, Coordinator, Hunter Jobs Alliance, 25 September 2026, p 28.

members and the government is pushing ahead with developments, no matter how many objections and issues are raised'.[150]

- 'Trust and respect, right from the beginning. You don't build trust in the community by altering processes to suit yourself halfway through. You don't build trust in the community by being non-transparent. You don't build trust in the community by giving false information or trying to sign people up on non-disclosure agreements'.[151]
- 'The whole approach of [EnergyCo] is adversarial. If you want straightforward information about how the project is carried out, you are met with questions in turn about why we would want such information and promises to provide it later—a later that never eventuates. … They do not talk openly and honestly with us, and these are missed opportunities, as we know the land'.[152]
- 'EnergyCo has been appalling with their consultation and so-called leadership and have now firewalled themselves by using subcontractors and labour hire at information sessions to communicate with the community. The renewable energy proponents have tried to bully and intimidate our members into signing neighbour agreements well before a scoping report or the placement of the project on the NSW Planning Portal'.[153]

2.61 In addition, many stakeholders were critical of EnergyCo's change of approach from town hall meetings to community 'pop-up meetings', advising that they were not fit for purpose when engaging with regional communities.[154] In particular, Mr Tim White, President, Valley Alliance, a community-based organisation in the NE REZ, highlighted how EnergyCo's town hall style meetings transitioned to 'pop-up meetings' as they were unprepared for handling community feedback:

> We had a community meeting in Tamworth, where there would have been 80 people at it, I think, and it was a very, very emotional meeting. EnergyCo was unprepared at that meeting and didn't handle it very well at all … We had another meeting … It was, to put it bluntly, a disaster. I mean, there were a lot of very angry and unhappy people there. EnergyCo didn't handle it very well. They were again unprepared … From that moment on, they've refused to have a group community meeting with us because it doesn't suit their narrative to see what the community wants. They want to do what they want to do. They don't want to hear what the community wants.

150 Submission 85, Mrs Jenny Bailey, p 5.

151 Evidence, Mrs Karen Zirkler, Regenerative Agriculture Grazier, Kentucky District, 17 July 2025, pp 42-43.

152 Evidence, Ms Kathy Morris, Landowner, 13 May 2025, p 38.

153 Evidence, Mr Tony Menkens, Beef Cattle Producer and Chair, Batting for Boorolong Community Group, 17 July 2025, p 46.

154 See for example: Evidence, Mr Tim White, President, Valley Alliance, 17 July 2025, p 33; Evidence, Mr Michael Holz, Resident and representing Singleton Solar Standoff community group, 25 September 2025, p 51; Evidence, Mr Richard Coughlan, Secretary, Bundure District Landholders Group, 18 February 2026, p 18.

> When you've got an angry community, they think that it's not to their benefit, so they don't have it. Now they have pop-up meetings. We have two pop-ups in our community—well, not in our community. The pop-up meetings are 30 kilometres away or 150 kilometres away. We had one pop-up meeting for our transmission lines at Gunnedah. It's 150 kilometres away. What good is that?[155]

2.62 The case study below illustrates some of the difficulties experienced by community groups when attempting to engage with renewable energy developers.

Case study - Mr Antony (Tony) Menkens, New England REZ[156]

Tony Menkens runs a beef cattle operation near Armidale, on land that sits directly in the path of a proposed wind project. Mr Menkens is also the Chair of Batting for Boorolong (B4B) Community Group, a group of over 160 residents in the area. Four wind projects were announced for the area, proposing up to 300 turbines across a corridor starting twelve kilometres from where he farms.

Mr Menkens and the B4B group were quick to recognise that the New England Renewable Energy Zone (NE REZ) was on its way and decided that the most productive approach would be to work with developers and government to secure the best outcomes possible for local people, farms, businesses, and communities.

B4B spent weeks developing thirteen requirements to be met by the wind project before the community would support it, consulting along the way with Indigenous groups, wildlife experts, aerial firefighting contractors, and legal advisers. They presented the list in September 2023.

Nearly two years later, little had been addressed. Every meeting between B4B and the proponents had been initiated by the community. Mr Menkens expressed his frustration that 'We have been stonewalled and rejected every step of the way'.

Mr Menkens described how representatives of the wind project approached households directly and pressured people to sign neighbour agreements before any scoping report had been submitted, warning them that 'if you don't sign this neighbour agreement, you're going to miss out on the money'.

Alongside the problematic consultation process, Mr Menkens raised the question of scale. The concentration of four large wind projects in a single area, he argued, had never been properly assessed in terms of its combined effect on roads, water, construction materials, and agricultural land. Much of the NE REZ has been mapped as Biophysical Strategic Agricultural Land, among the most productive soils in New South Wales, representing just 3.5 per cent of the state's total land area. In his view, that designation had not been taken seriously, 'It's all-encompassing and it's massive. They should have started on this five years ago'.

[155] Evidence, Mr Tim White, President, Valley Alliance, 17 July 2025, p 33.

[156] Evidence, Mr Tony Menkens, Chair, Batting for Booroolong Community Group, 17 July 2025, pp 46-50. See also: Submission 151, Mr Tony Menkens.

The inherent power imbalance between individuals and developers

2.63 Another concern raised in relation to the adequacy of community consultation was the inherent power imbalance between individuals and developers, with many stakeholders highlighting that the planning or negotiation process favoured developers.

2.64 As explained in the first report, the planning process involves complex policy and legislative requirements. Most renewable energy projects are classified as State Significant Developments[157] and are subject to a rigorous development assessment process managed by the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI). Furthermore, individual generation, storage and transmission developments within REZs must also undertake their own impact assessments, which are in turn assessed and approved by the department.[158]

2.65 Mr Richard Coughlan, Secretary, Bundure District Landholders Group, a community group of farmers based near the SW REZ, described his experience of dealing with renewable energy developers and the power imbalance that can exist. In particular, he drew attention to the following characteristics of the relationship between landholders and developers.

- Energy companies fail to acknowledge the hidden costs, stresses and concerns about the unknown experienced by those who neighbour their developments.
- The inclusion of unacceptable demands indicates a lack of respect in the negotiation of individual neighbour agreements.
- Compensation varies greatly from one project to another.
- Landholders are burdened with navigating these agreements with no support.
- Landholders are pressured to sign agreements and lose any right to object to unforeseen detrimental effects that may occur at a later time.
- Planning guidelines are used by some developers to minimise their commitment to a negotiated agreement.[159]

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157 Under the EP&A Act, projects can be declared State Significant Development (SSD) if they are important to the state for economic, environmental or social reasons. A development is considered significant to the state if it is over a specific size, is in an environmentally sensitive area or will exceed capital investment value. Source: Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales – First Report*, 2025, pp 5-6.

158 Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales – First Report*, 2025, pp 5-6.

159 Evidence, Mr Richard Coughlan, Secretary, Bundure District Landholders Group, 18 February 2026, p 17.

2.66 In a similar vein, other inquiry participants commented on how local community groups are required to review 'thousands' of pages of documents as part of the consultation process.[160] For example, Mrs Selena Sylvester, Hills of Gold Preservation Inc, a community group representing landholders that share boundaries with the CWO, NE and HCC REZs, highlighted the difference between the resources behind developers compared to that of local groups and individuals:

> Throughout this process, our community has experienced what can only be described as the Wild West of planning. We have faced highly resourced developers, supported by consultants and lawyers, and a government intent on fast-tracking renewables, while our rural community was left to navigate thousands of pages of technical documents with no meaningful support.[161]

Impact on social cohesion and wellbeing

2.67 Many stakeholders also raised concerns about the negative impact of the consultation process on social cohesion and wellbeing in rural and regional communities.[162] For instance, Ms Karen Zirkler, Regenerative Agriculture Grazier, Kentucky District, which is located in the NE REZ, described the work involved in preparing a submission to an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as part of the planning process and the impact it had on her community. Ms Zirkler highlighted how the substantial workload was detrimental to her community's wellbeing:

> The work we did during this period put another amount of significant strain on mental health and community members and their families. As you've heard, EIS documents are thousands and thousands of pages long. We had 28 days to digest it all, get advice, prepare submissions. Because no-one else was prepared to do it, our group members volunteered to help other community members—those people who were less able because they were older, they didn't have internet access or not even a computer—to submit.[163]

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160 Evidence, Mrs Selena Sylvester, Hills of Gold Preservation Inc, 17 July 2025, p 38. See also: Evidence, Mr Michael Holz, Resident and representing Singleton Solar Standoff community group, 25 September 2025, p 48; Evidence, Mrs Myree Russell, Farmer/Landowner, 25 September 2025, p 48; Evidence, Mrs Karen Zirkler, Regenerative Agriculture Grazier, Kentucky District, 17 July 2025, pp 39, 40.

161 Evidence, Mrs Selena Sylvester, Hills of Gold Preservation Inc, 17 July 2025, p 38.

162 See for example: President, Valley Alliance, 17 July 2025, p 30; Evidence, Mr Richard Coughlan, Secretary, Bundure District Landholders Group (BUNDL), 18 February 2026, pp 17, 21; Submission 140, Mr Michael Holz, p 5.

163 Evidence, Mrs Karen Zirkler, Regenerative Agriculture Grazier, Kentucky District, 17 July 2025, p 39.

2.68 Some communities were 'divided' as a result of the REZs.[164] For example, Tamworth Regional Council observed that there can be conflict between supporters and opponents of renewable projects.[165] Indeed, Mr Sam Lobsey, Manager, Development Division, Tamworth Regional Council, was of the view that this has long term consequences, whereby a 'couple of years of division is 20 years of trying to fix those problems'.[166]

2.69 Similarly, Ms Yael Stone, Founding Director, Hi Neighbour, described the impact of community division in the Illawarra REZ following debates about offshore wind and reflected on the long-term outcomes for her community:

> We've been disturbed and directly affected by some of the community division around offshore wind. It's been really upsetting, on a personal level and a community level, to see that sort of social tear happen and continue. We haven't been able to come back together.[167]

2.70 The committee also heard that social cohesion had been affected in the HCC REZ, notwithstanding its history and acceptance of the presence of other significant energy infrastructure. Mr Justin Fitzpatrick-Barr, General Manager, Singleton Council, outlined the particular impact of renewable energy development on a mining community:

> Our communities up here have been open to large, State-significant projects for a lot of decades—we've got mine sites around us everywhere, both here and in Muswellbrook—very supportive. We see the benefits of all this, and the flow-on benefits over the decades. What we're seeing with renewable energy, though, and the way it's being rolled out is potentially going to have a negative impact on a community that's already supported energy production. They're seeing renewables as having further impact on a community that's already been impacted by large mine sites.[168]

2.71 Mr Fitzpatrick-Barr continued:

> The fact that a community then has to go through significant gatherings and protests and stuff—have placards up on farmland fences and whatever—for a project that may never, ever eventuate is just not fair on this community, who has already experienced decades worth of impact from being in a power generation zone. I think, in hindsight, you'd probably approach it in a different way, but certainly it's not fair on communities to actually put them through the angst for them to find out later on that the

[164] See for example: Evidence, Councillor Eric Noakes, Mayor, Walcha Council, 17 July 2025, p 15; Evidence, the Hon. Barnaby Joyce, Member for New England, Parliament of Australia, 17 July 2025, p 17; Submission 71, Mr John Benjamin, p 2.

[165] Submission 69, Tamworth Regional Council, p 2.

[166] Evidence, Mr Sam Lobsey, Manager, Development Division, Tamworth Regional Council, 17 July 2025, p 15.

[167] Evidence, Ms Yael Stone, Founding Director, Hi Neighbour, 29 October 2025, p 21.

[168] Evidence, Mr Justin Fitzpatrick-Barr, General Manager, Singleton Council, 25 September 2025, p 13.

> project may have never got up anyway because it relied on 14 kilometres of road reserve, or it doesn't even have access to the network.[169]

The impact of non-disclosure agreements

2.72 Non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) between developers and landholders can prevent plans for properties from being discussed beyond the parties involved, leaving neighbours and the broader public unaware of future plans for development. In this context, several stakeholders claimed that the use of NDAs increased tensions within local communities by reducing the transparency of the process.[170]

2.73 The President of NSW Farmers described NDAs as an 'extraordinarily corrosive component' in rural communities.[171] He explained that secrecy around individual landholder agreements and compensation exacerbates social cohesion issues, leading to distrust and division:

> Some of my members are realising now that contracts were signed two or three years ago for their neighbours. To find out all of a sudden that—not only do you have this complex next door, but it changes all the hydraulics, all the water flows off those lands, in the case of solar … All those things create so much distrust and dysfunction in the community.[172]

2.74 Blueprint Institute, an independent think tank, suggested that developers should be open to negotiating with landholders collectively and refrain from 'imposing' NDAs to address the power imbalance between landholders and developers.[173] The Institute advised that such an approach 'promotes transparency in negotiations and mitigates potential conflicts arising from perceived inequalities'.[174]

Improving the quality of community consultation

2.75 There have been attempts to improve the consultation process. Mr Timothy Jarratt, Group Executive, Market Development and Strategy, Ausgrid advised that Ausgrid has been active in responding to concerns about the quality of community consultation, particularly in the HCC REZ, ensuring that their

169 Evidence, Mr Justin Fitzpatrick-Barr, General Manager, Singleton Council, 25 September 2025, p 13.

170 See for example: Evidence, Mr Xavier Martin, President, NSW Farmers, 13 May 2025, pp 60-61; Evidence, Ms Karen Zirkler, Regenerative Agriculture Grazier, Kentucky District, 17 July 2025, p 42; Evidence, Ms Susan Newey, Chair, ReD4NE, 17 July 2025, p 49.

171 Evidence, Mr Xavier Martin, President, NSW Farmers, 13 May 2025, p 60.

172 Evidence, Mr Xavier Martin, President, NSW Farmers, 13 May 2025, pp 60-61

173 Submission 53, Blueprint Institute, p 3.

174 Submission 53, Blueprint Institute, p 3.

approach is not a 'box-ticking exercise'.[175] To this end, the committee heard that Ausgrid's strategies include:

- increasing new staff as part of their engagement strategy and having a base in the local communities[176]
- proactively engaging with local councils, resident groups and local businesses
- holding one-on-one conversations with landholders, including door knocking exercises to reach out to the community
- including operational and project management staff in conversations with landholders and residents to address technical issues
- attending various community events and hosting online forums.[177]

2.76 Likewise, Mr Michael Johnson, General Manager, Community and Social Licence, Transgrid commented that Transgrid is committed to the REZ regions where its infrastructure is based and has been collaborating with all stakeholders.[178] During his evidence to the committee, Mr Johnson emphasised that Transgrid's engagement strategy includes:

- prioritising face-to-face engagement with stakeholders and maintaining a strong local community presence
- building relationships with landholders and emphasising the application of their code-of-conduct when interacting with key stakeholders
- being transparent in the decision-making process to ensure that the community understands the reasons for a project, from its construction-phase to its ongoing operation and maintenance.[179]

2.77 The government also responded to concerns raised in relation to community engagement. Mr Ashley Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, EnergyCo, advised that EnergyCo has improved the way in which they engage with the community and listened to the community's concerns. They have introduced measures such as:

- 'bolstering' their community engagement teams

175 Evidence, Mr Timothy Jarratt, Group Executive, Market Development and Strategy, Ausgrid, 25 September 2025, p 17.

176 Evidence, Mr Daniel Sartor, Head of Major Projects, Ausgrid, 25 September 2025, p 19.

177 Evidence, Mr Timothy Jarratt, Group Executive, Market Development and Strategy, Ausgrid, 25 September 2025, pp 17-18.

178 Evidence, Mr Michael Johnson, General Manager, Community and Social Licence, Transgrid, 25 September 2025, pp 17-18; Evidence, Mr Michael Johnson, General Manager, Community and Social Licence, Transgrid, 18 February 2026, p 24.

179 Evidence, Mr Michael Johnson, General Manager, Community and Social Licence, Transgrid, 25 September 2025, pp 19-20. See also: Evidence, Mr Michael Johnson, General Manager, Community and Social Licence, Transgrid, 18 February 2026, p 24.

- reviewing their engagement process during the land acquisition process
- introducing new ways to engage with landholders such as early engagement and having a single point of contact
- coordinating a mix of 'drop-in' sessions and town hall style meetings when requested.[180]

Use of Social Impact Assessments

2.78 As discussed in the first report, Social Impact Assessments (SIAs) are required for all state significant projects, including renewable energy developments, to identify and assess likely social impacts and recommend ways to reduce negative effects and enhance benefits.[181]

2.79 While the first report highlighted evidence from Dr Richard Parsons, a social research practitioner specialising in SIAs and community engagement,[182] his views regarding SIAs were not specific to the CWO REZ and apply to all communities impacted by state significant projects, including those within the other REZs.[183]

2.80 Dr Parsons noted that, when used effectively, SIAs can help communities feel more involved and supported. Nonetheless, there are 'shortcomings' around how these assessments are used by the state's planning system, due to limited engagement, insufficient attention to impacts such as noise and dust, and a lack of focus on social cohesion. He suggested the process could be improved by strengthening resourcing within the DPHI to better oversee and assess social impacts.[184]

2.81 A key recommendation of the first report was for DPHI to review its SIAs.[185] In response, the government advised that they support the recommendation 'in principle', noting that 'DPHI will explore options to improve the use of SIAs for

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180 Evidence, Mr Ashley Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, EnergyCo, 31 March 2026, pp 63-64.

181 Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales – First Report*, 2025, p 44.

182 Dr Richard Parsons, is a social research practitioner, specialising in social impact assessment SIA and community engagement. He was previously employed as an internal SIA specialist for the then Department of Planning and Environment from 2016 to 2022. Dr Parson provided evidence at the hearing on 13 May 2025 in a personal professional capacity and not representing any organisation. See also: Evidence, Dr Richard Parson, Social Researcher, 13 May 2025, p 32.

183 Evidence, Dr Richard Parsons, Social Researcher, 13 May 2025, p 32.

184 Evidence, Dr Richard Parsons, Social Researcher, 13 May 2025, p 32.

185 Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales – First Report*, 2025, pp x, 46.

state significant renewable energy infrastructure projects considering feedback from the inquiry'.[186]

Pathways for improving engagement

2.82 Various pathways for improving engagement and community consultation were identified by stakeholders, such as increased awareness of the role of the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW, and proactive coordination of individuals, community groups, local councils and renewable energy developers.

The role of the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW

2.83 The Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) is an independent, not for-profit, industry-based ombudsman that investigates and resolves complaints between individuals and energy sector industry members.[187]

2.84 According to EWON, the first year of their expansion into managing complaints about renewable energy infrastructure was 'significant', as community engagement and outreach across the state increased awareness of their role.[188] Ms Janine Young, Ombudsman, EWON, emphasised that the Ombudsman seeks to facilitate 'fair and reasonable outcomes' in the resolution of complaints and 'bring parties together so they actually achieve what they want.'[189]

2.85 However, renewable generation and storage such as solar, wind and large-scale battery storage remain outside EWON's jurisdiction if generation and storage developers are not members of EWON.[190] Nonetheless, EWON reported that 29 per

[186] Correspondence from the Hon Penny Sharpe, Minister for Climate Change, Minister for Energy, Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, to the Clerk of the Parliaments, providing government response to the inquiry into *the Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales – First Report*, 21 November 2025, p 1.

[187] Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales – First Report*, 2025, p 11. See also: Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON), *Renewable Energy Infrastructure*, https://www.ewon.com.au/page/customer-resources/renewable-energy-infrastructure; Evidence, Ms Janine Young, Ombudsman, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON), 31 March 2026, p 2.

[188] Tabled document, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON), Renewable Energy Infrastructure Impact Report - Energy and Water Ombudsman NSW, 31 March 2026, p 1. See also: Evidence, Ms Janine Young, Ombudsman, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON), 31 March 2026, p 2.

[189] Evidence, Ms Janine Young, Ombudsman, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON), 31 March 2026, p 4.

[190] Evidence, Ms Janine Young, Ombudsman, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON), 31 March 2026, p 2; Answers to supplementary questions, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON), 1 May 2026, p 4.

cent of the complaints received under their renewable energy infrastructure function is in relation to generation and storage developments. However, EWON advised that they are limited in their ability to address these complaints and can only assist the community and landholders by:

- providing independent information about community consultation guidelines, the planning process and where they can access information
- providing assistance on how to raise a complaint with the developer directly
- referring complaints to the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner, who has independent oversight of generation and storage development in Australia.[191]

2.86 To enhance their work in the renewable energy development space, Ms Young advocated for implementation of the following:

- that renewable energy infrastructure entities be directed to promote their openness to complaints from landholders and community members and, if they are not satisfied, to inform them of their right to contact EWON
- that the government introduce legislation or a licencing scheme requiring renewable energy generation and storage developers to be members of EWON thus ensuring that complaints are within EWON's jurisdiction
- that a single narrative be promoted by the energy sector and government about 'the why, where, what and how of energy transition and the benefits that are available to regional communities'.[192]

2.87 EWON advised that it has power within its jurisdiction to make a binding decision or determination to resolve complaints that cannot be conciliated. EWON can direct an entity 'to do something, to stop doing something or to start doing something', provided that the total cost is under $100,000.[193] Ms Young described how this can look in practice:

> If there's a customer impact, I can say—and the customer provides substantiation of that impact. For example, if someone left a gate open and some prized cattle got out and there was evidence of that, we could say, "Provide restitution to that landholder for what the loss is," capped at $100,000.[194]

[191] Answers to supplementary questions, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON), 1 May 2026, p 4.

[192] Evidence, Ms Janine Young, Ombudsman, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON), 31 March 2026, p 2.

[193] Evidence, Ms Janine Young, Ombudsman, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON), 31 March 2026, p 9.

[194] Evidence, Ms Janine Young, Ombudsman, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON), 31 March 2026, p 5.

2.88 However, Ms Young advised that EWON has yet to make a binding decision, highlighting that EWON has a 'good conciliation approach to resolving complaints'.[195] She maintained the view that EWON has the 'the right powers' within their jurisdiction, noting that if a complaint is received that is outside of EWON's jurisdiction, the landholder is referred to the appropriate authority.[196]

2.89 EnergyCo is a member of EWON and gave evidence that they actively promote EWON to the community and industry. Mr Ashley Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, EnergyCo, described how EnergyCo has positively responded to and actioned EWON's request that they engage with generation and storage developers to highlight the benefits of joining EWON as industry members.[197]

Agreed set of principles or code of conduct

2.90 Some inquiry participants gave evidence of the ways in which communities can proactively approach their engagement with renewable energy developers. These include developing an agreed set of principles or preparing a code of conduct for use in negotiations.

2.91 As an example, Hay Shire Council (located in the South West REZ) developed a principles document in consultation with the community, that sets out the expectations of the local community regarding roads, water and waste management.[198] Ms Alison McLean, Executive Manager, Economic Development and Tourism, Hay Shire Council, highlighted that having this set of principles prior to engaging with renewable energy developers 'firms' the council's ability to negotiate.[199]

2.92 Another stakeholder, Mr Andrew Locke, Farmer and Member, Farmers for Climate Action (as featured in the case study at paragraph 2.44), described how his community has approached dealing with developers. As a potential host of a renewable energy development, he and other landholders in his community put together a code of conduct that they negotiated with the developer, 'so that, if

[195] Evidence, Ms Janine Young, Ombudsman, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON), 31 March 2026, p 9.

[196] Evidence, Ms Janine Young, Ombudsman, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON), 31 March 2026, p 7.

[197] Evidence, Mr Ashley Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, EnergyCo, 31 March 2026, p 67.

[198] Evidence, Ms Alison McLean, Executive Manager, Economic Development and Tourism, Hay Shire Council, 18 February 2026, p 2; Submission 87, Hay Shire Council, pp 4-5.

[199] Evidence, Ms Alison McLean, Executive Manager, Economic Development and Tourism, Hay Shire Council, 18 February 2026, pp 2, 4-5.

there are any issues, we've got pathways for resolution and … compensated for that interruption in productivity for that two-year construction phase'.[200]

2.93 Further, Clean Energy Council, the peak industry body for the clean energy sector in Australia, gave evidence that they have developed a Best Practice Charter setting out commitments that signatories[201] agree to uphold in the development of current and new clean energy projects.[202] Examples of commitments include:

- engaging early and respectfully with local communities
- providing timely information and being accessible and responsive to community feedback
- minimising the impacts on agricultural land and exploring opportunities to integrate agricultural production.[203]

Cumulative impact on local services

2.94 Echoing the first report, a significant number of inquiry participants highlighted the adverse impact of Renewable Energy Zones on the capacity of local services, including housing, road networks, infrastructure (in particular water security and waste management), and emergency services. Local councils can experience significant resourcing pressures as a result. The need to consider these cumulative impacts in detail, and whether the Regional Infrastructure Studies have sufficiently done so, was a common theme throughout the inquiry.

Repercussions for local services

2.95 The key impacts on local services throughout the REZs are summarised below.

- **Available housing**: the influx of temporary workers for renewable energy developments (both from transmission and generation projects) impacts the availability of affordable housing in the regions and in some instances has increased rental prices.[204]

[200] Evidence, Mr Andrew Locke, Farmer and Member, Farmers for Climate Action, 31 March 2026, pp 18 & 21.

[201] Signatories include ACEN Australia, Akaysha and Origin, renewable energy developers who have a presence in the REZs. Source: Clean Energy Council, *Best Practice Charter*, https://cleanenergycouncil.org.au/advocacy/best-practice-charter, 2026.

[202] Clean Energy Council, *Best Practice Charter*, https://cleanenergycouncil.org.au/advocacy/best-practice-charter, 2026. See also: Evidence, Mr William Churchill, Chief Policy and Impact Officer, Clean Energy Council, 31 March 2026, pp 30, 36.

[203] Clean Energy Council, *Best Practice Charter*, https://cleanenergycouncil.org.au/advocacy/best-practice-charter, 2026.

[204] See for example: Submission 66, Uralla Shire Council, pp 5-6; Submission 62, Armidale Regional Council, pp 4-5; Submission 40, Singleton Council, p 3; Submission 87, Hay Shire Council, p 3; Submission 50, NSW Farmers, p 11.

- **Local road networks:** greater use of oversize and/or overmass (OSOM) vehicles[205] on local roads to transport equipment or construction materials for renewable energy projects impacts traffic and road conditions.[206] Some stakeholders highlighted that local roads may not be suitable for these vehicles and need to be upgraded before projects are approved.[207]
- **Water security:** some local councils cautioned that their regions face 'high water security risk', as the current storage and treatment capacity is insufficient for accommodating additional usage.[208]
- **Waste:** renewable energy projects generate substantial waste during commissioning, operation, and decommissioning, which can increase pressures on rural and regional waste processing facilities, shorten landfill lifespans and trigger the need for new or expanded sites.[209] The issue of decommissioning will be discussed in Chapter 3.
- **Greater pressure on emergency services (such as hospitals and police):** similar to housing, the influx of temporary workers adds to pressure on local emergency services, especially where those services are already limited. This can be particularly acute in rural communities.[210]
- **Long-term impacts on local economies:** while some local councils acknowledged the opportunities for economic diversification and investment including increased employment, they also noted the risks associated with infrastructure strain and limited long-term employment

[205] Oversize and/or overmass vehicles are heavy vehicles with loads that are more than 2.5 metres wide, 19 metres long and 4.6 metres high. For further information, see Transport for NSW, *Renewables Transportation – Oversize and/or overmass (OSOM) loads*, https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/projects/current-projects/renewables-transportation-%E2%80%93-oversize-andor-overmass-osom-loads#:~:text=Oversize%20and%2For%20overmass%20(OSOM)%20loads%20are%20a%20common,the%20Heavy%20Vehicle%20National%20Law, 7 August 2024.

[206] See for example: Submission 69, Tamworth Regional Council, p 2; Evidence, Councillor Jeff Drayton, Mayor, Muswellbrook Shire Council, 25 September 2025, p 4; Submission 121, Murrumbidgee Council, p 1; Submission 4, Mrs Julia James, p 1; Evidence, Mr Cameron Greig, Member, Voice for Walcha, 17 July 2025, p 35.

[207] Evidence, Mr Derek Finnigan, General Manager, Muswellbrook Shire Council, 25 September 2025, p 7.

[208] See for example: Answers to supplementary questions, Armidale Regional Council, 19 August 2025, pp 1-2; Submission 40, Singleton Council, p 3; Evidence, Ms Alison McLean, Executive Manager, Economic Development and Tourism, Hay Shire Council, 18 February 2026, p 2.

[209] See for example: Submission 54, Country Mayors Association, p 3; Submission 125, Local Government NSW, p 16; and Submission 139, Murray River Council, pp 9-10.

[210] Evidence, Mr Cameron Greig, Member, Voice for Walcha, 17 July 2025, p 32. See also: Evidence, Mr Andrew Browning, Committee Member, Bundure District Landholders Group, 18 February 2026, p 21.

opportunities post-construction phase.[211] This issue will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 3.

2.96 In this context, several stakeholders advocated for a coordinated approach by the government to ensure that REZ related infrastructure and projects are cumulatively addressed to minimise impacts to local communities.[212] For instance, Councillor Sam Coupland, Mayor, Armidale Regional Council, called for the government to address these issues collectively. He contended that 'we need the government to properly assess the cumulative impacts of the REZ and work with council to either mitigate some of those problems or fund the solutions'.[213]

2.97 The government has responded to some of these concerns through the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies (discussed in Chapter 1).

Challenges for local councils

2.98 While local councils are not the approving authority for renewable energy projects, they nonetheless play a crucial role in the development assessment process and in the provision of support to the community.[214]

2.99 Many local councils across all of the REZs and also outside the REZ boundaries experience increasing pressures as they support renewable energy developments on top of maintaining their ongoing responsibilities for local community services.[215] In this context, Councillor Claire Pontin, Acting President, Local Government NSW, stressed that local councils deal with 'limited resources, having received inadequate funding and support to respond to these additional demands'.[216]

2.100 In support of this view, Mrs Maryanne Crawford, Manager, Development and Environmental Services, Singleton Council, asserted that 'councils are being

[211] See for example: Submission 87, Hay Shire Council, p 2; Submission 66, Uralla Shire Council, p 3; Submission 139, Murray River Council, pp 4, 6; Submission 54, Country Mayors Association, p 2.

[212] See for example: Submission 40, Singleton Council, p 3. Evidence, Councillor Sam Coupland, Mayor, Armidale Regional Council, 17 July 2026, pp 2-3; Evidence, Councillor Jeff Drayton, Mayor, Muswellbrook Shire Council, 25 September 2025, p 3; Evidence, Ms Alison McLean, Executive Manager, Economic Development and Tourism, Hay Shire Council, 18 February 2026, p 6.

[213] Evidence, Councillor Sam Coupland, Mayor, Armidale Regional Council, 17 July 2026, pp 2-3.

[214] Submission 125, Local Government NSW, p 8.

[215] See for example: Submission 125, Local Government NSW, p 8; Evidence, Mr Trevor Ryan, Director, Planning and Environment, Dungog Shire Council, 25 September 2025, p 9; Submission 51 Temora Shire Council, p 3; Evidence, Councillor Eric Noakes, Mayor, Walcha Council, 17 July 2025, p 10.

[216] Evidence, Councillor Claire Pontin, Acting President, Local Government NSW, 13 May 2025, p 45.

called upon to dedicate resources towards supporting the development of REZs'.[217] For Singleton Council, the estimated cost of council staff resources to support the implementation of renewable energy projects is $2.7 million over the next four years.[218]

2.101 Smaller local councils may face particular pressures on resourcing due to their size and not having the same expertise or resources as larger councils.[219] As an example, Ms Alison McLean, Executive Manager, Economic Development and Tourism, Hay Shire Council, shared that the Environmental Impact Statement process is usually reviewed by up to 60 staff within a council. While she viewed this as potentially manageable for larger councils such as Dubbo, which employs around 600 staff, it places a significant burden on smaller councils like Hay, which has fewer than 60 staff.[220]

2.102 The following case study illustrates the way in which renewable energy projects can add to pressures on local councils when it comes to local roads.

Case study – Local roads in the South West REZ[221]

The sprawling size and distance of some rural and remote councils can present particular challenges. Balranald Shire Council is partly located in the South West REZ and covers 21,346 square kilometres. Its Chief Executive Officer, Mr Terry Dodds, reflected that the council has one engineer for an area that is 'bigger than 63 countries'.

The construction of a small wind farm in the region has led to an increase in oversize and/or overmass (OSOM) vehicles travelling on local roads to transport equipment and materials. Mr Dodds estimated that this could equate to over 1,700 loads of components traveling daily on local roads. However, the conditions of the unsealed roads in their area are unsuitable for this type of movement as it would take only 10 per

217 Evidence, Mrs Mary-Anne Crawford, Manager, Development and Environmental Services, Singleton Council, 25 September 2026, p 2.

218 Evidence, Mrs Mary-Anne Crawford, Manager, Development and Environmental Services, Singleton Council, 25 September 2026, p 2 and Evidence, Mr Justin Fitzpatrick-Barr, General Manager, Singleton Council, 25 September 2025, p 9. See also: Evidence, Mr Gary Stoll, Director, Planning and Infrastructure, Murrumbidgee Council, 18 February 2026, pp 7-8.

219 See for example: Evidence, Mr Trevor Ryan, Director, Planning and Environment, Dungog Shire Council, 25 September 2025, p 9; Evidence, Councillor Jeff Drayton, Mayor, Muswellbrook Shire Council, 25 September 2025, p 9; Evidence, Ms Alison McLean, Executive Manager, Economic Development and Tourism, Hay Shire Council, 18 February 2026, p 8.

220 Evidence, Ms Alison McLean, Executive Manager, Economic Development and Tourism, Hay Shire Council, 18 February 2026, p 8.

221 This case study is drawn from Evidence, Mr Terry Dodds, Chair, Energy Security and Affordability Committee, Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation, and Chief Executive Officer, Balranald Shire Council, 18 February 2026, pp 12-13. See also: Submission 40, Singleton Council, p 7; Submission 125, Local Government NSW, 14.

cent of those loadings before the roads will become 'friable' or 'turn to bulldust' in the summer or become 'bogholes' in times of rain.

Mr Dodds added that the pressures on local councils include the need to find additional resources to fix and manage the roads, lamenting that they 'will struggle even managing people to make sure they can comply with fixing our roads'.

Under the *NSW Roads Act 1993*, the process for undertaking works within a road reserve can only be undertaken with the approval of the roads authority. For much of the REZ, the roads authority is the relevant local council and the use of road corridors for transporting OSOM and transmission infrastructure requires council approval.[222]

Various local councils across the REZs have called for careful planning of haulage routes, pre-construction infrastructure assessments, and ongoing monitoring. There is a view that any required upgrades should be funded by project proponents or government and that broader strategic investment in transport infrastructure is needed. Some propose that affected local roads should be temporarily reclassified as state roads to ensure they are appropriately funded and managed during construction.

2.103 Nonetheless, in response to these challenges, some local councils have attempted to proactively address these concerns. As Muswellbrook Council declared, 'we are committed to being proactive and shaping these changes, not just responding to them'.[223]

2.104 To contend with some of the resourcing concerns for local councils, the government has provided $250,000 to some local councils within the REZs each year for three years.[224] While local councils welcomed the payment, there were complexities around use of the funds, and attitudes towards it varied.

2.105 For instance, Mr Jack Bond, Chief Executive Officer, Edward River Council, acknowledged that the payment 'has been fantastic'.[225] While noting that the process to secure the funds was 'pretty long' as funding was provided to other REZs first, Mr Bond considered that the payment created a 'big uplift for council to understand what is happening and what is on the way' and allowed additional support to assist council staff when it comes to REZ-related development assessments.[226]

2.106 Further, Mr Bond advised that Edward River Council receives a 'free leash on how we get to spend that money that comes into council', explaining that they have

222 Submission 40, Singleton Council, p 7.

223 Evidence, Councillor Jeff Drayton, Mayor, Muswellbrook Shire Council, 25 September 2025, p 3.

224 Evidence, Mr Jack Bond, Chief Executive Officer, Edward River Council, 18 February 2026, p 2; Submission 66, Uralla Shire Council, p 9; Submission 125, Local Government NSW, p 25; Submission 121, Murrumbidgee Council, p 7.

225 Evidence, Mr Jack Bond, Chief Executive Officer, Edward River Council, 18 February 2026, p 2.

226 Evidence, Mr Jack Bond, Chief Executive Officer, Edward River Council, 18 February 2026, pp 2 and 4.

used the funds towards a dedicated resource to manage all approved developments from the Australian Energy Market Operator process within their council boundaries.[227] Mr Bond also shared how other councils within the South West REZ are looking to spend the funds:

> [S]ome of the other councils that might not have any proponents currently approved in their area, I think they're looking to spend that money on some studies and understanding what it might look like. We call ourselves the G7, the seven councils that are within the region, and we're looking to pool those resources together as well so that we're not duplicating the work between ourselves too.[228]

2.107 Uralla Shire Council acknowledged that the payments critically support resourcing for strategic planning and engineering project management functions within the council. Some of the funding was also directed towards developing a Local Housing Strategy. However, the council was critical of the extensive oversight and administrative requirements of the payments, which they viewed as limiting their autonomy to make decisions and creating a significant workload for staff. Uralla Shire Council described the process in practice:

> These payments are overly scrutinised and 'tied,' requiring high-level of administrative support from finance officers and undermining Councils autonomy to direct funds where it sees fit. Payments are made in arrears, quarterly, upon receipt of detailed report and invoice. Uralla shares with several other Councils, the experience of expending funds in good faith, but later being denied reimbursement or having to provide further explanatory commentary and justification. This erodes trust and again increases the burden of an already stretched staff at the cost of local Council.[229]

2.108 Further, Uralla Shire Council called for the extension of the payments due to significant delays of the projects and the expansion of 'the scope of pre-delivery work for NE REZ'.[230] The council highlighted that as the three-year funding agreement is already in its second year, it no longer aligns with project delivery timelines.[231]

2.109 Other funding structures such as benefit sharing arrangements will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

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227 Evidence, Mr Jack Bond, Chief Executive Officer, Edward River Council, 18 February 2026, p 4.

228 Evidence, Mr Jack Bond, Chief Executive Officer, Edward River Council, 18 February 2026, p 4.

229 Submission 66, Uralla Shire Council, p 9.

230 Submission 66, Uralla Shire Council, p 9.

231 Submission 66, Uralla Shire Council, p 9.

Regional Major Infrastructure Studies and cumulative impacts

2.110 Throughout the inquiry, a number of stakeholders highlighted the absence of a cumulative impact study for each REZ.[232] As discussed in Chapter 1, the government published the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies (the Studies) in December 2025. These studies analyse the potential impacts and opportunities resulting from proposed major infrastructure projects, including Renewable Energy Zones. It should be noted that much of the evidence for this inquiry was received prior to the publication of the Studies.

2.111 In July 2025, Councillor Sam Coupland, Mayor, Armidale Regional Council, called for stronger measures to address cumulative impacts beyond merely identifying them. He emphasised the need to implement solutions once the problems are identified, stating that 'unless [the] government is prepared to actually enact solutions, don't bother doing it'.[233]

2.112 On the other hand, at a hearing in February 2026, Mr Terry Dodds, Chair, Energy Security and Affordability Committee, Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation (RAMJO), and Chief Executive Officer, Balranald Shire Council, advised that he 'liked the [Studies] for what it was', albeit agreeing that it did not provide solutions to address the impacts.[234] In a similar vein, Mr Brett Stonestreet, PSM, Interim Executive Officer, RAMJO considered that the Studies provided a high-level overview of the cumulative impact where 'finding the problem is the first step … before you address any potential solutions'.[235]

2.113 In response to questions regarding the Studies and their 'robustness', Ms Hannah McCaughey, EnergyCo, emphasised she is 'confident in the robustness in the studies'. When pressed further about the Studies based on assumptions, Ms McCaughey expressed that 'they are really good scenarios for a starting point', enabling the government to then work with local councils and adopt a 'whole-of-government' approach to addressing the impacts.[236] Further, Ms McCaughey defended how 'opportunities' were identified and outlined in the Studies, and was of the view that it represents a way for communities to receive significant

[232] See for example: Submission 56, Voice for Walcha, p 2; Submission 149, Mr Stuart Grills, p 1; Submission 151, Mr Tony Menkens, p 1.

[233] Evidence, Councillor Sam Coupland, Mayor, Armidale Regional Council, 17 July 2025, pp 5-6.

[234] Evidence, Mr Terry Dodds, Chair, Energy Security and Affordability Committee, Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation, and Chief Executive Officer, Balranald Shire Council, 18 February 2026, p 14.

[235] Evidence, Mr Brett Stonestreet, PSM, Interim Executive Officer, Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation, 18 February 2026, pp 14-15.

[236] Evidence, Ms Hannah McCaughey, Chief Executive Officer, EnergyCo, 31 March 2026, p 66.

investment and grow their communities through jobs and other economic opportunities.[237]

2.114 EnergyCo also highlighted their commitment to local government in the delivery of the REZs. EnergyCo acknowledged that, in the early stages, they 'probably haven't got that right' but relations had improved over time, particularly with CWO REZ. They were positive about their ongoing engagement with councils across the REZs.[238]

2.115 In this context, EnergyCo advised that they meet regularly with local councils across the REZs to work through any issues, collaborating with other government agencies such as Transport for NSW when required, coordinating responses and providing relevant updates on projects.[239]

2.116 When questioned about cumulative impacts, Transgrid responded that they engage with key stakeholders early on, including local councils, to keep them informed about their projects. More specifically, in relation to the potential impact on local roads, Transgrid, advised that they address this by:

- abiding by the relevant traffic and transport management plans or development conditions[240]
- ensuring that processes are followed so that roads are maintained accordingly (including collaborating with local councils and delivery partners such as other renewable energy developers)[241]
- conducting technical studies of the impact on roads and sharing information with local councils including providing recommendations for road improvements or upgrades.[242]

2.117 Transport for NSW acknowledged that significant investment, including ongoing funding, is required across key transport corridors to ensure equipment and materials can be delivered to the REZs. Mr Anthony Hayes, Head of Regional Integration, Planning, Integration and Passenger Division, Transport for NSW, confirmed that many of these routes have not previously accommodated OSOM

237 Evidence, Ms Hannah McCaughey, Chief Executive Officer, EnergyCo, 31 March 2026, p 63.

238 Evidence, Ms Hannah McCaughey, Chief Executive Officer, EnergyCo, 31 March 2026, p 68; Evidence, Mr Ashley Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, EnergyCo 31 March 2026, p 69.

239 Evidence, Mr Ashley Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, EnergyCo, 31 March 2026, p 69.

240 Evidence, Mr Michael Johnson, General Manager, Community and Social Licence, Transgrid, 18 February 2026, pp 28-29.

241 Evidence, Mr Michael Johnson, General Manager, Community and Social Licence, Transgrid, 18 February 2026, pp 28-29.

242 Evidence, Mr Nathan Menser, Community and Stakeholder Manager, Transgrid, 18 February 2026, p 29.

vehicles and stated that Transport for NSW will 'work in partnership with [the relevant local] councils' to address these challenges.[243]

Committee comment

2.118 The energy transition is underway with government policy focused on shifting electricity generation from coal-fired power stations to renewable energy sources. A key component of this transition is the establishment of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) across regional New South Wales.

2.119 The committee recognises that REZs are an essential part of New South Wales' energy transition and supports their timely implementation. The committee also acknowledges that the success of the rollout depends on regional communities being meaningfully engaged, adequately supported and able to benefit from the transition. The challenge for the NSW Government is to achieve this balance without unnecessarily slowing the urgent transition to renewable energy. The committee believes the Government can achieve this with a well-planned and properly supported rollout that will not only deliver the energy infrastructure New South Wales needs, but also strengthen community confidence in the transition and ensure its benefits are widely shared.

Finding 1

Given Renewable Energy Zones are an essential part of New South Wales' energy transition, the NSW Government must find a way to deliver the Renewable Energy Zone rollout as a matter of urgency, while ensuring regional communities are meaningfully consulted, adequately supported through the transition, and able to share in its benefits.

2.120 The people in rural and regional communities are at the heart of this inquiry. They are the ones facing significant changes to their communities, environment, everyday routines and, for some, their source of livelihood. Visiting each of the five REZs provided the committee with an invaluable opportunity to hear directly from local stakeholders, including councils, landholders, residents, and community organisations, about the unfolding impacts of each REZ and associated projects. The committee is thankful to each stakeholder who took the time to participate in the inquiry, as well as those landholders who welcomed the committee on their properties so we could witness firsthand the impacts of the REZ.

2.121 Each REZ has a distinct focus and its own unique uncertainties. The Central-West Orana REZ is the most developed REZ and was the focus of the first report. Many stakeholders in the New England REZ were concerned about the extent of

[243] Evidence, Mr Anthony Hayes, Head of Regional Integration, Planning, Integration and Passenger Division, Transport for NSW, 31 March 2026, p 69.

generation projects that could potentially be approved, calling for a reduction in the generation capacity allocated to the zone. Projects keep 'popping-up' in the Hunter-Central Coast REZ despite limited projects having been granted access rights. Communities in the Illawarra REZ have faced division over the uncertainty of offshore wind facilities, suggesting a need for the government to clarify the role of offshore wind in the REZ. As the last REZ to roll-out, some in the South West REZ community are concerned that they have been left behind. Despite frustration about being the last in line and with broad community acceptance of the REZ still lacking, many have nonetheless used the opportunity to proactively respond to some of the issues discussed.

2.122 In addition, we are mindful that the REZs also impact communities situated outside of the zones. Some renewable energy projects are not located within a REZ yet the communities hosting this infrastructure have similar concerns to those within the zones, suggesting that the issues are not confined to REZ-bound communities.

2.123 The committee's visits to each REZ enabled us to observe how the development of the zones and related projects has changed rural and regional landscapes within a short timeframe. Agricultural land in some areas has been transformed to host an increasing number of renewable energy developments. As such, we recognise that there has been a rapid industrialisation of various regional landscapes and some communities have not had the voice they would have liked in the energy transition.

2.124 Across New South Wales, a consistent pattern has emerged of the government not delivering a coordinated, 'whole-of-government' approach to the implementation and development of the REZs. Following the REZ announcements, the government accelerated its planning process, rushing projects and creating gaps in the development of each REZ without community buy-in. Rural and regional communities are naturally uncertain about future planning, resulting in anger and mistrust of the government. This could have been avoided.

2.125 The rollout of the current REZ model has been uneven with each region at different stages. Indeed, our first report signalled the need to address the adverse impacts identified for the Central-West Orana REZ (being the most progressed REZ) in order to deal with similar concerns for the other regions.

2.126 Nonetheless, persistent issues have emerged for the other REZs pertaining to a lack of strategic planning, adverse impacts on landholders regarding land values, potential repercussions for the agricultural industry, and the erosion of social cohesion. The committee shares the concerns of a number of stakeholders that these impacts will be long-term and are not easy to fix.

2.127 Further, these persistent issues demonstrate that while there are strong coordination and community benefit measures within REZ boundaries there are

improvements that could be made to planning, appropriate safeguards, and demonstrated community benefits.

Finding 2

The Renewable Energy Zone model, as implemented in New South Wales, has prioritised the rapid implementation of REZs, sometimes at a cost to regional interests. However, it is important to continue these measures to ensure the economic benefits, reliability and climate benefits.

Finding 3

The NSW Government has presided over the rollout of Renewable Energy Zones without a coherent, enforceable, whole-of-government planning framework, resulting in predictable and avoidable harm to rural and regional communities.

Finding 4

Renewable energy development poses a long-term change for some regional communities. There are challenges and opportunities to manage as a part of this to ensure that, on balance, it is a positive change with long lasting benefits.

Finding 5

While there are strong coordination and community benefit measures within REZ boundaries there are improvements that could be made to planning, appropriate safeguards, and demonstrated community benefits.

2.128 Further, the committee is concerned that the development of the REZs poses challenges for local services such as housing, road infrastructure, water security, waste, emergency services, and local economies. Some of these impacts can be addressed through individual planning consents and others require strategic coordination. Based on evidence received, local communities and councils do not have the ability to absorb the additional demands on local services given how much they are already stretched. These pressures may be particularly acute for smaller councils with less resourcing or funding compared to bigger councils.

2.129 The first report foresaw the need for an independent cumulative impact study of the Central-West Orana REZ to properly address the compounding impacts in that region. As it is the most progressed REZ, an independent cumulative impact study could have helped address similar concerns in the rollout of other REZs.

However, we are disappointed with the way in which current Regional Major Infrastructure Studies for the Central West Orana and New England REZs focus on 'opportunities' instead of solutions that address the impacts. Indeed, at the time of writing, no further studies have been published for the other REZs.

2.130 Despite this, the committee also recognises the importance of moving towards renewable energy sources for the environment and for the benefit of regional and rural communities already experiencing the impacts of climate change. The committee therefore recommends that the government review each REZ and the impacts on each regional community affected while each REZ is rolled out.

Finding 6

That Renewable Energy Zones development poses challenges for local services such as housing, road infrastructure, water security, waste, emergency services, and local economies. Some of these impacts can be addressed through individual planning consents and others require strategic coordination.

Recommendation 1

That the NSW Government review each Renewable Energy Zone and the impacts on each regional community affected while each zone is rolled out.

2.131 Despite EnergyCo being the statutory authority responsible for leading the delivery of all five REZs and Priority Transmission Infrastructure Projects, the government has not exercised sufficient stewardship of the REZ rollout, allowing the expansion of projects without coordinated planning, effective safeguards, or demonstrated community benefit.

2.132 While EnergyCo assured the committee that they collaborate with other government agencies, such as Transport for NSW, and regularly engage with stakeholders to work through any issues, other stakeholders repeatedly told the committee that there is a continued lack of understanding of the role of EnergyCo in REZ development. The committee is sympathetic to the view that fragmented decision-making across various government agencies has created confusion in relation to responsibility.

2.133 The committee notes the role of EnergyCo in developing one of the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies. However, the Studies inadequately address the issue of cumulative impacts. As infrastructure planner, EnergyCo needs to not only deliver renewable energy projects but ensure that the community's interests are protected as part of the energy transition.

2.134 On this basis, the committee finds that EnergyCo, as infrastructure planner, has failed to perform its key function of coordinating REZ infrastructure and services. To ensure accountability and leadership of the REZ development, the committee

recommends that the government seek to amend the *Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020* to expand and clarify EnergyCo's statutory mandate to include explicit responsibility for cumulative impact management, cross-agency coordination, regional infrastructure and service planning with enforceable obligations.

2.135 Further, while the committee notes EnergyCo's current statutory responsibilities, the formalised accountability measures and performance requirements could be strengthened. As such, the committee recommends that the NSW Government ensure that EnergyCo is subject to formal performance and accountability requirements including: statutory reporting on cumulative impacts in each REZ, public reporting on mitigation measures and outcomes, and an independent audit of its coordination role.

Finding 7

EnergyCo, as the infrastructure planner for the Renewable Energy Zones has failed to perform its central coordinating role, particularly in relation to:

- cumulative impact management
- sequencing of development
- coordination of infrastructure and services.

Recommendation 2

That the NSW Government seek to amend the *Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020* to expand and clarify EnergyCo's statutory mandate to include explicit responsibility for cumulative impact management, cross-agency coordination, and regional infrastructure and service planning, with enforceable obligations.

Recommendation 3

That the NSW Government ensure that EnergyCo is subject to formal performance and accountability requirements including:

- statutory reporting on cumulative impacts in each Renewable Energy Zone
- public reporting on mitigation measures and outcomes
- independent audit of its coordination role.

2.136 To address concerns regarding fragmented decision making, the committee recommends that the government require all relevant agencies involved in the implementation and development of the REZs to operate under a coordinated REZ

delivery framework, led by EnergyCo, with defined roles and responsibilities, mandatory data sharing and joint planning obligations.

Recommendation 4

That the NSW Government require all relevant agencies to operate under a coordinated Renewable Energy Zone delivery framework, led by EnergyCo, with:

- defined roles and responsibilities
- mandatory data sharing
- joint planning obligations.

2.137 The committee notes that local councils are not the approving authority for renewable energy projects. However, they play a crucial role in the development assessment process and in the provision of support to the community. In light of this, it is clear to the committee that local councils have often been the ones to step up and lead their communities and manage the consequences of state-led infrastructure expansion. The weight of this is even greater for those councils that are less well-resourced in terms of staff and funding.

2.138 The committee acknowledges the work that local councils have undertaken to provide detailed submissions to this inquiry, participate in hearings and provide evidence about the cumulative impact on local services. This has afforded the committee important insight into the significant impacts of REZs on communities.

2.139 The committee acknowledges that the government has provided an additional $250,000 to some councils within the REZs to address concerns regarding resourcing. However, this measure appears to have been implemented reactively rather than proactively, in keeping with the government's lack of strategic planning in this process. Therefore, the committee recommends that the government provide recurrent funding to local councils in each REZ to assist with resourcing pressures.

Finding 8

Local councils have been left to manage the consequences of state-led infrastructure expansion without sufficient authority, resources, or strategic direction.

Recommendation 5

That the NSW Government provide recurrent funding to local councils in each Renewable Energy Zone to assist with resourcing pressures.

2.140 Many stakeholders raised concerns about the potential negative impacts of renewable energy developments on landholders in relation to agricultural productivity, decreasing land value and public liability insurance coverage. In particular, these concerns have left many landholders who earn a living from the land feeling uncertain about the future.

2.141 The committee is mindful that the government has stressed that renewable energy development is not in conflict with agricultural land use. We previously urged the government to monitor this situation. However, the committee continues to be concerned about the impacts of REZ on agricultural productivity, land values and public liability insurance given the resounding views on these issues across the state. The government should have anticipated these concerns and addressed the associated risks.

Finding 9

The NSW Government has failed to adequately address known risks relating to agricultural productivity, land value impacts, and insurance availability, leaving landholders exposed to ongoing uncertainty.

2.142 Collectively, the committee finds that the implementation and development of the REZs has resulted in an uneven distribution of benefits and impacts to host communities. It appears that the transition is happening *to* rural and regional communities rather than *with* them. Across the state, local councils are expected to manage increased planning and infrastructure demands without additional funding. Landowners, including those who do not host renewable energy infrastructure, bear the costs and disruptions to their way of life given the uncertainty of the impacts of renewable energy infrastructure on their land.

2.143 While we acknowledge that there are current funding arrangements for host communities (further explored in Chapter 3), we urge the government to expand the compensation and benefit-sharing framework to: include non-host landowners; address land value and insurance impacts; ensure the equitable distribution of benefits; publish clear eligibility criteria for all community benefit and compensation programs; and provide annual public reporting on the allocation and expenditure of community benefit funding within each Renewable Energy Zone.

Finding 10

The benefits of Renewable Energy Zone development are unevenly distributed, while the burdens are concentrated on host communities, resulting in structural inequity.

Recommendation 6

That the NSW Government expand the compensation and benefit-sharing framework to:

- include non-host neighbours
- address land value and insurance impacts
- ensure the equitable distribution of benefits
- publish clear eligibility criteria for all community benefit and compensation programs
- provide annual public reporting on the allocation and expenditure of community benefit funding within each Renewable Energy Zone.

2.144 The committee notes that the evidence received regarding consultation was not uniform across all Renewable Energy Zones or proponents. While many stakeholders described consultation as occurring too late or having limited influence over decision-making, other witnesses gave evidence that consultation practices had improved over time, particularly where early engagement, ongoing communication and stronger relationships between proponents, EnergyCo and local councils had been established. The committee considers these examples demonstrate that improved consultation practices are achievable and should inform future Renewable Energy Zone delivery.

2.145 The committee is encouraged to hear that the relationship between EnergyCo and some local councils has improved since the initial stages of the REZ roll-out. This is a step in the right direction.

2.146 However, this was not the experience for everyone. The committee heard time and again that there has been inadequate consultation between the government, renewable energy developers and the community. In particular, the committee is concerned that the consultation process may at times have been a 'tick-a-box' exercise that did not always provide affected communities with the capacity to meaningfully influence outcomes.

2.147 It is clear that the consultation process is structurally flawed. Communities are required to participate in multiple consultations as developments are worked through project-by-project, resulting in consultation fatigue and information overload. Many shared similar experiences throughout the REZs of individuals feeling pressured to sign agreements before 'scoping reports' had been done or a project was placed in the NSW Planning Portal. This has led to a situation where information asymmetry and imbalanced engagement is rife. When consultation is not conducted in a manner that meets reasonable community expectations, community trust and respect is inevitably lost and can be difficult to restore.

2.148 Further, the State Significant Development framework, as applied to renewable energy projects, creates an inherent power imbalance between individuals and developers. The committee was concerned to hear of the significant burden on some individuals who are faced with reviewing 'thousands' of pages of

documentation throughout the consultation process. This is often in stark contrast to developers (and the government) who are well-resourced, with ready access to legal advice and specialist consultants. The current process does not provide equitable procedural rights to landholders. Many individuals simply do not have the time or resources to go through this process. While we applaud the initiative of those community groups that have stepped up to volunteer and help their community work through the layers of bureaucracy, this is hardly fair.

Finding 11

That the consultation process undertaken by EnergyCo, government agencies, and renewable energy developers has at times been procedural in nature and did not always provide affected communities with the capacity to meaningfully influence outcomes.

Finding 12

The consultation model could be improved by:

- whole of area rather than project-by-project engagement
- reducing information asymmetry
- earlier engagement before key decisions are made.

Finding 13

The State Significant Development framework, as applied to Renewable Energy Zone projects, systematically privileges proponents over affected communities and does not provide equitable procedural rights to landholders.

2.149 As well as cumbersome community consultation processes, landholders also face the widespread use of non-disclosure agreements in negotiations conducted between individuals and renewable energy developers. This has actively undermined transparency of how specific areas will be impacted by developments, fragmenting communities and exacerbating social division.

2.150 These failures in consultation and community engagement have eroded social cohesion within rural and regional communities in REZs and is a source of grief for many in these regions. It has divided some communities between those that support and those that do not support the REZs. The committee is concerned that these divisions may be enduring.

Finding 14

That the widespread use of non-disclosure agreements and individualised negotiations has actively undermined transparency, fragmented communities, and exacerbated social division.

Finding 15

Some witnesses felt that as a direct consequence of the failures in consultation and community engagement, social licence for Renewable Energy Zone development in affected regions has been materially eroded.

2.151 The government must put effective measures in place to improve the consultation process for REZ developments and related projects. The committee accordingly recommends that the government seek to find ways to ensure the consultation process, where possible occurs prior to key planning decisions; demonstrates measurable influence on project design; includes independent auditing of engagement outcomes and requires proponents to publish a response explaining how community feedback has influenced project design or, where it has not, the reasons why.

2.152 Further, the committee also recommends that the NSW Government review the use of non-disclosure agreements in renewable energy project negotiations as they restrict community-wide transparency and inhibit effective consultation.

2.153 In addition, to ensure procedural fairness and address the power imbalance that can exist between individuals and developers, the committee urges the government to review the State Significant Development framework, with a view to consider landholder rights, ensure consultation timeframes are adequate and consider independent peer review of impact assessments.

2.154 The review should specifically consider cumulative impact assessment across multiple projects within a Renewable Energy Zone; opportunities for earlier strategic planning prior to project assessment; procedural fairness for directly affected landholders and neighbouring properties consistency in assessment requirements across Renewable Energy Zone projects.

Recommendation 7

That the NSW Government seek to find ways to ensure the consultation process where possible:

- occurs prior to key planning decisions
- demonstrates measurable influence on project design
- includes independent auditing of engagement outcomes
- requires proponents to publish a response explaining how community feedback has influenced project design or, where it has not, the reasons why.

Recommendation 8

That the NSW Government review the use of non-disclosure agreements in renewable energy project negotiations as they restrict community-wide transparency and inhibit effective consultation.

Recommendation 9

That the NSW Government review the State Significant Development framework with a view to:

- consider landholder rights
- ensure consultation timeframes are adequate
- consider independent peer review of impact assessments.

The review should specifically consider:

- cumulative impact assessment across multiple projects within a Renewable Energy Zone
- opportunities for earlier strategic planning prior to project assessment
- procedural fairness for directly affected landholders and neighbouring properties
- consistency in assessment requirements across Renewable Energy Zone projects.

2.155 The committee reiterates the importance of Social Impact Assessments (SIA) as they identify and assess the likely social impacts of state significant projects, including REZ-related infrastructure, as well as recommend ways to reduce any negative effects while enhancing potential benefits. In addition, when used effectively, SIAs can help communities to feel more involved and supported.

2.156 In our first report, we emphasised that the current use of SIAs is ineffective. We accordingly recommended that the government review their use. While the government noted that it 'supported in principle' the committee's recommendation, it is clear that SIAs need more consistency of application and

adequate scoping, and are incapable of capturing cumulative and intangible impacts. These issues should be addressed via cumulative impact studies.

2.157 As such, the committee recommends that the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure review the Social Impact Assessment process so assessments are standardised, independently verified, and expanded to include consideration of cumulative impacts, social cohesion and long-term regional effects. Social Impact Assessments should be completed before transmission corridors and Renewable Energy Zone boundaries are finalised and should be updated as projects progress through the planning system.

Finding 16

Social Impact Assessments need more consistency of application and adequate scoping, and are incapable of capturing cumulative and intangible impacts. These issues should be addressed via cumulative impact studies.

Recommendation 10

That the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure review the Social Impact Assessment process so assessments are standardised, independently verified, and expanded to include consideration of:

- cumulative impacts
- social cohesion
- long-term regional effects.

Social Impact Assessments should be completed before transmission corridors and Renewable Energy Zone boundaries are finalised and should be updated as projects progress through the planning system.

2.158 Despite the conduct of numerous 'consultations' between renewable energy developers and the local community, the committee considers that many are ineffective as community voices are not adequately heard. An independent representative is needed to ensure there is someone who can effectively represent those within Renewable Energy Zones. The committee thus recommends that the NSW Government seek to establish a statutory Community Advocate for REZ regions to represent landholders, provide independent advice, and participate in planning and assessment processes.

Recommendation 11

That the NSW Government seek to establish a statutory Community Advocate for Renewable Energy Zone regions to:

- represent landholders
- provide independent advice
- participate in planning and assessment processes.

2.159 While the government has attempted to improve engagement with REZ communities, the committee is particularly impressed by the work of numerous individuals, community groups and local councils that have proactively sought to coordinate their responses and improve the effectiveness of their involvement in the consultation process.

2.160 We were also heartened to learn of the work the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) has done in the last 12 months to address community complaints regarding renewable energy development. While we applaud its conciliatory approach, this is not always sufficient or effective. The committee is troubled by the gaps in the functions of EWON that inhibit its ability to properly address community concerns. Of note is its lack of jurisdiction in the area of renewable energy generation and storage development.

2.161 The committee agrees with EWON that renewable energy generation and storage developers must be members of EWON in order for it to have the ability to properly handle all complaints received. Accordingly, we encourage the government to implement a mandatory licensing scheme that requires developers with access rights in a REZ to be members of EWON.

2.162 In addition, the committee notes that while EWON primarily adopts a conciliation approach to complaints, it has the power to make binding decisions of up to $100,000. To strengthen the dispute resolution process, the government should expand EWON's powers to include stronger enforcement abilities and increase its binding decisions to a higher amount.

2.163 Finally, the increasing role of EWON in addressing disputes within the renewable energy industry must not diminish the role of the government in providing robust, proactive protections for affected communities. The committee strongly urges the government to maintain a key role in ensuring the engagement process throughout the REZs is characterised by accountability, transparency and community buy-in. Therefore, we recommend that the government undertake an urgent review of the role of EWON in renewable energy infrastructure with a view to significantly expand its powers regarding: binding dispute resolution, systemic investigations and proactive monitoring. The review should include an assessment of the effectiveness of cumulative impact management, community engagement, regional economic outcomes, housing impacts and the delivery of community benefit commitments.

Finding 17

The extension of the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW to renewable energy infrastructure has not provided a sufficient mechanism for resolving disputes arising from Renewable Energy Zone development.

Finding 18

The role of the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW is currently inadequate for addressing the scale and complexity of Renewable Energy Zone-related grievances due to insufficient:

- enforcement powers
- systemic oversight capability
- capacity to address cumulative or cross-project issues.

Finding 19

That the NSW Government's reliance on the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW as a primary dispute resolution mechanism reflects that it has not established robust, proactive protections for affected communities.

Recommendation 12

That the NSW Government undertake an urgent review of the role of the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW in renewable energy infrastructure with a view to significantly expand its powers regarding:

- binding dispute resolution
- systemic investigations
- proactive monitoring.

The review should include an assessment of the effectiveness of cumulative impact management, community engagement, regional economic outcomes, housing impacts and the delivery of community benefit commitments.

Chapter 3 Economic, environmental and social impacts of Renewable Energy Zones

This final chapter explores various issues relating to the economic, environmental and social impacts of the Renewable Energy Zones (REZs), as identified by various stakeholders throughout the inquiry. It begins by outlining the proposed economic impacts of REZs, including funding arrangements, issues around employment and job creation, potential economic diversification of regional communities, and the cost and financial viability of energy projects. The chapter then explores concerns about the environmental impacts of the zones, including decommissioning of renewable energy infrastructure, potential fire risks, and the repercussions of land clearing on wildlife corridors**.** Finally, the chapter concludes by considering the perspectives of First Nations stakeholders in relation to the potential benefits and challenges associated with renewable energy development.

Economic impacts

3.1 The Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) are expected to deliver economic benefits to host communities through increased investment in the region, as well as employment and other economic opportunities.[244] This section examines stakeholder views regarding the proposed benefits of the REZs, with a particular focus on:

- funding arrangements
- employment opportunities
- economic diversification of regional communities
- the cost and financial viability of renewable energy projects.

3.2 There is also potential economic risk to communities if REZs do not proceed, as noted in evidence given by stakeholders such as the Nature Conservation Council:

> There is also the economic risk of not acting and delaying the transition to renewable energy, significantly impacting not just rural and regional communities but all of Australia. New modelling shows that Australia's GDP will take a hit of $6.8 trillion between 2024 and 2050 as a result of the broad impacts of climate change, if serious action is not taken.[245]

[244] Submission 44, NSW Government, p 12. See also: Evidence, Mr Ash Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, Energy Corporation of NSW (EnergyCo), 13 May 2025, p 2; Evidence, Ms Hannah McCaughey, Chief Executive Officer, EnergyCo, 31 March 2026, p 56.

[245] Submission 32, Nature Conservation Council NSW, p 4.

Funding arrangements for host communities

3.3 As mentioned in the first report, the government advised that a number of community benefit sharing schemes 'will deliver enduring benefits to communities that host new energy infrastructure within the renewable energy zones'.[246] The table below provides a summary of these benefits, as identified by the government.

Table 3 Community benefits sharing schemes in Renewable Energy Zones[247]

Community Benefit Funds	Delivered via Voluntary Planning Agreements and set by the Benefit Sharing Guidelines (the Guidelines),[248] the Community Benefit Fund is a local revenue mechanism provided by new solar, wind and battery energy system storage developments to host communities. Further information about VPAs are noted below. Under the Guidelines, it is estimated that REZ communities will receive $414 million in benefits.[249] The Guidelines set out the applicable rates for determining the total funding value of any benefit sharing arrangements between developers and the community. These are: • $1,050 per megawatt per annum for wind energy developments • $850 per megawatt per annum for large-scale energy developments • $150 per megawatt hour per annum for battery energy storage systems in rural zones.[250] These rates are to be adjusted for inflation each year over the life of a project.

246 Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales – First Report*, 2025, pp 17-19. See also: Submission 44, NSW Government, pp 15-16.

247 For more information, see Submission 44, NSW Government, pp 10, 15-16.

248 Further information about VPAs and the Guidelines are noted below.

249 Submission 44, NSW Government, p 10.

250 Submission 44, NSW Government, p 10.

Strategic Benefit Payment Scheme (SPB Scheme)	Established by the government to support the delivery of new major transmission projects to landowners hosting transmission infrastructure. $200,000 per kilometre is paid to eligible landowners in annual instalments over a 20-year period. This is in addition to any compensation paid under the *Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991.*[251]
Voluntary Planning Agreements	A legal agreement between a developer and a planning authority, such as the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces, or local councils. The development contributions system operates under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act).[252] Planning agreements can deliver or fund: • public amenities and services • affordable housing • transport or other infrastructure • conservation or enhancement of the natural environment.[253]
Compensation for land acquisition	Landowners hosting transmission lines are entitled to compensation for the acquisition of easements rights by Transgrid or Energy Corporation of NSW (EnergyCo) under the *Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991*. This compensation is an upfront, one-off payment that includes the market value of the land being acquired, loss due to severance and disturbance because of the

[251] Submission 44, NSW Government, p 15.

[252] As mentioned in the first report, the EP&A Act is the state's primary land use planning legislation. Amongst other things, the EP&A Act sets out the importance of community participation in planning decisions, different types of strategic land use planning including land use zoning, and planning pathways that govern the assessment and approval of development and infrastructure. See also: Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales – First Report*, 2025, p 5.

[253] Planning [NSW Government], *State Voluntary Planning Agreements*, 2026, https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/plans-for-your-area/infrastructure-funding/state-voluntary-planning-agreements.

	project, and reasonable costs and expenses incurred in seeking independent advice.[254]
Community and Employment Benefit Program	Funded by developer access fees, to invest and support 'significant legacy community services and infrastructure' such as improvements to mobile phone coverage, housing and accommodation projects, drought resilience projects and other related local community projects or programs. As mentioned in Chapter 1, $128.4 million has been dedicated to the Central West Orana (CWO) REZ over the next four years. The government's submission, received in January 2025, did not indicate any Community and Employment Benefit Program funding for the remaining REZs.[255]

3.4 At the hearing in May 2026, the government further emphasised their commitment to community benefits as evidenced by a number of funding announcements applicable to host communities and significant investment in critical infrastructure. Ms Hannah McCaughey, Chief Executive Officer, Energy Corporation of NSW (EnergyCo) highlighted the following:

- over $66 million in community employment benefits, representing significant investment in critical infrastructure needs
- over $20 million for critical water infrastructure in Coolah and Dunedoo (towns located in the CWO REZ)
- $11 million allocated to worker housing in Mudgee (located in the CWO REZ).[256]

3.5 Further to the community benefit sharing schemes, Ausgrid and Transgrid also operate funding programs that support host communities. Table 4 provides a summary of these arrangements.

[254] Submission 44, NSW Government, p 15.

[255] Submission 44, NSW Government, p 16.

[256] Evidence, Ms Hannah McCaughey, Chief Executive Officer, EnergyCo, 31 March 2026, p 56.

Table 4 Additional funding by Ausgrid and Transgrid

Ausgrid	Proposed $5 million community benefits program to support local initiatives, specifically in the Hunter Central Coast REZ (HCC REZ). If approved, the program will be co-designed with the community in 2025, with funding allocated over the design and construction phase.[257]
Transgrid	The Community Partnerships Program offers grants of up to $5,000 for not-for-profit organisations that are local to their planning, operations, and major project areas. Under the program, community groups can apply twice a year for grants of up to $5,000 to contribute towards community initiatives. 382 grants totalling $1,602,698.85 have been awarded since 2023 to host communities such as the HCC REZ and the South West (SW) REZ. Initiatives include community infrastructure, workshops, and sustainability, inclusivity and accessibility projects.[258]

3.6 In response to questions about the financial benefits available to communities that host transmission infrastructure, Transgrid advised that there are both direct and indirect gains for host communities. As of January 2026, Transgrid's projects, EnergyConnect (transmission infrastructure in the SW REZ) and HumeLink (a separate transmission project outside of the REZ), had spent $832 million with local and regional businesses.[259]

3.7 In addition, Transgrid maintained that host communities receive a number of indirect financial benefits including:

- Transgrid's purchase of goods and services while Transgrid and its contractors visit the host communities for development, construction and operational phases.
- Opportunities for local businesses to participate in project activity, which could be a result of gaining direct employment on the project or securing subcontracts to provide goods/services.
- Project employment would also include a component of upskilling and training, which then flows into future economic benefits for future employment and project legacy.
- Providing support for local community groups/local organisations through community investment and benefits programs.[260]

[257] Submission 36, Ausgrid, pp 3-4. See also: Evidence, Mr Daniel Sartor, Head of Projects, Ausgrid, 25 September 2025, p 24.

[258] Answers to questions on questions on notice, Transgrid, 20 March 2026, p 1; Evidence, Mr Michael Johnson, General Manager, Community and Social License, Transgrid, 18 February 2026, p 26.

[259] Answers to questions on questions on notice, Transgrid, 20 March 2026, p 7.

[260] Answers to questions on questions on notice, Transgrid, 20 March 2026, p 7.

3.8 Furthermore, the Clean Energy Council emphasised that the Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap (the state's plan for the energy transition) is estimated to attract up to $32 billion of private sector investment by 2030, supporting 6,300 construction jobs and 2,800 ongoing jobs, primarily in regional NSW.[261]

Community attitudes towards the proposed funding arrangements

3.9 Stakeholders had a variety of views about the community benefit sharing schemes or 'benefit sharing arrangements' that applied to their local communities, especially in relation to some of the practical outcomes of the proposed funding arrangements.

3.10 According to Tamworth Regional Council, local communities expect to receive appropriate financial benefits and compensation as a result of hosting both generation and transmission infrastructure.[262] The financial contributions that flow from various benefit sharing arrangements were acknowledged by some councils.[263]

3.11 Nonetheless there was criticism of both the adequacy of these benefits as well as constraints associated with their use.[264] In particular, some local councils highlighted several practical considerations associated with managing funds, including:

- restrictions on how funds can be spent, with funding limited to new infrastructure rather than operational costs, resulting in calls for greater flexibility in the use of funds[265]
- depreciation and ongoing maintenance costs for new assets, which adds further pressures to councils' asset management responsibilities[266]

261 Answers to supplementary questions, Clean Energy Council, 11 May 2026, p 1.

262 Submission 69, Tamworth Regional Council, p 2.

263 See for example: Evidence, Councillor Robert Bell, Mayor, Uralla Shire Council, 17 July 2025, p 3; Evidence, Councillor Sam Coupland, Mayor, Armidale Regional Council, 17 July 2025, p 4; Evidence, Mr Sam Lobsey, Manager, Development Division, Tamworth Regional Council, 17 July 2025, p 11.

264 See for example: Submission 62, Armidale Regional Council, pp 6-7; Submission 69, Tamworth Regional Council, p 2; Evidence, Councillor Robert Bell, Mayor, Uralla Shire Council, 17 July 2025, p 3; Evidence, Councillor Sam Coupland, Mayor, Armidale Regional Council, 17 July 2025, p 4.

265 See for example: Submission 54, Country Mayors Association of NSW, p 5; Submission 125, Local Government NSW, p 31; Evidence, Councillor Robert Bell, Mayor, Uralla Shire Council, 17 July 2025, p 3; Evidence, Mr Alan Butler, Acting General Manager, Walcha Council, 17 July 2025, p 11.

266 See for example: Submission 87, Hay Shire Council, p 7; Evidence, Councillor Robert Bell, Mayor, Uralla Shire Council, 17 July 2025, p 3; Evidence, Mr Alan Butler, Acting General Manager, Walcha Council, 17 July 2025, p 11.

- the alignment of financial benefits with long-term economic development and legacy infrastructure outcomes[267]
- community involvement in decision-making about expenditure of the funds.[268]

3.12 To illustrate the point, Councillor Eric Noakes, Mayor, Walcha Shire Council, highlighted the potential financial impact of these funds on smaller rural communities as well as some practical considerations. Councillor Noakes also described the disparity between the views of developers and local communities in how these funds are best used. He argued that councils should have greater flexibility to direct community benefit funding towards long-term community needs rather than infrastructure that creates ongoing maintenance and depreciation costs:

> Most of the proponents seem to want them to represent something that represents them in the community. We need them to make our community better, and those things aren't always seen and they don't always have a big sign on them saying that "so and so wind developer did this project". They want the buildings, they want the community centres and these sorts of things or the swings and the barbeques—all these things. Councils need a better ability to direct where that money goes so that we can have the things that sustain our community. There is not much use these projects coming and pouring so many million dollars into our community and at the end of it we have just a far bigger thing to depreciate.[269]

3.13 Furthermore, some local councils informed the committee that benefit sharing arrangements for transmission projects do not apply to developments within or on public land or local road networks. As such, some councils argued that the current financial benefit arrangements are not evenly distributed across communities.[270]

3.14 To demonstrate, Singleton Council explained that transmission infrastructure located within local road reserves is excluded from both the Transmission Guideline and the SPB Scheme. In the case of Bowman Creek Wind Farm, a proposed development in the HCC REZ, Singleton Council argued that:

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267 See for example: Submission 66, Uralla Shire Council, pp 8-9; Submission 139, Murray River Council, p 12; Evidence, Councillor Sam Coupland, Mayor, Armidale Regional Council, 17 July 2025, p 4.

268 See for example: Submission 125, Local Government NSW, p 31; Evidence, Councillor Robert Bell, Mayor, Uralla Shire Council, 17 July 2025, p 3.

269 Evidence, Councillor Eric Noakes, Mayor, Walcha Shire Council, 17 July 2025, p 12.

270 Submission 40, Singleton Council, pp 7-9; Evidence, Mrs Mary-Anne Crawford, Manager, Development and Environmental Services, Singleton Council, 25 September 2025, p 3. See also: Submission 121, Murrumbidgee Council, p 4; Evidence, Councillor Jeff Drayton, Mayor, Muswellbrook Shire Council, 25 September 2025, p 15.

- the exclusion from benefit sharing arrangements prevents Singleton and Muswellbrook councils from receiving approximately $4.2 million for 21 kilometres of transmission lines.
- the Benefit Sharing Guidelines also restrict councils from seeking alternative developer contributions under sections 7.11 and 7.12 of the EP&A Act, limiting councils' ability to mitigate development impacts.[271]

3.15 Notably, Singleton Council maintained that while transmission infrastructure benefit schemes provide financial benefits to private landholders, there will be 'downward pressures on local councils to host [transmission] infrastructure 'free of charge'.[272] Mr Justin Fitzpatrick-Barr, General Manager, Singleton Council, suggested that the guidelines be expanded in recognition of the impact on his region's local councils:

> … at this point in time the guidelines don't really offer any benefits for transmission lines in public road reserves on public land, certainly they help those private landowners in those REZs. For us, it's very unclear if there is opportunity for proponents to use our road reserves, how we benefit and what that would look like. We've obviously done some numbers based on what we believe it is worth commercially, but it would be good to have some guidelines around that.[273]

3.16 In response to these challenges, Singleton Council adopted a policy framework to guide the negotiation of planning agreements with developers. The framework comprises a planning agreements policy of 1.5 per cent of capital investment value and a contributions plan equivalent to one per cent of capital investment value.[274]

3.17 Other local councils advised that they proactively use voluntary planning arrangements to assist with the maintenance of council assets. In the case of addressing local road works (as discussed in Chapter 2), Mr Gary Stoll, Director, Planning and Infrastructure, Murrumbidgee Council, gave evidence about the gaps in funding to compensate for the impacts of renewable energy developments. Mr Stoll explained how Murrumbidgee Council intends to use voluntary planning agreements in future to ensure costs are paid:

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271 Submission 40, Singleton Council, pp 7-9.

272 Evidence, Mrs Mary-Anne Crawford, Manager, Development and Environmental Services, Singleton Council, 25 September 2025, p 3.

273 Evidence, Mr Justin Fitzpatrick-Barr, General Manager, Singleton Council, 25 September 2025, p 15.

274 Evidence, Mrs Mary-Anne Crawford, Manager, Development and Environmental Services, Singleton Council, 25 September 2025, p 16. See also: Answers to questions on notice, Singleton Council, 23 October 2025, p 2; Evidence, Councillor Jeff Drayton, Mayor, Muswellbrook Shire Council, 25 September 2025, p 15; Evidence, Mr Trevor Ryan, Director, Planning and Environment, Dungog Shire Council, 25 September 2025, p 16; Evidence, Mr Gary Stoll, Director, Planning and Infrastructure, Murrumbidgee Council, 18 February 2026, p 3.

> When the construction period is three years, we've found that we would constantly have a crew on our local roads—sometimes weekly, sometimes fortnightly but at least once a month. Those roadworks are unprogrammed, unfunded by council, so we got to the point where over the three-year period we were then trying to charge the contractors to pay for those road upgrade works. The pre- and post-condition relies upon a condition of the road assessed before work starts and at the end of the construction period, which is totally inadequate, to the point now that we've adopted our own policy whereby we'll be requiring all future renewable energy developments to sign a voluntary planning agreement for council to construct the roads applicable to the traffic volumes that they'll be putting down those roads. They'll be paying for that work and then council will be maintaining it with our crews for the life of the development.[275]

Compensation for land acquisitions

3.18 Landowners hosting transmission lines are entitled to compensation for the acquisition of easements rights by Transgrid or EnergyCo under the *Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991* (Just Terms Act) (see Table 3, paragraph 3.3).

3.19 Many landowners expressed their concern about the land acquisition process. For instance, Mr Peter Dawson, Property Owner, Salisbury Plains (located in the New England REZ (NE REZ)), described how EnergyCo prefers to approach landowners individually, leading to division and angst in the community. He referred to their communication as 'deadline-oriented' and often 'shallow'.[276]

3.20 In addition, stakeholders who are impacted by the Hunter Transmission Project (HTP) gave evidence about their experience with EnergyCo and the land acquisition process. As noted in Chapter 1, the HTP is a major infrastructure project separate to the HCC REZ that is designed to carry electricity from the CWO and NE REZs to the rest of the state.

3.21 Ms Kathy Morris, landowner, claimed that her experience with EnergyCo was 'adversarial' and unsupportive,[277] resulting in unsatisfactory outcomes for landowners involved in the land acquisition process:

> One thing that has been made very clear to us affected residents is that the New South Wales State Government—and, by extension, its agency EnergyCo—have all the legal power to acquire land without our agreement to build infrastructure, and that the only options available to us affected landholders are a series of diminishing returns and uncertainties… At no

[275] Evidence, Mr Gary Stoll, Director, Planning and Infrastructure, Murrumbidgee Council, 18 February 2026, p 4.

[276] Evidence, Mr Peter Dawson, Property Owner, Salisbury Plains, 17 July 2025, p 41.

[277] Evidence, Ms Kathy Morris, Landowner, 13 May 2025, p 38.

> stage have we been supported and reassured that we will be taken care of.[278]

3.22 Another landowner, Mr Ben Turner, expressed similar views about EnergyCo's 'adversarial' approach to land acquisition.[279] During the hearing, Mr Turner elaborated on his experience, highlighting how EnergyCo's focus on acquisition rates minimised the difficulties experienced by landowners, including the financial and emotional cost of demonstrating whether or not compensation is reasonable:

> … what we have learnt through experience is that rather than undertaking negotiations with a view to assisting affected landowners to manage and move on from the loss of their land, acquiring authorities adopt an adversarial approach in which the affected landowner bears the evidentiary and cost burden of convincing the authority and its panel valuer of the reasonableness of its claim. This approach is not an expression of the [Just Terms Act], but simply a learned behaviour of the acquiring authority and the valuation industry generally. Acquiring authorities will often cite the acquisition rates on a project as a measure of success, but these statistics ignore the experience of landholders of a drawn-out process that is discomforting and adversarial.[280]

3.23 To illustrate further, the case study below highlights the experience of Mr Ian Barry, landowner, when dealing with EnergyCo and the HTP.

Case study: Mr Ian Barry, landowner, Hunter-Central Coast REZ[281]

Mr Ian Barry is a landowner within the vicinity of the Hunter-Central Coast REZ. Mr Barry has motor-neurone disease (MND) and views his home as his 'life-lengthening sanctuary'. His property will be affected by the Hunter Transmission Project (HTP).

Mr Barry found EnergyCo's approach to delivering the HTP to be characterised by rushed decision making with poor outcomes for landowners. EnergyCo also appeared ignorant in relation to the use of Social Impact Assessments. In particular, he highlighted their refusal to consider him 'as a terminal sufferer'.

Mr Barry claimed that the land acquisition process removes landowner rights through the imposition of restrictive easements. Engagement with communities was inconsistent, misleading, and at times coercive. Mr Barry also raised concerns about the changes being made to land use, including vegetation clearing and road works, and the reliance on incomplete surveys and outdated mapping assumptions.

The land acquisition process and his interactions with EnergyCo have negatively impacted his health. Mr Barry recounted how his doctor noted an increase in his decline

278 Evidence, Ms Kathy Morris, Landowner, 13 May 2025, p 38.

279 Evidence, Mr Ben Turner, Landowner, 13 May 2025, p 39.

280 Evidence, Mr Ben Turner, Landowner, 13 May 2025, p 39.

281 This case study is drawn from Evidence, Mr Ian Barry, Landowner, 13 May 2025, pp 37, 41 and Submission 123, Mr Ian Barry, pp 1-2.

despite fighting MND over the last 10 years. According to Mr Barry, his doctor considered that the stress of the process 'hasn't done me all that good', and that they wrote to EnergyCo emphasising their concerns about Mr Barry but to no avail. After writing again to the Minister for Climate Change, Minister for Energy, Minister for the Environment, and Minister for Heritage, Mr Barry eventually met the Hon Penny Sharpe MLC for a 'chat'.

Mr Barry called for improvements to the land acquisition process, so acquisitions are carried out with sympathy and empathy, with landowners paid the market value for their property. He also advocated for changes to sub-contractor processes so staff 'negotiate and not incite', and with Social Impact Assessments followed from the outset.

3.24 The Law Society of NSW raised concerns about the adequacy of compensation paid to landowners who host transmission infrastructure. They advised that the current compulsory acquisition process does not 'encourage meaningful consultation and genuine negotiation'.[282] In addition, some landowners are presented with complex acquisition agreements, containing extensive standard conditions that have not been appropriately tailored:

> Our members report that acquiring authorities have, in some cases, presented landholders with overly complex contractual documentation that is difficult for the landholder to navigate and requires expert analysis. This is reflected in legal instruments often containing multiple pages of apparently standard form special conditions and warranties that are not appropriately customised. For instance, we understand that some agreements contained provisions requiring the landholder to warrant that the portion of land to be acquired is not contaminated and that Aboriginal cultural heritage has not been found on the land. In our view, provisions of this nature are unnecessary and unreasonable where preliminary feasibility surveys have often already been undertaken, and having regard to the respective resources and bargaining power of the parties.[283]

3.25 The Law Society of NSW made the following suggestions for improving the land acquisition process.

- Apply the principles of the *Private Agreement Guideline*[284] to the land acquisition process, including a requirement that agreements are tailored to the specific landholder and project, are fair and reasonable, and written in plain language. The applicant (in this case, the acquiring authority) should bear all reasonable landholder costs associated with entering into or understanding the agreement, including costs for independent advice.
- Review the Just Terms Act and include a mechanism allowing landowners to apply for advance financial assistance to cover reasonable legal,

[282] Submission 70, Law Society of NSW, p 3.

[283] Submission 70, Law Society of NSW, p 3.

[284] The Private Agreement Guideline is a policy document that guides landowners in relation to things to consider when entering agreements with renewable energy developers: Submission 44, NSW Government, p 16.

valuation and other expert advisory costs associated with initial engagement processes. The negotiation timeframes should be updated and there should be a 'clarification of the entitlement to just terms compensation as an overriding objective of the Act'.

- Develop a suite of standard documents, prescribed by regulations, that are required to initiate and complete the acquisition process.[285]

3.26 When it comes to acquiring new easements from existing landowners, Ausgrid advised that they intend to work with individual landowners to negotiate a fair and reasonable value in line with the Just Terms Act.[286]

3.27 Transgrid advised that private landowners receive direct benefits provided through payments administered as easement compensation under the Just Terms Act and through the government's SPB Scheme (see Table 3) when the transmission line becomes operational.[287]

3.28 As mentioned in the first report, a review into the Just Terms Act is underway and recommendations from the review were anticipated to be submitted to government in 2025. At the time of writing, no further updates were available.

Employment and job creation

3.29 This section explores the issues raised regarding employment and job creation as it relates to REZ development, including whether opportunities will be long-term as well as constraints in relation to workforce availability.

3.30 There are a number of government initiatives that are designed to strengthen local economies and promote long-term employment as a part of the introduction of REZs.

- The provision of $66 million in community employment benefits, representing significant investment in critical infrastructure needs (as mentioned in paragraph 3.4).[288]
- The creation of 226 apprenticeships in relation to renewable generator projects and 90 apprenticeships for network infrastructure within the CWO REZ.[289]

[285] Submission 70, Law Society of NSW, p 3.

[286] Submission 36, Ausgrid, p 3.

[287] Answers to questions on questions on notice, Transgrid, 30 March 2026, p 7.

[288] Evidence, Ms Hannah McCaughey, Chief Executive Officer, EnergyCo, 31 March 2026, p 56.

[289] Evidence, Ms Hannah McCaughey, Chief Executive Officer, EnergyCo, 31 March 2026, p 67.

- The 'Renewables Taster Program' is a training program based in the CWO REZ for those interested in working in construction and renewable energy sectors – 70 per cent of participants found employment in the CWO REZ.[290]
- $2.9 million has been invested in energy transition education, to deliver accredited training, apprenticeships and career pathways, and strengthen local employment opportunities in host communities as part of the energy transition.[291]
- Partnering with ICN Network, a network of industry procurement and supply chain specialists which connects businesses of all sizes with projects across Australia and New Zealand, to establish an online portal for communities to access local procurement opportunities.[292]
- Developing supply chain mapping to identify local businesses capable of supplying goods and services for generator developers and network operators.[293]

3.31 The government also pointed to the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies (as discussed in Chapter 2) which identify a number of employment opportunities for regional communities in the CWO and NE REZs.

- Approximately 1,800 direct local jobs in the CWO REZ with 500 local people working on the network infrastructure project and 63 local suppliers.
- Around 2,000 direct local jobs in the NE REZ as part of the construction phase and approximately 1,000 jobs for the operational phase. In addition, 500 local people will work on the network infrastructure project.[294]

3.32 A number of unions supported the development of the REZs given their potential to contribute to regional jobs, economic growth, and a sustainable energy

[290] Evidence, Ms Hannah McCaughey, Chief Executive Officer, EnergyCo, 31 March 2026, p 67. See also: Evidence, Mr Ashley Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, EnergyCo, 31 March 2026, p 68; EnergyCo, *Renewable Taster Program*, 2026, https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/community/careers-training-business-opportunities/renewables-taster-program, Accessed on 14 May 2026.

[291] Evidence, Mr Ashley Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, EnergyCo, 31 March 2026, p 68. See also: Minister for Energy and Climate Change, Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education, '$2.9 million to boost regional energy workforce in Central-West Orana REZ' (Media Release, 29 August 2025)

[292] Evidence, Mr Ashley Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, EnergyCo, 31 March 2026, p 68. See also: ICN Network, *Who we are*, 2026, https://icn.org.au/who-are-we/, Accessed 14 May 2026.

[293] Evidence, Mr Ashley Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, EnergyCo, 31 March 2026, p 68.

[294] Evidence, Ms Hannah McCaughey, Chief Executive Officer, EnergyCo, 31 March 2026, p 56.

transition.[295] When discussing possible economic benefits, they highlighted the following.

- The increase of renewable energy developments could deliver a 'just transition' to workers and communities, particularly in areas such as the HCC REZ which has historically focused on non-renewable industries.[296]
- Maximising the local workforce through targeted training programs, apprenticeships, and upskilling will be essential for building a sustainable talent pipeline in regional communities.[297]
- Regional skills shortages must be addressed, especially in electrical trades and maritime sectors, ensuring local workers benefit from REZ projects.[298]
- Strategic procurement policies should be in place to strengthen local manufacturing opportunities and secure regional jobs.[299]

3.33 Nonetheless, Mr Justin Page, Coordinator, Hunter Jobs Alliance stressed that while the REZs could be a driver of jobs and economic growth, its success depends on developing local skills and employment opportunities, supporting regional businesses and infrastructure, maintaining transparent community engagement, and strategic planning across REZs.[300]

3.34 Some stakeholders questioned whether employment opportunities in the region would be long-term, irrespective of the increase in associated renewable energy development jobs.[301] Specifically, the committee heard that a high proportion of the renewable energy workforce is expected to consist of temporary workers who 'drive in-drive out' or 'fly in-fly out'.[302] The temporary nature of employment was attributed to factors such as a skills shortage for technical roles in regional areas,

295 See for example: Evidence, Mr Justin Page, Coordinator, Hunter Jobs Alliance, 25 September 2025, p 25; Evidence, Mr Tom Edwards, Research and Policy Officer, Unions NSW, 25 September 2025, p 25; Evidence, Mr Matthew Murray, Member, Newcastle Branch Committee, Maritime Union of Australia, p 25 September 2025, p 25; Evidence, Mr James Miranda, Policy and Research Officer, Electrical Trades Union NSW and ACT Branch, 25 September 2025, p 25.

296 Evidence, Mr Matthew Murray, Member, Newcastle Branch Committee, Maritime Union of Australia, 25 September 2025, pp 25-26.

297 Evidence, Mr Justin Page, Coordinator, Hunter Jobs Alliance, 25 September 2025, p 25.

298 Evidence, Mr James Miranda, Policy and Research Officer, Electrical Trades Union NSW and ACT Branch, 25 September 2025, p 27; Evidence, Mr Matthew Murray, Member, Newcastle Branch Committee, Maritime Union of Australia, 25 September 2025, p 28.

299 Evidence, Mr Tom Edwards, Research and Policy Officer, Unions NSW, 25 September 2025, p 26 & 29.

300 Evidence, Mr Justin Page, Coordinator, Hunter Jobs Alliance, 25 September 2025, p 25.

301 See for example: Submission 62, Armidale Regional Council, pp 1, 3-5; Submission 121, Murrumbidgee Council, p 5; Submission 125, Local Government NSW, pp 9-11.

302 See for example: Submission 62, Armidale Regional Council, pp 4-5; Submission 66, Uralla Shire Council, p 6; Submission 125, Local Government NSW, pp 9-11.

high levels of employment and competition for labour in some regions.[303] Furthermore, some stakeholders raised concerns that the influx of temporary workers in local communities would place additional pressures on local services, as discussed in Chapter 2.[304]

3.35 To illustrate the point, the Country Mayors Association outlined some of the complexities around securing long-term economic benefits for communities following an increase of infrastructure projects. The Association put forward the following considerations.

- The revenue generated by a renewable energy development is rarely held within the local economy if the project is run by a company that is based outside of the community.
- The construction phase of renewable energy developments creates substantial employment in local communities. However, given the skills shortage, established businesses may be disadvantaged as projects compete for workers by offering higher wages to meet construction timeframes.
- Renewable energy projects generate an economic 'sugar hit' during the construction phase. However, once constructed, there are few local jobs available in relation to the ongoing operation of renewable energy developments such as a solar or wind farm. The jobs that are created are often casual in nature and focus on general maintenance work.
- As a result, regional communities may experience significant changes without the long-term benefits of increased local economic activity and improved public and commercial services that often accompany high employment-generating development and related urbanisation.[305]

3.36 Transgrid provided the following information regarding the number of workers for their projects in the South West REZ.

- Dinawan substation is a transmission infrastructure hub designed to transfer electricity generated within the South West REZ to the broader transmission network in New South Wales. Its total peak 'headcount' was 1,206.
- The workforce composition of the substation during the construction phase was:
  - 5 to 10 per cent were local workers (Riverina region and adjacent LGAs)
  - 25 to 30 per cent were workers from elsewhere in New South Wales

303 See for example: Submission 62, Armidale Regional Council, p 7; Evidence, Mr Justin Page, Coordinator, Hunter Jobs Alliance, 25 September 2025, p 25; Submission 54, Country Mayors Association, p 2.

304 See for example: Submission 66, Uralla Shire Council, p 7; Submission 125, Local Government NSW, p 9-10; Submission 62, Armidale Regional Council, p 4-5.

305 Submission 54, Country Mayors Association, p 2.

- 40 to 45 per cent were interstate workers
- 30 to 35 per cent were overseas specialists (including synchronous condenser installation and commissioning).[306]

3.37 Comparable information was not received for other REZs or related projects.

Economic diversification of regional communities

3.38 As discussed below, other economic benefits enabled by REZ development include the diversification of regional industries and increased capital investment.[307] Particular opportunities may also be available to the Illawarra REZ, often referred to as 'the urban REZ'.

3.39 Hay Shire Council considered the way in which economic diversification could support primary industry in the region. The council explained that a substantial proportion of Hay's agrarian economy is reliant on primary production, including 33 per cent of employment, and is thus exposed to the impacts of a drying climate, fluctuations in export markets, and water availability. In their view, the REZ provides an opportunity to diversify the economy by integrating renewable energy with primary production.[308]

3.40 Hay Shire Council further submitted that renewable energy projects have the potential to attract other industry sectors to the region, particularly energy-intensive industries like data processing centres and 'value-add' agricultural production, leveraging Hay's low land costs and access to affordable energy.[309]

3.41 Similarly, Murray River Council acknowledged the economic opportunities associated with renewable energy projects for landholders. While acknowledging that renewable energy projects present challenges for the agricultural industry, the council accepted that these projects could potentially 'future proof' businesses and increase resilience and market volatility. Some of the opportunities identified by Murray River Council included:

- **Reliable Income in a Drying Climate**: With increasingly dry conditions and impending droughts, hosting renewable infrastructure offers landholders a stable, long-term income stream. This financial security allows farmers to sustain livestock and maintain operations even in the face of commodity price fluctuations, water restrictions, and adverse weather events.
- **Investment in Agricultural Innovation**: Long-term lease agreements with renewable energy proponents provide landowners with capital to reinvest in their farms, enabling improvements in

306 Answers to questions on notice, Transgrid, 20 March 2026, p 1.

307 See for example: Submission 87, Hay Shire Council, p 2; Submission 66, Uralla Shire Council, p 3; Submission 139, Murray River Council, p 6.

308 Submission 87, Hay Shire Council, p 2.

309 Submission 87, Hay Shire Council, p 2.

property infrastructure, adoption of new technologies, and expansion of their workforce.

- **Informed Decision-Making**: Many host landholders are well-researched and proactive, having visited other regions with established renewable energy zones to learn about successful farming practices alongside renewable infrastructure, such as wind turbines and agrivoltaics systems.[310]

Potential opportunities for urban REZs

3.42 Several inquiry participants viewed rural and regional communities as shouldering the burden of the renewable transition, due to the development of REZs and associated infrastructure projects being located outside urban locations.[311]

3.43 Some stakeholders discussed the opportunity for urban regions to participate in the energy transition, through the uptake of smaller infrastructure projects such as rooftop solar and home and community-scale batteries in these areas.[312] Indeed, Mr Guy Chalkley, Chief Executive Officer, Endeavour Energy, noted that 'Australia is unique in the sense that it probably has the largest take-up of rooftop solar in the world'.[313]

3.44 The Illawarra REZ is often referred to as the 'first urban REZ'.[314] Endeavour Energy is an electricity distributor that has a Memorandum of Understanding with EnergyCo that focuses on understanding the needs and opportunities of Endeavour's distribution network in the Illawarra REZ.[315] Its Chief Executive Officer, Mr Chalkley, viewed the Illawarra REZ as an ideal location for an urban REZ given its established industry in energy, port and transport infrastructure, as well as its population.[316]

3.45 Mr Chalkley explained that an urban REZ differs from traditional, large-scale transmission REZs as they integrate consumer energy resources such as rooftop

310 Submission 139, Murray River Council, p 6.

311 See for example: Submission 125, Local Government NSW, pp 31-38; Evidence, Councillor Sam Coupland, Mayor Armidale Regional Council, 17 July 2025, p 2; Evidence, Mr Brett Stonestreet, PSM, Interim Executive Officer, Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation, 18 February 2026, p 11.

312 See for example: Evidence, Mr Guy Chalkley, Chief Executive Officer, Endeavour Energy, 29 October 2025, p 2; Evidence, Mr Francis Vierboom, Chief Executive Officer, Rewiring Australia, 29 October 2025, p 21.

313 Evidence, Mr Guy Chalkley, Chief Executive Officer, Endeavour Energy, 29 October 2025, p 3.

314 EnergyCo, *Illawarra Renewable Energy Zone*, https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/our-projects/illawarra-rez, 16 March 2026, Accessed on 9 June 2026.

315 EnergyCo, *Illawarra Renewable Energy Zone*, https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/our-projects/illawarra-rez, 16 March 2026, Accessed on 9 June 2026.

316 Evidence, Mr Guy Chalkley, Chief Executive Officer, Endeavour Energy, 29 October 2025, p 5.

solar, home batteries, community-scale batteries, and the use of spare government land and commercial roof space.[317] An urban REZ aims to harness distributed energy generation within urban areas, making the grid more reliable and reducing the need for major transmission investments.[318]

3.46 Ms Leanne Pickering, Chief Customer and Strategic Officer, Endeavour Energy, further elaborated on the opportunities in an urban REZ, describing it as an early stage 'grassroots' approach that reduces the cost for large-scale generation and transmission infrastructure, and addresses the social licence considerations associated with such projects.[319]

3.47 When asked about the generation capacity of an urban REZ to balance the impact of REZ development in the regional communities, Mr Chalkley reflected that an urban REZ is 'not the only solution' and 'you've got to use as many solutions as you can' as part of the energy transition.[320]

3.48 Mr Francis Vierboom, Chief Executive Officer of Rewiring Australia, an organisation 'focused on the science and engineering that underpin our energy system',[321] also highlighted the role of individual households in the energy transition, advocating for the electrification of household appliances to reduce carbon emission and household bills. In this context, Mr Vierboom described the possibilities of an urban REZ, with its denser areas and use of rooftop solar and smaller-scale battery infrastructure:

> The urban REZ that's been proposed here for the Illawarra is a great opportunity to demonstrate what renewable energy means in denser areas and not just in rural Australia. If we can maximise the solar and the battery that are on the rooftops of our homes, as well as on all of our businesses, we can run an energy system that costs less for everyone. If we can smooth out the energy that's moved across our grid throughout the day, that fundamentally lowers the cost of our energy bills.[322]

317 Evidence, Mr Guy Chalkley, Chief Executive Officer, Endeavour Energy, 29 October 2025, p 2.

318 Evidence, Mr Guy Chalkley, Chief Executive Officer, Endeavour Energy, 29 October 2025, p 2.

319 Ms Leanne Pickering, Chief Customer and Strategic Officer, Endeavour Energy, 29 October 2025, p 3.

320 Evidence, Mr Guy Chalkley, Chief Executive Officer, Endeavour Energy, 29 October 2025, p 3.

321 Evidence, Mr Francis Vierboom, Chief Executive Officer, Rewiring Australia, 29 October 2025, p 21.

322 Evidence, Mr Francis Vierboom, Chief Executive Officer, Rewiring Australia, 29 October 2025, p 21.

3.49 Mr Chalkley drew attention to a pilot project in the Illawarra region that focuses on electrification and renewable energy integration.[323] A snapshot of this project is presented in the case study below.

Case study: Electrify 2515[324]

Electrify 2515 is a pilot project in selected suburbs of the Illawarra region that aims to demonstrate the feasibility and benefits of electrifying homes and businesses using rooftop solar, batteries, and electrified appliances.

The project, a partnership between Endeavour Energy and Rewiring Australia,[325] involves changing appliances (e.g. hot water systems) and upgrading homes so they are fully electric. The project area was chosen due to its high levels of community engagement and support, factors considered critical to its success. An extensive consultation process was undertaken and town hall events were held to explain the concept and benefits to residents.

Learnings from the pilot will be considered before the concept is applied to other suburbs, including assessment of its suitability for lower socio-economic areas and rental properties. The intention is to first test the model in a supportive community, before it is adapted and scaled to areas with greater need or with less initial support for the concept.

3.50 Shellharbour Council, located in the Illawarra REZ, also 'recognises and supports the significant benefits for economic growth, energy affordability and environmental sustainability' that REZs can bring to its region.[326] While its submission emphasised the challenges of REZ developments and called for robust planning, policy alignment and adequate consultation (similar to issues discussed in Chapter 2), they also highlighted the following opportunities.

- **Economic Growth and Employment:** capitalising the region's skilled workforce in construction, maintenance, and renewable energy industries can lead to the creation of local employment, strengthen economies and foster economic resilience.
- **Affordable and reliable energy for socio-economic parity**: transitioning to renewable energy can significantly reduce energy costs for households and businesses, which is advantageous for low-income families who are disproportionately impacted by rising energy prices.

[323] Evidence, Mr Guy Chalkley, Chief Executive Officer, Endeavour Energy, 29 October 2025, p 2.

[324] Evidence, Mr Guy Chalkley, Chief Executive Officer, Endeavour Energy, 29 October 2025, pp 2, 5, 7; Evidence, Ms Leanne Pickering, Chief Customer and Strategic Officer, Endeavour Energy, 29 October 2025, pp 5, 7.

[325] Evidence, Mr Francis Vierboom, Chief Executive Officer, Rewiring Australia, 29 October 2025, p 21.

[326] Submission 41, Shellharbour City Council, p 1.

- **Environmental benefits:** the renewable energy transition helps achieve the state's and Australia's Net Zero targets, which can improve air-quality, support local biodiversity and enhance public health outcomes.[327]

Cost and financial viability of projects

3.51 One of the issues raised in relation to renewable energy infrastructure development is its cost for the state as well as the financial viability of projects. Mr Aidan Morrison, Director, Energy Program, Centre for Independent Studies (CIS), argued that the premise that electricity will cost less overall as a result of the state's energy transition is unsupported, stressing that there is no available analysis that demonstrates this.[328] He concluded that there is 'no credible way and no analysis in place that suggests there is ever a plausible path to having lower cost electricity through the current plan embodied in the New South Wales road map'.[329]

3.52 Mr Morrison asserted that the current regulatory framework prevents a proper cost-benefit analysis from being conducted that could show whether REZ investment actually lowers prices. According to Mr Morrison, the rollout of REZs will prove that renewable energy increases system costs.[330] The CIS submission described the development of both the CWO and NE REZs as 'fraught' with changes to transmission plans, network capacity, timelines and costs omitted from official documents. [331]

3.53 In this context, CIS argued that the actual costs of the REZ roll-out are uncertain and called for more transparency in relation to the outlay required for these projects:

> These frequent changes to the transmission corridor route, timeline, capacity and cost estimates for [New South Wales] REZs mean consumers cannot have any certainty in the costs of these projects. Given the significant cost blowouts already experienced by the [CWO] REZ, and the delays experienced by the [NE] REZ, there is a serious risk that future REZ developments will face similar issues that could inflate future financial costs associated with construction and maintenance of REZ projects far beyond what is currently assumed. More transparency on the part of EnergyCo is needed so consumers can understand the true costs of these projects.[332]

327 Submission 41, Shellharbour City Council, pp 1-2.

328 Evidence, Mr Aidan Morrison, Director, Energy Program, Centre for Independent Studies, 31 March 2026, pp 11-12.

329 Evidence, Mr Aidan Morrison, Director, Energy Program, Centre for Independent Studies, 31 March 2026, pp 11-12.

330 Evidence, Mr Aidan Morrison, Director, Energy Program, Centre for Independent Studies, 31 March 2026, p 11.

331 Submission 33, Centre for Independent Studies, pp 2-3.

332 Submission 33, Centre for Independent Studies, p 4.

3.54 At the hearing in March 2026, the government answered questions about the financial viability of some renewable energy projects. Mr Liam Ryan, Executive Director, Energy Infrastructure, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEW), confirmed that a number of projects need to reach the 'decision point', that is, critical choices to be made confirming the direction and outcomes of a project, in order to meet the legislative targets for renewable energy generation.[333]

3.55 Mr Ryan acknowledged that lack of revenue certainty was a factor in why some projects have yet to reach the decision point. However, Mr Ryan emphasised that other factors must also be considered to achieve 'financial close', that is, when all agreements and commitments are formalised:

> Project developers may not be certain about the revenues that their project will achieve in the wholesale electricity market if they don't have either a power purchasing agreement in place with a large energy consumer or one of these other underwriting agreements, so the [Long-term service agreement, LTSA] or the [Capacity Investment Scheme Agreement, CISA]. That's one element that we think is important for those projects achieving financial close. Another one is having confidence that the enabling infrastructure to construct their projects will be available so they'll actually be able to get materials from the port to their site, and that the transmission will be available as well, so that enabling infrastructure that they require to develop their project will actually be there. There's a number of factors, just to give you that example that we believe, in consultation with developers, they're still trying to lock in this year. The [LTSA and CISA] are important, but not the whole piece of what they need in order to effectively lock in the debt financing they need to construct their project and get to financial close.[334]

3.56 In answers to questions on notice, DCCEEW provided the extent of projects, in GW, required to meet the minimum objectives for generation in 2030:

> There are 6.3 GW of wind and solar power stations that are operational, in construction and commissioning or have reached financial close in [New South Wales] since 2019. This leaves around 7.1 GW of projects needed to meet the minimum objective for generation in 2030 under the *Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020*.
>
> The number of projects needed to reach financial close this year will depend on the technology mix as wind power stations take longer to develop than solar power stations.

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333 The minimum objective for renewable generation in 2030 under the *Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020* is 12 GW: Evidence, Mr Liam Ryan, Executive Director, Energy Infrastructure, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, 31 March 2026, p 59 and Answers to questions on notice, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, 1 May 2026, pp 1-2.

334 Evidence, Mr Liam Ryan, Executive Director, Energy Infrastructure, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, 31 March 2026, p 59.

> Assuming around 33 [per cent] of this capacity is wind and the remainder is solar, the Department estimates [New South Wales] needs around 2.4 GW of wind needs to reach financial close in 2026 to be operational by 2030. There are seven wind projects with 6.2 GW of access rights to [CWO and SW REZ] networks that are yet to reach financial close.[335]

Environmental impact

3.57 The environmental impacts of Renewable Energy Zones were discussed throughout the inquiry. Concerns were raised in relation to the uncertainty of the decommissioning process, fire risks associated with renewable energy developments, as well as issues around land clearing and the impact on wildlife corridors. These are explored in this section.

Uncertainty of the decommissioning process

3.58 Decommissioning refers to the removal of renewable energy infrastructure from a host site and the rehabilitation of the affected land. Mr Clay Preshaw, Executive Director, Planning System Reform, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI), emphasised that the DPHI has 'clear' and 'very strong' rules and policies for assessing decommissioning, closure and rehabilitation in relation to large-scale renewable energy proposals.[336]

3.59 However, the government determined that decommissioning bonds, that is, financial assurance or a bank guarantee to cover the cost of decommissioning and land rehabilitation,[337] are best managed through commercial negotiations between landholders and industry.[338] In this regard, the government considered that the cost of decommissioning 'heavily depends on what the host landowner is willing to accept at the completion of the project'.[339]

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335 Answers to questions on notice, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, 1 May 2026, p 2.

336 Submission 44, NSW Government, p 11. See also: Evidence, Mr Clay Preshaw, Executive Director, Planning System Reform, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, 13 May 2025, pp 12-13.

337 Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, *Renewable Energy Transition Update* (November 2024), p 14, https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-11/NSW-RenewableEnergy-Transition-Update-20241112.pdf.

338 Submission 44, NSW Government, p 11. See also: Evidence, Mr Clay Preshaw, Executive Director, Planning System Reform, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, 13 May 2025, pp 12-13.

339 Submission 44, NSW Government, p 11. See also: Evidence, Mr Clay Preshaw, Executive Director, Planning System Reform, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, 13 May 2025, pp 12-13.

3.60 As mentioned in the first report, the government advised that it had considered a 'range of models',[340] including a system of bonds, before determining its stance. Ultimately, it was explained that many factors led to the government's position, including the difference between the impact of mining and renewable energy projects on the environment as well as the distinctive regulatory systems for each sector.[341]

3.61 In response to questions about the government's position on decommissioning bonds, Mr Preshaw advised that the following tools were developed to assist landowners in understanding their obligations and opportunities during negotiations with a developer.

- A template agreement, or the *Private Agreement Guideline* (as mentioned in paragraph 3.25), helps landholders understand their potential obligations and their opportunities for the life of the project and in relation to decommissioning.
- A decommissioning calculator – an online tool that helps inform the decision-making process of landowners when considering whether to host renewable energy projects.[342]

3.62 Nonetheless, some stakeholders expressed concerns about the uncertainty of decommissioning bonds for renewable energy projects and the risk of stranded assets should a developer become bankrupt or sell the project.[343] Some advocated for implementation of a framework similar to that used for mining projects to ensure bonds are held for rehabilitation purposes.[344]

3.63 For instance, Mrs Mary Anne Crawford, Manager, Development and Environmental Services, Singleton Council, considered the long-term community benefits of decommissioning bonds in light of the council's experience with mining bonds.

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340 Evidence, Mr Matt Riley, Director, Energy and Resources Policy, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, 13 May 2025, p 13.

341 Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, NSW Legislative Council, *Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales – First Report*, 2025, pp 17-19. See also: Submission 44, NSW Government, p 58.

342 Evidence, Mr Clay Preshaw, Executive Director, Planning System Reform, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, 13 May 2025, p 12.

343 See for example: Evidence, Mrs Mary-Anne Crawford, Manager, Development and Environmental Services, Singleton Council, 25 September 2025, pp 14-15; Submission 125, Local Government NSW, p 41; Submission 54, Country Mayors Association of NSW, p 7.

344 See for example: Evidence, Mrs Mary-Anne Crawford, Manager, Development and Environmental Services, Singleton Council, 25 September 2025, pp 14-15; Evidence, Mr Xavier Martin, President, NSW Farmers,13 May 2025, p 61; Evidence, Ms Kerry Atkins, New South Wales Policy Director, Association of Mining Exploration Companies, 25 September 2025, p 61; Evidence, Mr Michael Holz, Resident and representing Singleton Solar Standoff community group, 25 September 2025, p 46.

In her response to questions on how the government should approach decommissioning bonds, Mrs Crawford highlighted how the experience of mining bonds could easily be applied to renewable energy infrastructure:

> From Singleton's perspective, we've got a long history and experience with mining projects in particular. Decommissioning bonds are not a new thing. They're held for a whole range of different types of development. They're held to ensure that projects meet community standards and don't leave long-term legacy issues for future generations. They're not held because a landowner wants to hold a whole bunch of money. They're there to make sure that their future generations are secure and that what the developer is actually doing is making sure that their community standards are met.[345]

3.64 Mrs Crawford continued:

> From our perspective, it shouldn't be left to individual landowners to carry that risk that's associated with decommissioning. Given that decommissioning bonds are a state government policy position—they're in the Mining Act—it's not a huge leap, I don't think, to incorporate something related to decommissioning bonds in the resources and energy [State Environmental Planning Policies], for example, to help support landowners in addressing some of those more technical issues of decommissioning, like waste management, contamination, remediation and those sorts of things.[346]

3.65 The Nature Conservation Council acknowledged community concerns around the decommissioning of renewable energy projects. In their view, the government's private landholder agreement guideline and decommissioning calculators address these concerns and are 'great resources for landholders'. Nonetheless, they highlighted that communities close to renewable energy developments need more reassurance about the plans for decommissioning and suggested that decommissioning agreements should be made publicly available, providing transparency for impacted communities.[347]

3.66 The Clean Energy Council advised that a national decommissioning security framework has been developed to ensure proper land rehabilitation and financial security over the life of a project irrespective of changes in ownership, so that 'communities and landowners are not left carrying any costs'.[348] The council further emphasised that the framework 'is a direct response to community

345 Evidence, Mrs Mary-Anne Crawford, Manager, Development and Environmental Services, Singleton Council, 25 September 2025, pp 14-15.

346 Evidence, Mrs Mary-Anne Crawford, Manager, Development and Environmental Services, Singleton Council, 25 September 2025, pp 14-15.

347 Submission 32, The Nature Conservation Council, p 11.

348 Evidence, Mr William Churchill, Chief Policy and Impact Officer, Clean Energy Council, 31 March 2026, pp 30, 36.

concern, and reflects an industry that is taking full life cycle responsibilities seriously'.[349]

Fire risks associated with renewable energy developments

3.67 Echoing the first report, stakeholders in the other REZs also raised concerns about fire risks associated with the development of REZs. Key concerns centred around increased fire risks from proposed developments,[350] possible gaps in emergency service planning, and the ability to respond to fires from renewable energy developments.[351]

3.68 Some stakeholders such as Mr Tim White, President, Valley Alliance, and Mr Xavier Martin, President, NSW Farmers Association, raised concerns that overhead transmission lines associated with Renewable Energy Zones may be a significant fire hazard.[352] For example, Mr Martin described transmission lines as a 'special fire-lighting device' and highlighted the existence of a widespread anxiety among rural communities about increased fire risk.[353]

3.69 Voice for Walcha was similarly troubled, especially given their experience of the 2019–20 'megafires', stating that the design of REZs had failed to consider the impact of those fires.[354] They maintained that the development of industrial projects near a national park will 'increase fire risk and hamper firefighting capabilities, in particular aerial firefighting practices that are critical in this inaccessible area'.[355]

3.70 Some local councils across the REZs also shared concerns about 'gaps'[356] in emergency service planning and the ability to respond to fires resulting from renewable energy developments.[357] To illustrate the point, Murray River Council outlined the following risks associated with large scale renewable infrastructure:

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349 Evidence, Mr William Churchill, Chief Policy and Impact Officer, Clean Energy Council, 31 March 2026, p 30, 36.

350 See for example: Submission 61, Yass Landscape Guardians Inc, p 2; Submission 85, Mrs Jenny Bailey, p 2; Submission 139, Murray River Council, p 8.

351 See for example: Submission 56, Voice for Walcha, p 2; Submission 85, Mrs Jenny Bailey, p 2.

352 See for example: Evidence, Mr Tim White, President, Voice for Walcha, 17 July 2025, p 30; Evidence, Mr Xavier Martin, President, NSW Farmers, 13 May 2025, p 59.

353 Evidence, Mr Xavier Martin, President, NSW Farmers, 13 May 2025, p 59.

354 Submission 56, Voice for Walcha, p 2.

355 Submission 56, Voice for Walcha, p 2.

356 Submission 125, Local Government NSW, p 23.

357 See for example: Submission 62, Armidale Regional Council, p 5; Submission 68, Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation, p 3; Submission 121, Murrumbidgee Council, pp 1-2; Submission 125, Local Government NSW, pp 22-23; Submission 139, Murray River Council, p 8.

- Wind turbines, battery storage, and transmission infrastructure introduce new ignition hazards in high-risk agricultural zones, where fires can spread rapidly due to dry conditions and wind exposure.
- No mandated developer insurance requirements place unfair financial liability on farmers and local councils, while landowners near SW REZ infrastructure face rising insurance costs without compensation.
- Local Rural Fire Service (RFS) lacks resources and specialised training to respond to high-risk energy-related fires, particularly chemical fires from battery storage and electrical faults from transmission lines.
- Current fire response capacity is insufficient, as RFS is volunteer-dependent, making it impractical to rely solely on local emergency crews to manage complex renewable energy fire scenarios.[358]

3.71 To address these concerns, some councils and Local Government NSW proposed improvements that could be made to emergency planning to address fire risks.

- **Review of firefighting resources:** a state-wide review of firefighting resources and gaps in each subregion, considering the scale and distance of renewable and non-renewable projects.[359]
- **Specialised training and equipment:** provide tailored training (including chemical fire response) and equipment upgrades (such as foam systems, high-reach appliances) to local RFS and volunteers in each REZ.[360]
- **Establish dedicated response teams:** create full-time professional response teams or expand existing schemes to cover renewable energy sector fire risks.[361]
- **Developer contributions:** require developers to contribute to the Emergency Services Levy and fund fire management resources.[362]

3.72 In response to these concerns, the committee heard from Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW) and NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS). Both agencies are emergency service organisations that have distinct operational responsibilities. They are typically involved during the planning and assessment stages for renewable energy developments – assessing fire safety, emergency access design and risk mitigation.[363]

358 Submission 139, Murray River Council, p 9.

359 Submission 125, Local Government NSW, p 24.

360 Submission 125, Local Government NSW, p 24; Submission 127, Edward River Council, p 3; Submission 139, Murray River Council, p 8.

361 Submission 125, Local Government NSW, p 24; Submission 127, Edward River Council, p 3; Submission 139, Murray River Council, p 8.

362 Submission 68, Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation, p 3; Submission 125, Local Government NSW, p 24.

363 Answers to supplementary questions, NSW Rural Fire Service, 6 May 2026, p 2; Evidence, Commissioner Jeremy Fewtrell AFSM, Fire and Rescue NSW, 31 March 2026,

3.73 RFS explained that the role of emergency services in REZ planning is during the planning and assessment stages, when developers are required to address 'Planning for Bush Fire Protection' bush fire protection measures, emergency access design, and operational risk controls. As part of this assessment, emergency services assess infrastructure layouts, transmission routes, temporary worker camps and mitigation strategies before approvals are finalised.[364]

3.74 Commissioner Jeremy Fewtrell AFSM, FRNSW, outlined how FRNSW is involved when it comes to potential developments:

> When [FRNSW] is advised of proposed developments, our role is to assess whether fire safety provisions are appropriate for the risk, ensure emergency services information is available for responders and confirm that effective emergency communication arrangements are in place with local emergency management partners. To do this properly, [FRNSW] requires early and reliable notification of proposed locations and the technologies to be installed. This allows emergency services to plan collaboratively, assess the operational capability that is needed and, where necessary, identify sites that may be unsuitable due to local risk factors.[365]

3.75 Commissioner Fewtrell acknowledged that the growth of REZs will change the nature of 'existing incident profiles'.[366] He noted that developments:

- are often located in bushfire-prone areas
- increase freight movements involving hazardous materials
- may introduce large temporary workforces into regional communities
- introduce new technologies which can present complex fire and hazardous materials challenges.[367]

3.76 However, when asked if REZ infrastructure increased points of ignition in rural landscapes, both FRNSW and RFS maintained that there is no current evidence indicating a notable increase in bush fire ignitions attributable to REZ infrastructure.[368] In support of their view, the RFS noted that while renewable

p 48; Evidence, Ben Millington, Operational Coordination, NSW Rural Fire Service, 31 March 2026, p 49.

364 Answers to supplementary questions, NSW Rural Fire Service, 6 May 2026, p 2.

365 Evidence, Commissioner Jeremy Fewtrell AFSM, Fire and Rescue NSW, 31 March 2026, p 48.

366 Evidence, Commissioner Jeremy Fewtrell AFSM, Fire and Rescue NSW, 31 March 2026, p 48.

367 Evidence, Commissioner Jeremy Fewtrell AFSM, Fire and Rescue NSW, 31 March 2026, p 48.

368 Answers to supplementary questions, Fire and Rescue NSW, 1 May 2026, p 1; Answers to supplementary questions, NSW Rural Fire Service, 6 May 2026, p 2.

energy infrastructure introduces additional electrical and mechanical systems into rural areas, they are subject to safety controls and oversight:

> Renewable energy assets do introduce additional electrical and mechanical systems into rural areas, but these are subject to design standards, operational controls, and regulatory oversight intended to minimise ignition risk. Some renewable energy infrastructure such as wind turbines can contain inbuilt fire suppression systems. At present, ignition trends in rural landscapes continue to be driven primarily by established sources such as lightning, machinery, escaped burns, and human activity.[369]

3.77 Nonetheless, Commissioner Fewtrell advised that FRNSW's approach to the energy transition is from an 'energy-agnostic perspective', focusing solely on community safety.[370] Commissioner Millington, RFS, agreed with FRNSW's agnostic position, highlighting that the RFS is not the consent authority for renewable energy developments.[371]

3.78 Both agencies emphasised that, to mitigate the risks associated with new renewable energy infrastructure, it must be matched by early engagement, transparent information sharing and appropriate planning, design and investment measures.[372] Commissioner Fewtrell added that this approach will also serve to reassure the community.[373]

3.79 Further, RFS clarified that emergency services have not received dedicated or proportional funding increases directly linked to REZ development. In their answers to supplementary questions regarding the potential risks of under-resourced services, RFS indicated that there is no evidence that communities are subsidising risk and outlined the existing operational framework used to manage additional emergency response demands:

> There is no clear evidence that communities are directly subsiding risk through under resourced emergency services. In the absence of dedicated resourcing, any increased operational requirements associated with large scale energy infrastructure is generally managed through existing emergency service capacity or through bespoke arrangements such as private firefighting contractors.

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369 Answers to supplementary questions, NSW Rural Fire Service, 6 May 2026, p 2.

370 Evidence, Commissioner Jeremy Fewtrell AFSM, Fire and Rescue NSW, 31 March 2026, p 48.

371 Evidence, Ben Millington, Operational Coordination, NSW Rural Fire Service, 31 March 2026, p 49.

372 Evidence, Commissioner Jeremy Fewtrell AFSM, Fire and Rescue NSW, 31 March 2026, p 48; Evidence, Ben Millington, Operational Coordination, NSW Rural Fire Service, 31 March 2026, p 49. See also: Answers to supplementary questions, NSW Rural Fire Service, 6 May 2026, p 2.

373 Evidence, Commissioner Jeremy Fewtrell AFSM, Fire and Rescue NSW, 31 March 2026, p 48.

> Additional funding could help improve infrastructure and equipment, but some communities may lack the resources (or people) to protect remote renewable energy facilities. In some instances, in the state's northwest, some facilities have private firefighting arrangements for onsite fires. The RFS coordinates with these private teams through emergency management plans.[374]

Land clearing and wildlife corridors

3.80 Similar to the first report, some stakeholders expressed concern about the impact of land clearing on wildlife corridors in relation to renewable energy development.[375] For example, Ms Kathy Morris, a landowner, highlighted the potential scale of wildlife displacement:

> There's going to be huge displacement of wildlife. The bare-earthing of properties blows my mind. I have been told, "Not to worry, Kathy, we will only bring down trees that grow to more than four metres." I'm like, "I don't think I have any trees that are less than four metres." Where is all the wildlife going? If I have 500 metres-ish of 140-metre-wide bare-earthed and it continues, where are they going to go? I have no words.[376]

3.81 Similarly, Mr Tim White, Valley Alliance, referred to the destruction of critical habitat for native flora and fauna, and flagged his concerns with the response from EnergyCo:

> EnergyCo basically said it would be covered in the [Environmental Impact Statement]. To put that into a little bit of context, we did a lot of work with an ecological firm up here in Armidale on koalas in our vicinity, and we had two ecologists come down to do a report, and they believe that they've found a very significant community of koalas in our area. It could be the largest inland community of koalas in New South Wales—healthy community in New South Wales. It's a significant community and it's a significant concern that we might lose them, because they're talking about bulldozing a 250-metre clear channel through the middle of it.[377]

3.82 As mentioned in Chapter 1, the government confirmed its support for addressing ecological protection and restoration priorities for each REZ through its Conservation Investment Strategies for the CWO and HCC REZ and by actively

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374 Answers to supplementary questions, NSW Rural Fire Service, 6 May 2026, p 2. See also: Answers to supplementary questions, Fire and Rescue NSW, 1 May 2026, p 2.

375 See for example: Submission 136, Mr Tim White, p 2; Evidence, Ms Kathy Morris, landholder, 13 May 2025, p 40; Evidence, Mrs Selena Sylvester, Hills of Gold Inc., 17 July 2025, p 38; Evidence, Mr Richard Coughland, Secretary, Bundure District Landholders Group, 18 February 2026, p 17.

376 Evidence, Ms Kathy Morris, landholder, 13 May 2025, p 40.

377 Evidence, Mr Tim White, President, Valley Alliance, 17 July 2025, p 32. See also: Submission 136, Mr Tim White, p 2.

engaging with renewable energy proponents to ensure they align with these strategies.[378]

First Nations perspectives

3.83 Renewable energy development presents various opportunities and challenges for First Nations peoples. These are explored throughout this section, as is the response to the government's First Nations Guidelines and community engagement practices, as well as impacts on cultural heritage.

3.84 Two councillors from the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council (NSW ALC) shared their perspective on the effects of Renewable Energy Zones. The NSW ALC is the peak statutory body representing 121 local Aboriginal land councils (LALC) across New South Wales. It should be noted that while each councillor represented the NSW ALC, they were also informed by the interests and concerns of their respective LALC, and, at times, held different views.[379]

3.85 In addition, the Indigenous Land and Justice Research Group, University of New South Wales (UNSW) Sydney, shared their recent research involving LALCs in the CWO REZ regarding Aboriginal landholdings, land claims, renewable energy opportunities and constraints, and possible pathways for Aboriginal communities to benefit from the state's energy transition.[380]

Opportunities and challenges

3.86 The NSWALC acknowledged that the REZs present significant opportunities for Aboriginal economic participation, employment and long-term community benefit, particularly where co-ownership and partnership models are supported.[381] Councillor Leanne Hampton, Deputy Chairperson, and Councillor for

[378] Correspondence from the Hon Penny Sharpe, Minister for Climate Change, Minister for Energy, Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, to the Clerk of the Parliaments, providing government response to the inquiry into the Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales – First Report, 21 November 2025.

[379] Evidence, Councillor Leanne Hampton, Deputy Chairperson, and Councillor for the Wiradjuri Region, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 31 March 2026, pp 38, 40, 41; Evidence, Councillor Charles Lynch, Councillor for the Northern Region, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 31 March 2026, pp 40-41. See also: NSW Aboriginal Land Council, *Our organisation* (2026), https://alc.org.au/our-organisation/.

[380] Submission 157, Indigenous Land and Justice Research Group, University of New South Wales (UNSW) Sydney, p 1.

[381] Answers to questions on notice, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 13 May 2026, pp 4-5. See also: Evidence, Councillor Leanne Hampton, Deputy Chairperson, and Councillor for the Wiradjuri Region, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 31 March 2026, p 39; Evidence, Councillor Charles Lynch, Councillor for the Northern Region, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 31 March 2026, pp 40-41.

the Wiradjuri Region, NSW ALC, emphasised that REZs 'intersect directly with regions where [ALCs] hold land or have lodged land claims. As a result, Aboriginal communities are not adjacent to this transition, we are on the ground where it is happening'.[382]

3.87 The NSW ALC noted that tangible and sustained benefits for Aboriginal communities have yet to be consistently realised across the sector.[383] Some Aboriginal communities have received short-term funding or upfront financial benefits associated with REZ developments. However, long-term legacy outcomes, including apprenticeships, qualifications, long-term employment pathways, co-ownership opportunities and ongoing land management roles are considered to be greater importance.[384]

3.88 Councillor Charles Lynch, Councillor for the Northern Region, NSW ALC, further elaborated on the impacts of 'sugar hits', or upfront payments to communities. While acknowledging that the funds contribute towards community initiatives regarding land and business plans, Councillor Lynch emphasised the need for 'more extensive coordination, to ensure long-term legacies' in local communities.[385] To demonstrate, he highlighted his community's work in ensuring the development of skills sets that are retained locally:

> I can talk specific to New England. They're really working hard to ensure that university qualifications are achieved; that we have qualified tradespersons by the end of the project; that well after the requirements of whether it be the maintenance on the REZs or so on, there are skill sets that also are held in community that advance community in other facets as well. It's the uplift within the community that longer term aspirations and goals are being set to achieve on.[386]

3.89 Councillor Hampton also acknowledged the opportunities presented by renewable energy development. However, she expressed some concerns regarding 'inconsistent' economic benefits for Aboriginal communities and the adequacy of LALC resourcing required to undertake 'complex land analysis' or negotiation with large-scale developers.[387] She called for genuine and early

382 Evidence, Councillor Leanne Hampton, Deputy Chairperson, and Councillor for the Wiradjuri Region, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 31 March 2026, p 38.

383 Answers to questions on notice, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 13 May 2026, pp 4-5.

384 Answers to questions on notice, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 13 May 2026, pp 4-5.

385 Evidence, Councillor Charles Lynch, Councillor for the Northern Region, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 31 March 2026, p 39.

386 Evidence, Councillor Charles Lynch, Councillor for the Northern Region, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 31 March 2026, p 39.

387 Evidence, Councillor Leanne Hampton, Deputy Chairperson, and Councillor for the Wiradjuri Region, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 31 March 2026, p 38.

engagement, adding that she would support further funding towards resourcing LALC to help build capacity in development assessments.[388]

3.90 Furthermore, in their answers to supplementary questions, NSW ALC elaborated that LALCs require greater access to technical, legal and commercial support so negotiations occur on an informed and equitable basis. According to the NSW ALC, strengthening this capability would assist in ensuring agreements more accurately reflect informed consent and long-term community interests.[389]

3.91 In its submission, the Indigenous Land & Justice Research Group highlighted the importance of collective and long-term benefits from the REZs, building on existing strengths, priorities and community-led work:

> Short-term jobs, small grants or one-off consultation processes are not enough. Communities want benefits that support housing, energy affordability, cultural centres, youth training, Aboriginal businesses, cultural heritage protection, land management, caring for Country and strong Aboriginal community controlled organisations. LALCs also emphasised that opportunities should build on the work, assets and expertise they already hold, including cultural heritage work, land management, community housing, training, local governance, community services and existing relationships with members and Aboriginal businesses. In this way, REZ benefits would not be separate from LALC priorities, but could strengthen the work LALCs are already doing for their communities.[390]

3.92 The Indigenous Land & Justice Research Group also highlighted that land holdings are 'not always suitable for large-scale renewable energy projects, particularly in densely settled and highly developed areas like the CWO [region]'.[391] They argued that LALC land parcels can be small or constrained by tenure, Native Title, biodiversity, vegetation, zoning, topography or location.[392]

3.93 In this regard, they advocated for 'careful policy curation and industry innovation **...** to ensure that LALCs are not excluded from the REZ economy' given the limited opportunities for hosting renewable energy projects on LALC land. These opportunities include biodiversity offsets, accommodation provision for

388 Evidence, Councillor Leanne Hampton, Deputy Chairperson, and Councillor for the Wiradjuri Region, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 31 March 2026, pp 38, 42.

389 Answers to questions on notice, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 13 May 2026, pp 2-3.

390 Submission 157, Indigenous Land and Justice Research Group, University of New South Wales (UNSW) Sydney, p 5.

391 Submission 157, Indigenous Land and Justice Research Group, University of New South Wales (UNSW) Sydney, p 5.

392 Submission 157, Indigenous Land and Justice Research Group, University of New South Wales (UNSW) Sydney, p 5.

temporary workers, storage, freight, small-scale renewable energy, procurement, maintenance, decommission and land rehabilitation.[393]

First Nation guidelines and community engagement

3.94 The government advised that their engagement with Aboriginal communities as part of the REZ development is informed by formal guidelines, benefit sharing funds and contractual obligations from developers. It includes a number of initiatives.

- First Nations Guidelines (see Chapter 1): Developers are required to offer economic participation opportunities equivalent to at least 1.5 per cent of the economic value of a project, aligning with the government's procurement targets.[394]
- A dedicated Aboriginal outcomes team within EnergyCo, comprised of Aboriginal staff who work closely with local communities.[395]
- Close partnerships with community reference groups, that include representatives from Aboriginal communities, local land councils and peak Aboriginal organisations.[396]
- First Nations Fund – a specific fund dedicated to supporting projects proposed by local land councils and Aboriginal organisations. The fund focuses on business and economic development to ensure that Aboriginal communities benefit directly from the REZ.[397]

3.95 Moreover, Mr Ash Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, EnergyCo, emphasised that they closely engage with Aboriginal communities and commitment to ensure Aboriginal voices are heard. Mr Albury further stressed that the government is 'very keen' that the targets as set out in the guidelines (as noted in paragraph 3.94) are met, and stated that, in his view, efforts should be made to exceed them.[398]

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393 Submission 157, Indigenous Land and Justice Research Group, University of New South Wales (UNSW) Sydney, p 5.

394 Evidence, Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability Group, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), 13 May 2025, p 11.

395 Evidence, Mr Ash Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, EnergyCo, 13 May 2025, p 11.

396 Evidence, Mr Ash Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, EnergyCo, 13 May 2025, pp 4, 11. See also: NSW Government, *First Nations Fund - Central-West Orana REZ*, (2026) https://www.nsw.gov.au/grants-and-funding/first-nations-fund-central-west-orana-rez.

397 Evidence, Mr Ash Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, EnergyCo, 13 May 2025, p 11

398 Evidence, Mr Ash Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, EnergyCo, 13 May 2025, p 11

3.96 As mentioned in Chapter 1, guidelines (consisting of the General First Nations Guidelines and the Region-specific First Nations Guidelines) apply when consulting and negotiating with the local Aboriginal community in relation to relevant projects. The purpose of the guidelines is to increase employment and income opportunities.

3.97 When asked about improvements in benefit sharing and outcomes for Aboriginal communities from REZ developments, Councillor Lynch referred to the First Nations Guidelines and their importance, describing the guidelines as 'decision-making from a community perspective'.[399] He reflected that governance arrangements in the guidelines could be further improved by embedding it within tender and contractual arrangements, especially in relation to sub-contractors. This would ensure that agreed commitments are carried through project delivery and supply chains.[400]

3.98 Councillor Hampton expressed that the approach to the First Nations Guidelines was 'inconsistent' across the REZs due to the lack of 'wholesome' engagement and cross-community consultation among Aboriginal communities, including with relevant government departments and with each other.[401]

3.99 Councillor Lynch acknowledged that the guiding principles of both Guidelines are broadly 'similar'. For example, common principles include strong coordination, effective communication and information sharing, accountability and monitoring, co-design through Aboriginal working groups, and collaboration across multiple government agencies.[402]

3.100 However, Councillor Lynch considered that the guidelines vary when it comes to their objectives. For instance, he observed that the government approach often focused on employment and training outcomes, whereas communities 'have advanced enough to say that there's a lot more that they could be delivering on'.[403] He further maintained that the specific goals and targets of communities vary due to the unique geographic, social, and economic circumstances of each, including factors such as access to training institutions and other local opportunities.[404]

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399 Evidence, Councillor Charles Lynch, Councillor for the Northern Region, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 31 March 2026, p 38.

400 Evidence, Councillor Charles Lynch, Councillor for the Northern Region, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 31 March 2026, p 38.

401 Evidence, Councillor Leanne Hampton, Deputy Chairperson, and Councillor for the Wiradjuri Region, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 31 March 2026, p 39.

402 Evidence, Councillor Charles Lynch, Councillor for the Northern Region, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 31 March 2026, p 39.

403 Evidence, Councillor Charles Lynch, Councillor for the Northern Region, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 31 March 2026, p 39.

404 Evidence, Councillor Charles Lynch, Councillor for the Northern Region, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 31 March 2026, p 39.

3.101 Beyond the Guidelines, the NSW ALC emphasised that Aboriginal communities and LALCs should be engaged at the earliest stages of project planning, prior to key decisions or project parameters being finalised. This is to ensure that Aboriginal communities have the opportunity to meaningfully participate in decision-making processes. While there have been positive efforts to improve engagement processes, concerns remain that consultation may occur after substantial planning decisions have already progressed.[405]

3.102 The NSW ALC explained that, in some REZs, Aboriginal stakeholders have pushed back on project timeframes to ensure key Aboriginal organisations and stakeholders, including LALCs, Native Title groups and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, are able to participate collectively in discussions, rather than consultation occurring with selected individuals or parties only.[406]

3.103 The Indigenous Land & Justice Research Group similarly advised that LALCs reported that they were often brought into the process after key decisions had already been made, limiting their ability to influence project design, cultural heritage protection and benefit-sharing:

> LALCs expressed disappointment that many decisions in relation to the REZ have already been made. There was a shared feeling that LALCs, and Aboriginal community, had been invited into the process after key decisions about project design, transmission, access, approvals and benefit-sharing had already been settled. This limited what Aboriginal communities can influence and the extent to which benefits could be achieved.
>
> A repeated message from the workshops was that consultation is not enough if Aboriginal people do not have real power in the process. Communities need to be involved early, before projects are designed and approved.[407]

Cultural heritage

3.104 Opinions varied regarding the extent to which cultural heritage had been appropriately considered in the development process. In Councillor Hampton's view, the protection of cultural heritage had been managed well, with Aboriginal knowledge and wishes respected in most cases.[408]

3.105 On the other hand, Councillor Lynch highlighted some issues with the consultation for cultural heritage assessments. Councillor Lynch informed the

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405 Answers to questions on notice, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 13 May 2026, p 2.

406 Answers to questions on notice, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 13 May 2026, p 2.

407 Submission 157, Indigenous Land and Justice Research Group, University of New South Wales (UNSW) Sydney, pp 4-5.

408 Evidence, Councillor Leanne Hampton, Deputy Chairperson, and Councillor for the Wiradjuri Region, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 31 March 2026, p 40.

committee that developers sometimes provided little or short notice to Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPS) for attending sites or walkovers. Some communities also felt that the incorrect person was 'walking on Country':

> Some comments that have been made by countrymen are that, as always, with RAPs on the ground, some people feel we have people walking on country that are not from country … I have had comments specifically about people being notified the day before a walkover. Sometimes that's just not achievable when a lot of our community members with the expertise are Elders or people that maybe not necessarily can drop everything at the drop of a hat and be onsite in a particular location with that type of notification. There has been some pressure with the delivery, in particular with the REZ in New England—it has taken a little bit more time, and that's for various reasons.[409]

3.106 Moreover, the Indigenous Land and Justice Research Group reported a recent breach of cultural heritage that occurred in the CWO REZ. The case study below outlines the incident in more detail.

Case study The destruction of the Mudgee rock shelter[410]

In May 2026, an Aboriginal heritage rock shelter on Wiradjuri Country near Mudgee was destroyed 'beyond recovery' during the construction of transmission infrastructure. ACEREZ, the network operator appointed by EnergyCo to design, build, finance, operate and maintain the CWO REZ transmission network, acknowledged that it knew of existence of the site. The site was identified in the project's planning approval, and Aboriginal representatives had raised its cultural significance before the damage occurred. However, the destruction of the rock shelter arose from internal failures in site design and on-site construction protocols.

According to the Indigenous Land and Justice Group, the incident highlights concerns about the limits of consultation. While First Nations groups may be consulted, they can lack the power or authority to prevent harm to Country once projects move into the delivery phase. The Indigenous Land and Justice Group also questioned whether industry has established adequate protocols, contract governance and onsite controls to ensure cultural heritage is protected during construction.

Mr Steve Masters, CEO, ACEREZ apologised for the damage to the site: 'We are deeply sorry. We apologise without reservation to the Traditional Owners and to the local community. The loss of this rock shelter is permanent and nothing we say can undo that'. ACEREZ advised that they have been in contact with the Traditional Owners and will work with them to determine how the site and its story can be acknowledged and honoured following the damage.

409 Evidence, Councillor Charles Lynch, Councillor for the Northern Region, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 31 March 2026, p 40. See also: Answers to questions on notice, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 13 May 2026, pp 2-3.

410 Submission 157, Indigenous Land and Justice Research Group, University of New South Wales (UNSW) Sydney, p 6. See also: ACEREZ, *Statement from CEO Steve Masters,* 25 May 2026, https://www.acerez.com.au/latest-news.

An investigation in relation to the destruction of the site has been launched by the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure.

3.107 In their answers to supplementary questions about cultural heritage, the NSW ALC highlighted their concerns about existing consultation and participation frameworks, maintaining that they rely heavily on voluntary compliance and do not always contain sufficiently strong obligations or enforcement mechanisms. The NSW ALC emphasised the following key considerations when it comes to protecting cultural heritage.:

- Aboriginal cultural heritage considerations should be embedded into project planning from the outset, requiring early engagement, transparency, genuine participation by Aboriginal communities, and should not be treated as secondary to project delivery timeframes.
- Short notification timeframes significantly limit the ability of RAPs to attend sites and properly walk Country prior to works occurring. When this occurs, this undermines the effective protection of Aboriginal culture and heritage, whether intentional or not.
- Critical consideration is given to ensuring RAPs include local Aboriginal people with recognised cultural authority, who live on or maintain strong connections to Country and possess appropriate knowledge of that Country.[411]

Committee comment

3.108 The development of Renewable Energy Zones has the potential to provide a number of economic benefits for host communities and landowners. There is also economic risk to delaying the transition to renewable energy, noting evidence that Australia's GDP will reduce by $6.8 trillion between 2024 and 2050 as a result of the impacts of climate change, if serious action is not taken. The committee notes the government has significantly invested in community benefit schemes as a way of ensuring long-term economic benefits form part of the energy transition for these communities.

3.109 The committee also acknowledges the additional funding distributed by Transgrid and Ausgrid to host communities. We are grateful for their willingness to appear before the committee at the hearings held in Singleton and Hay. We are similarly thankful that Endeavour Energy and the Clean Energy Council participated in the Sydney and Wollongong hearings. Given the central role of renewable energy developers in transforming those rural and regional communities affected by the REZs, inquiry participation helps facilitate open engagement and transparency.

[411] Answers to questions on notice, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 13 May 2026, p 3.

3.110 Nonetheless, despite significant investment, the committee shares the concerns of several inquiry participants around some of the practical implications of proposed funding arrangements. Many stakeholders were critical of both the adequacy and constraints associated with the community benefit schemes, highlighting some of the impracticalities associated with managing funds. Substantial investment achieves little if it is buried in red tape.

3.111 REZ related construction and ongoing operations present a number of employment opportunities. The government's commitment to ensuring employment in the regions is a step in the right direction. Nonetheless, we are sympathetic to the concerns of some stakeholders, such as Local Government NSW and the Country Mayors Association, that employment opportunities in the regions may not be long-term. While the construction phase of each REZ appears to increase regional employment, a high proportion of the renewable energy workforce is expected to consist of temporary workers that 'drive in-drive out' or 'fly in-fly out'. This does not equate to long-term legacy outcomes.

3.112 Therefore, we find that while REZ development is projected to deliver economic benefits, this is not consistently reflected in the lived experience of some rural and regional communities.

Finding 20

The proposed economic benefits from Renewable Energy Zones are not consistent with the lived experience of some rural and regional communities.

3.113 While the land acquisition process includes the provision of compensation to landowners, it is hard to fully account for the stress and uncertainty provoked by the potential loss of land. The committee was moved by the evidence of a number of individuals who shared their negative experiences of the government land acquisition process. We heard repeated stories of EnergyCo's 'adversarial', unsupportive, 'deadline oriented' and 'Social Impact Assessment-ignorant' approach to dealing with landowners. For Mr Ian Barry, his battle with Motor Neurone Disease was negatively affected by the process. We understand that revisiting these experiences would have been difficult and appreciate the openness and candour of these participants.

3.114 Unfortunately, these experiences remind us of similar issues explored in the first report. The land acquisition process is flawed and we are concerned that these issues will persist given the likelihood of increased land acquisition as the government continues the energy transition in rural and regional communities. Indeed, we share the concerns of the Law Society of NSW regarding the inadequacy of compensation for landowners who host transmission infrastructure, and the impediments to meaningful and genuine negotiations.

Finding 21

That the land acquisition process in relation to renewable energy development is inadequate.

3.115 In this context, we consider that the Law Society of NSW's suggestions for improving the land acquisition process would greatly assist landowners. We accordingly recommend that the government seek to strengthen the land acquisition process by:

- applying the principles of the *Private Agreement Guideline* so:
  - agreements are tailored to the specific landholder and project
  - agreements are fair, reasonable, and written in plain language,
  - reasonable landholder costs associated with entering into or understanding the agreement are paid for by the applicant.
- developing a suite of standard documents, prescribed by regulations, that are required to initiate and complete the acquisition process.

3.116 Further, we note that the *Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991* is currently under review and recommend that the government provide an urgent update as to its progress.

3.117 We also recommend strengthening the land acquisition process by including minimum standards for: independent legal advice funded by proponents; valuation processes; mediation prior to compulsory acquisition; and transparent compensation principles.

Recommendation 13

That the NSW Government seek to strengthen the land acquisition process by:

- applying the principles of the *Private Agreement Guideline* so:
  - agreements are tailored to the specific landholder and project
  - agreements are fair, reasonable, and written in plain language
  - reasonable landholder costs associated with entering into or understanding the agreement are paid for by the applicant.
- developing a suite of standard documents, prescribed by regulations, that are required to initiate and complete the acquisition process
- providing an urgent update regarding the review of the *Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991*
- including minimum standards for:
  - independent legal advice funded by proponents
  - valuation processes
  - mediation prior to compulsory acquisition
  - transparent compensation principles.

3.118 As foreshadowed in the first report, the committee remains concerned about the uncertainty of the decommissioning process. The committee notes the government's position that decommissioning bonds are not necessary for renewable energy projects and that the responsibility of decommissioning should be managed between the landowner and the developer. However, we recognise that concerns remain in the community regarding the risk of stranded assets should a developer become bankrupt or sell the project.

3.119 Indeed, we found Singleton Council's evidence regarding the long-term community benefits of decommissioning bonds compelling in light of their experience with mining bonds. It is clear that there is an existing and sufficient framework for decommissioning bonds that the government can apply to renewable energy developments. As such, we urge the government to revisit their position regarding decommissioning bonds so as to reassure the community about appropriately accounting for the decommissioning of renewable energy infrastructure. We accordingly recommend that the NSW Government reconsider their position regarding decommissioning bonds and consider applying mandatory bonds to new renewable energy developments including requirements for periodic review of financial assurance to reflect actual costs.

Finding 22

Decommissioning bonds are a necessary part of any significant infrastructure as they provide reassurance to the community regarding long-term environmental and economic impacts.

Recommendation 14

That the NSW Government reconsider their position regarding decommissioning bonds and consider applying mandatory bonds to new renewable energy developments including requirements for periodic review of financial assurance to reflect actual costs.

3.120 Emergency services, such as Fire & Rescue NSW and the NSW Rural Fire Service, play an essential role in protecting communities, property and critical infrastructure in rural and regional areas. They are currently involved in the development assessment process through the consideration of fire safety, emergency access design and risk mitigation. We understand that they are not the consent authority for these decisions yet they are required to respond in accordance with their operational roles and responsibilities.

3.121 Fire & Rescue NSW and the NSW Rural Fire Service advised that, while there is no evidence that REZ infrastructure increases fire risk in rural landscapes, it does change the nature of 'existing incident profiles'. Nonetheless, many stakeholders remain significantly concerned about the potential fire risk from proposed

developments as well the uncertainty around emergency service planning and the ability to respond quickly to fires surrounding renewable energy developments.

3.122 While there is no suggestion that emergency services are unable to perform their operational responsibilities, the committee nonetheless considers it important that emerging risks are adequately assessed and incorporated into planning.

Finding 23

The Renewable Energy Zones and related infrastructure have caused significant concern in the community regarding fire risk and uncertainty around emergency service planning and responses.

3.123 The insights provided by Aboriginal stakeholders to this inquiry have been invaluable and the committee acknowledges their cultural and spiritual connections to land within the REZs. They are key stakeholders who are experiencing the impacts of the energy transition.

3.124 We are concerned that the cultural heritage consultation process has at times lacked meaningful participation due to the short notice provided to relevant representatives as well as a failure to always engage with the recognised cultural authority. The committee considers that this approach undermines the genuine participation by Aboriginal communities and potentially hinders the effective protection of Aboriginal culture and heritage.

3.125 Moreover, we are deeply concerned by the recent breach of cultural heritage protection in the Central-West Orana REZ. This incident has caused significant distress to Traditional Owners and local Aboriginal communities, and will raise broader concerns among Aboriginal communities about whether cultural heritage protections are being properly implemented and upheld.

3.126 The committee notes that the government has established formal mechanisms to support the delivery of benefits from the energy transition to Aboriginal communities, including the use of guidelines, benefit-sharing funds and contractual obligations for developers.

3.127 However, we are of the view that further work is needed so tangible and sustained benefits for Aboriginal communities are realised. In particular, we note the evidence from the NSW Aboriginal Land Council who emphasised the need for long-term legacy outcomes, including apprenticeships, qualifications, long-term employment pathways, co-ownership opportunities and ongoing land management roles. These long-term economic outcomes are valuable and opportunities should not be limited to short-term financial benefit.

3.128 The committee also acknowledges the role of local Aboriginal land councils in representing their communities as part of the REZ process. We note that they are

required to undertake complex land analysis and negotiation with large-scale developers, often with insufficient resourcing. Local Aboriginal land councils should have greater access to technical, legal and commercial support to ensure negotiations occur on an informed and equitable basis. This would facilitate the development of agreements that more accurately reflect informed consent and long-term community interests.

3.129 On this basis, we recommend that the government provide additional funding to the local Aboriginal land councils in each Renewable Energy Zone to assist with complex land analysis and negotiations with large-scale developers together with requirements for early engagement in strategic planning, cultural heritage assessment and route selection before project locations are finalised.

Recommendation 15

That the NSW Government provide additional funding to the local Aboriginal land councils in each Renewable Energy Zone to assist with complex land analysis and negotiations with large-scale developers together with requirements for early engagement in strategic planning, cultural heritage assessment and route selection before project locations are finalised.

3.130 More broadly, the themes explored in this final report lead to the conclusion that the Renewable Energy Zones unfortunately have adverse ongoing impacts for many stakeholders in rural and regional communities across New South Wales. Since the commencement of this inquiry in 2024, the committee has observed clear indications of the direction and scale of these impacts and their implications for affected communities, yet the government has not delivered an adequate response.

3.131 Indeed, we reiterate our view expressed in the first report regarding the need to address the concerns that were already emerging for those living in the Central-West Orana REZ. It is clear that key issues such as a lack of strategic planning, inadequate community consultation, adverse cumulative impacts on local communities, and negative environmental and social impacts are persisting in the other REZs. We hoped that the government would sufficiently address these concerns in their response to the first report in order to prevent persistent issues in the roll-out of the other REZs.

3.132 However, the government's response to the first report, as outlined in Chapter 1, is characterised by broad support 'in principle', while failing to commit to substantive structural reform, indicating a gap between acknowledgment and action. This response is unsatisfactory, as it is devoid of clear timelines, deliverables and accountability mechanisms, which undermine confidence in its implementation and the government's commitment to ensuring rural and regional communities are part of the energy transition.

3.133 In order to effectively keep the government accountable throughout this significant transition that is being experienced by many rural and regional communities throughout New South Wales, we recommend that the government publish a detailed implementation plan for all accepted recommendations of this report within three months, as part of its response to this report. The plan should set out relevant timelines, responsible agencies and measurable outcomes, with the government reporting to New South Wales Parliament every six months on the progress of its implementation plan.

3.134 The implementation plan should: identify the lead agency responsible for each recommendation; specify implementation timeframes; include measurable performance indicators; and provide annual public progress reports until implementation is complete.

Finding 24

The response of the NSW Government to the first report is characterised by broad support 'in principle' while failing to commit to substantive structural reform, indicating a gap between acknowledgment and action.

Finding 25

The response of the NSW Government to the first report lacked clear timelines, deliverables, and accountability mechanisms, undermining confidence in its implementation and the commitment to ensuring rural regional communities are part of the energy transition.

Recommendation 16

That the NSW Government publish a detailed implementation plan for all accepted recommendations of this report within three months. The plan should set out relevant timelines, responsible agencies and measurable outcomes, with the government reporting to New South Wales Parliament every six months on the progress of its implementation plan. The implementation plan should:

- identify the lead agency responsible for each recommendation;
- specify implementation timeframes;
- include measurable performance indicators;
- provide annual public progress reports until implementation is complete.

Appendix 1 Submissions

No.	Author	
1	Confidential	
2	Name suppressed	*partially confidential*
3	Name suppressed	*partially confidential*
4	Mrs Julia James	
5	Mr Malcolm Ritter	
6	Name suppressed	*partially confidential*
7	Mr Ian McDonald	
8	Dungog Shire Council	
8a	Dungog Shire Council	
9	Name suppressed	*partially confidential*
10	Mr Graeme Tychsen	
11	Ms Ifeanna Tooth	
12	Mr Matthew Hasemore	
13	Mr Patrick Li	
14	Mr Brian Mason	
15	Mr Robert Richardson AO	
16	Mr Peter Coughlan	
17	Mr David Bowman	
18	Merriwa-Cassilis Alliance Incorporated	
19	Confidential	
20	Rainforest Reserves Australia	
21	Mr John Kelly	
22	Ms Emily Edwards	
23	Doctors for the Environment Australia	
24	Hi Neighbour	
25	Rainforest Reserves Australia	
26	Cassilis District Development Group	
27	Save Our Surroundings (SOS)	
28	Justice and Equity Centre	
29	Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW	
30	CWO REZist Inc.	
31	Lithgow Environment Group Inc	

No.	Author
32	National Rational Energy Network Inc.
33	The Centre for Independent Studies
34	The Nature Conservation Council NSW
35	Central NSW Joint Organisation
36	Ausgrid, Endeavour Energy, Essential Energy
37	The Australian Workers' Union
38	AMEC
39	Hunter Jobs Alliance
40	Singleton Council
41	Shellharbour City Council
42	Uarbry Tongy Lane Alliance Inc
43	Responsible Future (Illawarra Chapter) Inc
44	NSW Government DCCEEW
45	Mid-Western Regional Council
46	ReD4NE
47	Sydney Knitting Nannas
48	Net Zero Commission
49	Burrendong SOS - Community Group
50	NSW Farmers Association
51	Temora Shire Council
52	Community Power Agency
53	Blueprint Institute
54	Country Mayors Association of NSW
55	The Next Economy
56	Voice for Walcha
57	Climate Action and REEACH groups of Sustainable Living Armidale
58	Friends of the Earth Australia
59	Renew, Hunter region branch
60	Dubbo Regional Council
61	Yass Landscape Guardians Inc
62	Armidale Regional Council
63	Warrumbungle Shire Council
64	Charles Abela
65	Unions NSW
66	Uralla Shire Council

No.	Author	
67	RE-Alliance	
68	Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation	
69	Tamworth Regional Council	
70	The Law Society of New South Wales	
71	Mr John Benjamin	
72	Name suppressed	*partially confidential*
73	Melissa and Leo Collins	
74	Name suppressed	*partially confidential*
75	NSW Minerals Council Ltd	
76	Name suppressed	*partially confidential*
77	Mr Martin Mansfield	
78	Name suppressed	*partially confidential*
79	Name suppressed	*partially confidential*
80	Mr Nigel Roberts	
81	Mr Rick Campbell	
82	Dr Ken Wilson	
83	Ms Ruby Hardie	
84	Name suppressed	
85	Mrs Jenny Bailey	
86	Dr Martin Scurrah	
87	Hay Shire Council	
88	Confidential	
89	Mrs Phebe Fidge	
90	Mr Brian Bowman	
91	Mrs Anne Bowman	
92	Maritime Union of Australia (MUA)	
93	Noel Hicks	
95	Mr Stephen Johnston	
94	Miss Emma Bowman	*partially confidential*
96	Name suppressed	*partially confidential*
97	Colleen Wysser - Martin	
98	Mrs Rosemary Miller	
99	Confidential	
100	Name suppressed	*partially confidential*
101	Confidential	

No.	Author	
102	Name suppressed	*partially confidential*
103	Name suppressed	*partially confidential*
104	Name suppressed	*partially confidential*
105	Ms Kim Gambrill	
106	Name suppressed	*partially confidential*
107	Mrs Myree Russell	
108	Mrs Sally Edwards	
109	Lake Macquarie City Council	
110	Clean Energy Investor Group Ltd	
111	Mr Stan Moore	
112	Mr Peter Dawson	
113	Name suppressed	*partially confidential*
114	Ms Julie Marlow	
115	Nature Conservation Council of NSW, Community Power Agency, Hunter Jobs Alliance et al	
116	Ms Annie Marlow	
117	Mr Jason Harrop	
118	Mr Anthony Morrison	
119	Name suppressed	*partially confidential*
120	Name suppressed	*partially confidential*
121	Murrumbidgee Council	
122	Margaret Armstrong	
123	Mr Ian Barry	
124	Mr Colin Smith	
125	Local Government NSW (LGNSW)	
126	Business NSW	
127	Edward River Council	
128	Cotton Australia	
129	Name suppressed	*partially confidential*
130	Name suppressed	*partially confidential*
131	Confidential	
132	New England Greens	
133	Name suppressed	*partially confidential*
134	Wild Rivers Engineering	
135	Ms Anita O'Neil	

No.	Author
136	Mr Tim White
137	Good for the Gong
138	Lynette Lablack
139	Murray River Council
140	Mr Michael Holz
141	Lyndal McRae
142	Peter Reardon
143	Mary Noglik and Les Dywer-Gray
144	Renee Harrison
145	Confidential
146	Rob and Bill Hicks
147	Farmers for Climate Action
148	Arleen Packer
149	Stuart Grills
150	Sally Denyer
151	Antony (Tony) Menkens
152	Bundure District Landholders Group (BUNDL)
153	Dungowan Creek Alliance
154	Annette Smith
155	Mr Nathaniel Barton
156	Voice for Cabonne
157	Indigenous Land and Justice Research Group, UNSW Sydney

Appendix 2 Witnesses at hearings

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
Tuesday 13 May 2024 **Macquarie Room** **Parliament House, Sydney**	Mr Liam Ryan	Advising Executive Director, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
	Mr Ash Albury	Executive Director, Planning and Communities, Energy Corporation of NSW
	Mr Clay Preshaw	Executive Director, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
	Mr Matt Riley	Director, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
	Mr Anthony Hayes	Head of Regional Integration, Planning, Integration and Passenger, Transport for NSW
	Ms Suzie Matthews	Executive Director, Skills and Workforce Programs, NSW Department of Education
	Mr James Bolton	Deputy Secretary, Regional Development and Delivery, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
	Ms Nevenka Codevelle	Executive General Manager, AEMO Services
	Ms Melanie Koerner	General Manager – System Planning, Reporting & REZ Authorisation, AEMO Services
	Ms Janine Young *(via videoconference)*	Ombudsman, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW
	Ms Stephanie Saill *(via videoconference)*	Head of Energy Transition, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW
	Ms Meg McDonald	Interim Chair, Net Zero Commission
	Dr Will Rayward-Smith	Executive Director, Net Zero Commission
	Ms Alison Stone	NSW Agriculture Commissioner
	Dr Richard Parsons	Social Researcher
	Mr Ian Barry	Landowner
	Ms Kathy Morris	Landowner
	Mr Ben Turner	Landowner

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
	Cr Claire Pontin *(via videoconference)*	Vice President Regional/Rural, Local Government NSW
	Mr David Reynolds *(via videoconference)*	Chief Executive, Local Government NSW
	Ms Marilyne Crestias	Head of Policy and Advocacy, Clean Energy Investor Group
	Dr Brad Smith	Policy and Advocacy Director, Nature Conservation Council NSW
	Ms Eve Altman	Clean Energy Campaigner, Nature Conservation Council NSW
	Ms Lu Allan	Advocacy Director, RE-Alliance
	Mr Xavier Martin	President NSW Farmers
	Ms Rhiannon Heath	Policy Adviser, Environment, NSW Farmers
	Ms Leah Tucker	Senior Policy Manager, Energy and Infrastructure, Business NSW
	Mr Bob Hawes	CEO, Business Hunter, Business NSW
	Mr Andrew Abbey	Policy Director, NSW Minerals Council
Friday 16 May 2025 Dubbo Regional Council Chambers, Dubbo NSW	Mr Murray Wood	Chief Executive Officer, Dubbo Regional Council
	Mr Steven Jennings	Development and Environment, Dubbo Regional Council
	Mr Brad Cam	General Manager, Midwestern Regional Council
	Mr Lindsay Mason	General Manager, Warrumbungle Council
	Adjunct Prof Warwick Giblin FEIANZ, FRSN	Environmental Consultant to Warrumbungle Council
	Mr Grant Piper, AASM, DFSM	CWO REZist
	Mrs Annette Piper	Uarbry Tongy Lane Alliance
	Mr Terry Conn	Landowner
	Mrs Margaret Conn	Landowner
	Ms Emma Bowman	Landowner
	Ms Sally Edwards	Landowner
	Mr Nigel Roberts	Landowner

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
	Mrs Jane Hegarty	Chair, Cassilis District Development Group
	Mrs Linda Gant	Committee member, Cassilis District Development Group
	Mr James Matthews	Executive Committee, Merriwa Cassilis Alliance
	Mr James Armstrong	Owner, Cassilis Park Merino Stud
	Mr Peter Rothwell Director	VRA Rescue
Thursday 17 July 2025 Armidale Bowling Club, Auditorium, Armidale NSW	Cr Sam Coupland	Mayor, Armidale Regional Council
	Mr Stephen Wood	Senior Strategic Planner, Armidale Regional Council
	Mr James Pryor	Senior Strategic Planner, Armidale Regional Council
	Cr Robert Bell	Mayor, Uralla Shire Council
	Ms Emily Sims	Planning Officer – Strategic, Uralla Shire Council
	Mr Jordan Kirk	Renewable Energy Project Co-ordinator, Tamworth Regional Council
	Mr Sam Lobsey	Manager, Development Division, Liveable Communities, Tamworth Regional Council
	Cr Eric Noakes	Mayor, Walcha Council
	Mr Alan Butler	Acting General Manager, Walcha Council
	The Hon Barnaby Joyce MP	Member for New England, Parliament of Australia
	Ms Annette Kilarr	Convenor, Climate Action Armidale of Sustainable Living Armidale
	Dr Sanaz Alian	Renewable Energy, Education, Advocacy and Community Health (REEACH) group of Sustainable Living Armidale
	Mr Cameron Greig	Member, Voice for Walcha
	Mr Damien Timbs	Member, Voice for Walcha
	Mr Tim White	President, Valley Alliance
	Mr Peter Dawson	Property owner, Salisbury Plains

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
	Mrs Karen Zirkler	Regenerative Agriculture Grazier, Kentucky district
	Mrs Selena Sylvester	Hills of Gold Preservation Inc.
	Mr Mark Fogarty	Director, Bushtricity – ReD4NE
	Ms Susan Newey	Chair, ReD4NE
	Mr Antony (Tony) Menkens	Beef cattle producer, Chair, Batting for Booroolong Community Group
	Mr Stuart Grills	Property owner
Thursday 25 September 2025 **Singleton Civic Centre** **Singleton NSW**	Mr Trevor Ryan	Director, Planning and Environment, Dungog Shire Council
	Mr Justin Fitzpatrick-Barr	General Manager, Singleton Council
	Mrs Mary-Anne Crawford	Development and Environmental Services, Singleton Council
	Cr Jeff Drayton	Mayor, Muswellbrook Shire Council
	Mr Derek Finnigan	General Manager, Muswellbrook Shire Council
	Mr Ben Maddox	Coordinator, Sustainability Strategy and Education, Maitland City Council
	Mr Timothy Jarratt	Ausgrid Group Executive Market Development & Strategy, Ausgrid
	Mr Daniel Sartor	Ausgrid Head of Major Projects, Ausgrid
	Mr Michael Johnson	General Manager, Community and Social Licence, Transgrid
	Mr Struan Wilson	Program Director – Hunter Transmission Project, Transgrid
	Mr Richard Poole	CEO, Verdant Earth Technologies
	Mr Costa Tsiolkas	General Manager, Verdant Earth Technologies
	Mr Justin Page	Coordinator, Hunter Jobs Alliance
	Mr Tom Edwards	Research and Policy Officer, Unions NSW (via videoconference)
	Mr Matthew Murray	Member, Newcastle Branch Committee, Maritime Union of Australia
	Mr James Miranda	Policy & Research Officer, ETU NSW & ACT Branch Electrical Trades Union

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
	Dr John Shiel	Member, Renew – Hunter Region Branch
	Ms Kerry Atkins	NSW Policy Director, AMEC (Association of Mining Exploration Companies)
	Ms Paula Dell-McCumstie	NSW Policy Advisor, AMEC
	Mr Michael Holz	Resident and representing Singleton Solar Standoff community group
	Mrs Myree Russell	Farmer/landholder
Wednesday 29 October 2025 **Victory Room** **WIN Sports and Entertainment Centre** **Wollongong NSW**	Mr Guy Chalkley	Chief Executive Officer, Endeavour Energy
	Ms Leanne Pickering	Chief Customer and Strategy Officer, Endeavour Energy
	Mr Mark Horne	Individual
	Mr Alex O'Brien	President, Responsible Future, Illawarra Chapter
	Mrs Amanda De Lore	Vice President, Responsible Future, Illawarra Chapter
	Mr Jim Pinkerton	Consultant Power System Engineer and Past President of Electricity Engineers Association of NSW, Responsible Future, Illawarra Chapter
	Ms Madeleine Holme	Good for the Gong
	Ms Yael Stone	Founding Director, Hi Neighbour
	Mr Francis Vierboom	Chief Executive Officer, Rewiring Australia
Wednesday, 18 February 2026 **The Auditorium,** **Hay Services Club** **Hay NSW**	Ms Alison McLean	Executive Manager – Economic Development and Tourism, Hay Shire Council
	Mr Jack Bond	Chief Executive Officer, Edward River Council
	Mr Garry Stoll	Director, Planning & Infrastructure, Murrumbidgee Council
	Mr Steven Parisotto	Senior Planner, Murrumbidgee Council
	Mr Brett Stonestreet PSM	Interim Executive Officer, Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation (RAMJO)

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
	Mr Terry Dodds	Chair, RAMJO Energy Security and Affordability Committee and CEO, Balranald Shire Council
	Ms Hodi Beauliv	Executive Manager, Governance & Economic Services, Balranald Shire Council
	Mr Richard Coughlan	Secretary, Bundure District Landholders Group (BUNDL)
	Mr Andrew Browning	Committee member, BUNDL
	Mr Michael Johnson	General Manager Community and Social Licence, Transgrid
	Mr Nathan Menser	Community and Stakeholder Manager, Transgrid
Tuesday, 31 March 2026 Macquarie Room Parliament House, Sydney	Ms Janine Young	Ombudsman, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW
	Ms Stephanie Saill	Head of Energy Transition, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW
	Mr Aidan Morrison	Director, Energy Programs, Centre for Independent Studies
	Ms Verity Morgan-Schmidt	Acting CEO, Farmers for Climate Action
	Mr Andrew Locke	Farmers for Climate Action
	Mr Mark Robinson	Director, Wild Rivers Engineering
	Ms Saideh Kent	Program Director – Energy, The Next Economy
	Mr William Churchill	Chief Policy and Impact Officer, Clean Energy Council
	Mr Chris O'Keefe	National Spokesperson, Clean Energy Council
	Councillor Leeanne Hampton	Deputy Chairperson, NSW Aboriginal Land Council and Councillor for the Wiradjuri Region, NSW Aboriginal Land Council
	Councillor Charles Lynch	Councillor for the Northern Region, NSW Aboriginal Land Council
	Professor Ivan R. Kennedy AM FRACI CChem	Professor Emeritus in Agricultural and Environmental Chemistry, School of Life and Environmental Sciences, Institute of Agriculture, University of Sydney
	Commissioner Jeremy Fewtrelll, AFSM	Commissioner, Fire & Rescue NSW

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
	Deputy Commissioner Ben Millington	Deputy Commissioner, Operational Coordination, NSW Rural Fire Service
	Chief Superintendent Laurence McCoy	Chief Superintendent and Manager Predictive Services, NSW Rural Fire Service
	Mr Ashley Albury	Executive Director, Planning & Communities, Energy Corporation of NSW
	Mr Anthony Hayes	Head of Regional Integration, Planning, Integration and Passenger Division, Transport for NSW
	Mr Clay Preshaw	, Executive Director, Planning System Reform, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
	Mr Liam Ryan	Executive Director, Energy Infrastructure, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
	Ms Hannah McCaughey	Chief Executive Officer, Energy Corporation of NSW
	Mr Chris Ritchie	A/Executive Director, Energy and Resource Assessments, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure

Appendix 3 Minutes

Minutes no. 23
Tuesday 30 July 2024
Portfolio Committee no. 4
Room 1034, NSW Parliament House, 4.03 pm

1. Members present
Mr Banasiak, *Chair* (via videoconference)
Ms Hurst, *Deputy Chair* (via videoconference)
Mr Donnelly
M Fang (substituting for Mrs Mitchell for the POCTAA inquiry) (via videoconference, until 4.14 pm)
Mrs MacDonald
Mrs Mitchell (via videoconference)
Mr Murphy (via videoconference)
Mr Primrose

2. Previous minutes
Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That draft minutes no. 22 be confirmed.

3. Correspondence
The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received:

- 18 July 2024 – Email from Witness H to the secretariat providing a clarification to evidence before the committee on 18 July 2024, for the inquiry into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979)*
- 19 July 2024 – Email from Witness D to the secretariat providing a clarification to evidence she gave before the committee on 18 July 2024, for the inquiry into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979)*
- 21 July 2024 – Email from Witness H to the secretariat providing further observations to the committee, for the inquiry into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979)*
- 22 July 2024 – Email from Ms Abigail Wiley to the secretariat querying a committee comment in the report of the inquiry into the veterinary workforce
- 23 July 2024 – Email from Mr Stephen Albin acknowledging receipt of the Chair's letter regarding the Turner allegations, for the inquiry into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979)*
- 23 July 2024 – Email from Ms Amanda Gray to the secretariat requesting further information about the Turner allegations, for the inquiry into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979)*
- 23 July 2024 – Letter from the Hon Sarah Mitchell, MLC, the Hon Mark Banasiak MLC and the Hon Aileen McDonald MLC requesting a meeting of Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW to consider a proposed self-reference into the impact of the phaseout of Australian live sheep exports by sea on New South Wales
- 23 July 2024 – Letter from the Hon Mark Banasiak MLC, Hon Sarah Mitchell, MLC, and the Hon Aileen McDonald MLC requesting a meeting of Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional

NSW to consider a proposed self-reference into Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ's) on Rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

- 24 July 2024 – Email from Mr Michael Sheehy, Detective Chief Superintendent – Chief of Staff, NSW Police, to the secretariat, requesting further information regarding the Turner allegations, for the inquiry into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979)*
- 24 July 2024 – Email from Ms Amanda Gray, Chief Inspector, Animal Welfare League with report of inspection of property belonging to Ms Suzette Turner, for the inquiry into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979)*.

Sent:

- 11 July 2024 – Email from the secretariat to Ms Suzette Turner regarding whether she would provide a written response to adverse mention of her at the hearing on 27 May 2024, for the inquiry into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979)*
- 23 July 2024 – Letter from the Chair to Ms Karen Webb, NSW Police Commissioner regarding allegations made about Ms Suzette Turner during the POCTAA hearing on 27 May 2024, for the inquiry into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979)*
- 23 July 2024 – Letter from the Chair to Mr Stephen Albin, CEO, Animal Welfare League regarding allegations made about Ms Suzette Turner during the POCTAA hearing on 27 May 2024, for the inquiry into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979)*
- 23 July 2024 – Email from the secretariat to Ms Amanda Grey, Chief Inspector, AWL regarding the Turner allegations, for the inquiry into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979).*

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Murphy: That the committee keep confidential the following items of correspondence due to identifying/sensitive information of *in camera* witnesses:

- Emails from Witness H received 18 July 2024 and 21 July 2024
- Email from Witness D received 19 July 2024.

4. Inquiry into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979)*

4.1 Correspondence from NSW Police

The committee considered the request by the NSW Police for more information about the allegations the committee had referred to NSW Police.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Hurst: That the secretariat contact the *in camera* witness who provided the information to see if they would be willing for the secretariat to provide their contact details to the NSW Police.

4.2 Inquiry next steps

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: that the secretariat canvass potential dates for a half day hearing after 15 August, and that the Chair report to the House an extension of the reporting date for the inquiry until 30 November 2024.

5. Consideration of terms of reference - Impact of the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports by sea on New South Wales

The Chair tabled a letter proposing the following self-reference:

That Portfolio Committee No. 4 - Regional NSW inquire into and report on the impact of the phase- out of Australian live sheep exports by sea on New South Wales, considering the

economic and social implications of such a phase-out on regional New South Wales communities, and in particular:

(a) evaluate the economic impact of phasing out live sheep exports on New South Wales sheep producers and related supply chains in regional towns, including:

  (i) transport operators

  (ii) fodder and grain producers

  (iii) other associated industries

(b) evaluate the impact on the sheep industry in New South Wales if farmers are unable to restock with animals from Western Australia (WA)

(c) evaluate the price implications on New South Wales sheep and lamb producers of having stock from WA regularly sold at our sales

(d) examine whether the phase-out of live sheep exports by sea will have any impact on NSW Government revenue and bottom line

(e) examine potential implications in demand for New South Wales mutton after the phase out of the live sheep trade

(f) examine reasons used by the Federal Government for the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports by sea and whether the Federal Government should provide compensation to New South Wales sheep producers

(g) examine animal welfare standards relating to live sheep export including any information used in the determination to cease live sheep export by sea by the Federal Government

(h) examine the impact to local meat processors

(i) examine proven alternative markets and opportunities for New South Wales sheep producers

(j) explore the social and community impacts of income loss for New South Wales sheep producers, including the evaluation of support mechanisms for affected communities and workers

(k) analysis of potential economic losses from the phase-out and the impact on employment across regional New South Wales, including but not limited to transport, contract musterers and veterinary suppliers

(l) identify case studies of graziers in other regions or countries that have successfully transitioned from live exports, and

(m) examine alternative income streams for New South Wales sheep producers

(n) any other related matters.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Hurst: That the committee adopt the terms of reference with the following amendments:

- in the first paragraph, insert 'and the animal welfare considerations relevant to the phase-out' after 'regional New South Wales communities'
- in paragraph (g), omit 'standards relating to live sheep export including any information used in' and insert instead 'concerns relevant to'
- insert after paragraph (m) the following new paragraph: 'examine community views in New South Wales of the live export industry'.

6. Conduct of the inquiry into the impact of the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports by sea on New South Wales

6.1 Proposed timeline

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee adopt the following timeline for the administration of the inquiry:

- Submission closing date – Friday 20 September 2024
- Hearing(s) – One hearing and one reserve hearing date in October/November 2024
- Report tabling – February 2025.

6.2 Stakeholder list

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That:

- the secretariat circulate to members the Chair's proposed list of stakeholders to be invited to make a submission
- members have two days from when the Chair's proposed list is circulated to make amendments or nominate additional stakeholders
- the committee agree to the stakeholder list by email, unless a meeting of the committee is required to resolve any disagreement.

6.3 Approach to submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That, to enable significant efficiencies for members and the secretariat while maintaining the integrity of how submissions are treated, in the event that 50 or more individual submissions are received, the committee may adopt the following approach to processing short submissions:

- All submissions from individuals 250 words or less in length will:
  - have an individual submission number, and be published with the author's name or as name suppressed, or kept confidential, according to the author's request
  - be reviewed by the secretariat for adverse mention and sensitive/identifying information, in accordance with practice
  - be channelled into one single document to be published on the inquiry website
- All other submissions will be processed and published as normal.

6.4 Online questionnaire

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee use an online questionnaire to capture individuals' views, and that the draft questions be circulated to the committee for comment, with a meeting on request from any committee member if there is disagreement on the questions.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That:

- the committee not accept proformas
- the media release announcing the establishment of the inquiry and emails to stakeholders note that there will be an online questionnaire to capture individuals' views
- the closing date for the online questionnaire be [date]
- the following wording be included on the committee's website:
  - **Online questionnaire**

    Contributions to the inquiry may be made via the submissions tab below. The closing date for submissions is [date].

    Individual contributors may prefer to complete an online questionnaire rather than make a submission [insert link to online questionnaire]. The closing date for the online questionnaire is [date].

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the secretariat prepare a summary report of responses to the online questionnaire for publication on the website and use in the report, and that:

- the committee agree to publication of the report via email, unless a member raises any concerns
- individual responses be kept confidential on tabling.

7. Consideration of terms of reference - Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) on Rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

The Chair tabled a letter proposing the following self-reference:

That Portfolio Committee No. 4 - Regional NSW inquire into and report on the impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales, and in particular:

(a) the current and projected socioeconomic, cultural, agricultural and environmental impacts of projects within renewable energy zones in New South Wales including the cumulative impacts

(b) current and projected considerations needed with regards to fire risk, management and containment and potential implications on insurance for land holders and/or project proponents in and around Renewable Energy Zones (REZs)

(c) the historical, current and projected future financial costs associated with construction and maintenance of large scale projects within Renewable Energy Zones

(d) proposed compensation to regional New South Wales residents impacted by Renewable Energy Zone transmission lines

(i) adequacy of compensation currently being offered for hosting transmission lines

(ii) adequacy of the shared benefits being offered to neighbours of large scale renewable projects

(iii) financial impact of compensation on the state's economy

(iv) tax implications resulting from compensation received by impacted residents.

(e) adequacy, and management of voluntary planning agreements and payments made to the LGAs impacted by Renewable Energy Zones

(f) current and projected supply and demand levels of manufactured products, raw materials, and human resources required for completion of Renewable Energy Zones and their source

(g) projected impact on visitation to regional areas with renewable energy zones resulting from changes to land use

(h) suitable alternatives to traditional renewable energy sources such as large-scale wind and solar

(i) adequacy of community consultation and engagement in the development of Renewable Energy Zones, and associated projects

(j) how decommissioning bonds are currently managed and should be managed as part of large scale renewable projects

(k) the role and responsibility of the Net Zero Commission and Commissioner in addressing matters set out above

(l) any other related matters.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That the committee adopt the terms of reference.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs McDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Noes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

8. Conduct of the inquiry into the impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ's) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

8.1 Proposed timeline

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee adopt the following timeline for the administration of the inquiry:

- Submission closing date – 31 January 2025
- Hearing(s) – That the timeline for hearings be considered by the committee following the receipt of submissions.

8.2 Stakeholder list

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That:

- the secretariat circulate to members the Chair's proposed list of stakeholders to be invited to make a submission
- members have two days from when the Chair's proposed list is circulated to make amendments or nominate additional stakeholders
- the committee agree to the stakeholder list by email, unless a meeting of the committee is required to resolve any disagreement.

8.3 Approach to submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: Suggested resolution: That, to enable significant efficiencies for members and the secretariat while maintaining the integrity of how submissions are treated, in the event that 50 or more individual submissions are received, the committee may adopt the following approach to processing short submissions:

- All submissions from individuals 250 words or less in length will:
  - have an individual submission number, and be published with the author's name or as name suppressed, or kept confidential, according to the author's request
  - be reviewed by the secretariat for adverse mention and sensitive/identifying information, in accordance with practice
  - be channelled into one single document to be published on the inquiry website
- All other submissions will be processed and published as normal.

8.4 Online questionnaire

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee use an online questionnaire to capture individuals' views, and that the draft questions be circulated to the committee for comment, with a meeting on request from any committee member if there is disagreement on the questions.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That:

- the committee not accept proformas

- the media release announcing the establishment of the inquiry and emails to stakeholders note that there will be an online questionnaire to capture individuals' views
- the closing date for the online questionnaire be [date]
- the following wording be included on the committee's website:
    - **Online questionnaire**

      Contributions to the inquiry may be made via the submissions tab below. The closing date for submissions is [date].

      Individual contributors may prefer to complete an online questionnaire rather than make a submission [insert link to online questionnaire]. The closing date for the online questionnaire is [date].

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the secretariat prepare a summary report of responses to the online questionnaire for publication on the website and use in the report, and that:

- the committee agree to publication of the report via email, unless a member raises any concerns
- individual responses be kept confidential on tabling.

9. Adjournment

Adjourned at 4.27 pm, *sine die.*

Peta Leemen
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 24
Tuesday 27 August 2024
Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW
Jubilee Room, Parliament House, Sydney, 9.00 am

1. Members present

Mr Banasiak, *Chair* (until 10.00 am, from 10.43 am)
Ms Hurst, *Deputy Chair*
Mr Donnelly
Ms Faehrmann (participating) (from 11.17 am until 12.48 pm, from 3.45 pm until 4.28 pm)
Mr Fang (substituting for Mrs MacDonald)
Mr Farraway (substituting for Mrs Mitchell) (until 4.36 pm)
Ms Higginson (participating)
Mr Lawrence (substituting for Mr Primrose)
Mr Murphy

2. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Hurst: That draft minutes no. 21 be confirmed.

3. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 2 August 2024 – Email from Tina Flakas, office of Hon. Stephen Kamper MP, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Lands and Property, Minister for Multiculturalism and Minister for Sport providing Minister Kamper's proposed amendments to the witness list for PC4 Budget Estimates hearing for his portfolios, 28 August 2024
- 2 August 2024 – Further email from Tina Flakas, office of Hon. Stephen Kamper MP, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Lands and Property, Minister for Multiculturalism and Minister for Sport providing further detail about Minister Kamper's proposed amendments to the witness list for PC4 Budget Estimates hearing for his portfolios, 28 August 2024
- 7 August 2024 – Letter from the Hon Sam Farraway MLC, to Chair, requesting that the committee hold hearings in Wellington and Mudgee as part of the inquiry into Renewable Energy Zones
- 9 August 2024 – Email from Jessica Malnersic, office of Hon. Tara Moriarty MLC, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional New South Wales, Minister for Western New South Wales providing the Minister's proposed amendments to the witness list for the PC4 Budget Estimates hearing for her portfolios, 27 August 2024
- 12 August 2024 – Email from Phillipa Gately, Office of the Secretary, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) advising that Ms Kiersten Fishburn, Secretary, DPHI seeks leave from Budget Estimates hearing for Minister Kamper's portfolios on 28 August 2024 from 3.20 pm to 4.45 pm
- 15 August 2024 – Email from Jessica Malnersic, office of Hon. Tara Moriarty MLC, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional New South Wales, Minister for Western New South Wales providing a further proposed amendment of the Minister to the witness list for the PC4 Budget Estimates hearing for her portfolios, 27 August 2024
- 20 August 2024 – Email from Jessica Malnersic, office of Hon. Tara Moriarty MLC, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional New South Wales, Minister for Western New South Wales providing the Minister's further feedback on the witness list for the PC4 Budget Estimates hearing for her portfolios, 27 August 2024.

Sent

- 2 August 2024 – Email to Hon Tara Moriarty MLC, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional New South Wales, Minister for Western New South Wales inviting her to appear at PC4 Budget Estimates hearing for the Minister's portfolios and attaching witness list agreed to by the committee
- 2 August 2024 – Email to Hon Stephen Kamper MP, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Lands and Property, Minister for Multiculturalism and Minister for Sport, inviting him to appear at PC4 Budget Estimates hearings for the Minister's portfolios, 28 August 2024, and attaching witness list agreed to by the committee
- 19 August 2024 – Email to Hon. Tara Moriarty MLC, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional New South Wales, Minister for Western New South Wales advising that committee would like to insist on the appearance of Dr Jacqueline Tracey and Ms Harriet Whyte before PC4 Budget Estimates hearing for Minister Moriarty's portfolios, 27 August 2024.

4. Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2024-2025

4.1 Order of examination of portfolios

The committee noted that under the Budget Estimates 2024-2025 resolution:

(a) each portfolio, except The Legislature is to be examined concurrently by opposition and crossbench members only from 9.15 am to 10.45 am, 11.15 am to 12.45 pm, 2.00 pm to 3.30 pm and 3.45 pm to 5.15 pm, and, if required, by Government members only from 10.45 am to 11.00 am, 12.45 pm to 1.00 pm, and 5.15 pm to 5.30 pm.

4.2 Sequence of questions

The committee to noted that under the Budget Estimates 2024-2025 resolution, unless the committee decides otherwise, the sequence of questions to be asked at the hearing for the portfolios of Agriculture, Regional New South Wales, Western New South Wales is to alternate between crossbench and opposition members, in that order, with equal time allocated to each.

4.3 Public hearing - Agriculture, Regional New South Wales, Western New South Wales (Moriarty)

Witnesses, the public and the media were admitted.

The Hon Tara Moriarty MLC, Minister for Agriculture, Regional New South Wales, Western New South Wales was admitted.

The Chair made an opening statement regarding parliamentary privilege and other matters. The Chair noted that Members of Parliament swear an oath to their office, and therefore do not need to be sworn prior to giving evidence before a committee.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Steve Orr, Secretary, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Mr James Bolton, Deputy Secretary Regional Development & Delivery, Chief Executive Regional Growth NSW Development Corporation, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Ms Rachel Connell, Deputy Secretary, Agriculture and Biosecurity, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Mr Sean Sloan, Deputy Secretary, Fisheries and Forestry, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Mr Rob Kelly, Executive Director Regional Delivery, Local Land Services, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Dr Adam Tyndall, Executive Director, Strategy, Media and Ministerial Services, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Dr Lisa Szabo, Acting Executive Director, Biosecurity and Food Safety, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Mr David McPherson, Executive Director, Forestry and Land Reform, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Dr Kim Filmer, Chief Animal Welfare Officer, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Mr Anshul Chaudhary, Chief Executive Officer, Forestry Corporation of NSW
- Ms Kate Lorimer-Ward, Chief Executive Officer, Local Land Services, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

The Chair declared the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Agriculture, Regional New South Wales, Western New South Wales open for examination.

Mr Farraway tabled the following documents:

- Media article by James O'Doherty entitled "Border position under scrutiny: Top Not given plum role", undated, together with X (formerly Twitter) posts of the Hon Tara Moriarty MLC, dated 5 August 2023
- LinkedIn experience extraction for Dr Marion Healy PSM, undated.

The Chair left the meeting.

In the absence of the Chair, the Deputy Chair took the Chair for the purposes of the meeting.

Ms Hurst tabled the following document:

- Eight photographs of dogs in captivity.

The Chair re-joined the meeting and took the Chair.

The Minister withdrew at 12.48 pm.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined (2.00 pm):

- Mr Peter Turnell, Acting Executive Director, Fisheries, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Ms Kate Meagher, Deputy Secretary Community Engagement Group, Premier's Department
- Dr Jacqueline Tracey, Executive Director Policy, Local Land Services, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (*via videoconference*)
- Ms Harriet Whyte, Executive Director, Regional Programs and Partnerships, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The public hearing concluded at 5.24 pm. The public and the media withdrew.

4.4 Tabled documents

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That the committee accept and publish the following documents tabled during the public hearing:

- Media article by James O'Doherty entitled "Border position under scrutiny: Top Not given plum role", undated, together with X (formerly Twitter) posts of the Hon Tara Moriarty MLC, dated 5 August 2023, tabled by Mr Farraway
- LinkedIn experience extraction for Dr Marion Healy PSM, undated, tabled by Mr Farraway
- Eight photographs of dogs in captivity, tabled by Ms Hurst.

5. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 5.26 pm, until Wednesday 28 August 2024, 9.00 am, Jubilee Room, Parliament House, Budget Estimates 2024-2025 – Small Business, Lands and Property, Multiculturalism, Sport (public hearing).

Emma Rogerson
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 33
Friday 21 March 2025
Portfolio Committee 4 – Regional NSW
Room 1136, Parliament House, Sydney, 9.32 am

1. Members present

Mr Banasiak, *Chair*
Ms Hurst, *Deputy Chair*
Mr Barrett (via videoconference)
Mr Donnelly
Mrs MacDonald (from 9.37 am until 9.40 am and from 9.41 am)
Mr Murphy
Mr Primrose

2. Apologies

Ms Boyd (participating)

3. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That draft minutes no. 30 be confirmed.

4. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 18 December 2024 – Letter from Mr Adam Dawes, General Manager, Wool Producers Australia, to the committee, clarifying his evidence from the public hearing on 18 December 2025 for the inquiry into the impact of the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports on New South Wales
- 27 January 2025 – Correspondence from Mr Nick Grant via the submission portal, inquiring about local wind turbines applications for the inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional New South Wales
- 14 February 2025 – Email from Ms Ewa Meyer, Convenor, Hunter Region Branch, Renew, requesting to redact parts of their submission for the inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional New South Wales.

The committee noted that it resolved via email to:

- publish the letter from Mr Adam Dawes, General Manager, Wool Producers Australia, to the committee, clarifying his evidence from the public hearing on 18 December 2025 for the inquiry into the impact of the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports on New South Wales, received 18 December 2024
- insert footnotes at the relevant points in the transcript noting that correspondence clarifying the evidence had been received and providing a hyperlink to the published correspondence.

5. Inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional New South Wales

5.1 Public submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Murphy: That the committee authorise the publication of submission nos. 4-5, 7-8a, 10-18, 20-50, 52-58, 60-71, 73, 75, 77, 80-83, 85-87, 89-93, 95, 97-98, 105, 107-112, 114-118, 121-128, 132, 134-139.

5.2 Partially confidential submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That the committee keep the following information confidential, as per the request of the author: names and/or identifying and sensitive information in submissions nos. 2-3, 6, 9, 72, 74, 76, 78-79, 84, 96, 99, 100, 102-104, 106, 113, 119-120, 129-130, 133.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly:

- That the committee authorise the publication of submission nos. 51 and 59, with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information which are to remain confidential, as per the request of the author.
- That the committee authorise the publication of submission no. 94, with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information which are to remain confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat.

5.3 Confidential submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Murphy: That the committee keep submission nos. 1, 19, 88, 101 and 131 confidential, as per the request of the author.

6. Inquiry into the impact of the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports by sea on New South Wales

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7. Next meeting

The committee adjourned at 10.02 am, until Tuesday 13 May 2025.

Frances Arguelles
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 34
Tuesday 13 May 2025
Portfolio Committee 4 – Regional NSW
Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney, 8:53 am

1. Members present

Mr Banasiak, *Chair*
Ms Hurst, *Deputy Chair* (via videoconference)
Ms Boyd (participating) (via videoconference)
Mr Lawrence substituting for Mr Primrose from 9.00 am to 10.30 am
Mrs MacDonald
Mrs Mitchell from 8.57 am
Mr Murphy
Mr Primrose from 11.30 am

2. Apologies

Mr Donnelly

3. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Murphy: That draft minutes no. 33 be confirmed.

4. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 8 August 2024 – Email from the Office of Ms Abigail Boyd nominating Ms Abigail Boyd as a participating member on the inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales
- August 2024 (with additional batches received in October and November 2024) – postal letters from various individuals addressed to the Hon. Paul Scully, Minister for Planning and Public Spaces regarding their objection to the New England REZ Transmission Project
- 27 March 2025 – Email from Mr Michael Holz, on behalf of the Singleton Solar Standoff Group, to the Chair offering their assistance if the committee visits the Hunter region for the inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales
- 31 March 2025 – Email from Vicki and Rene Wouters to the Chair, various government organisations and the media, stating that Ausgrid's submission to the inquiry into the

impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales was incorrect and misleading
- 4 April 2025 – Email from Vicki and Rene Wouters to the committee requesting to meet to discuss the Hunter Central Coast REZ upgrades
- 29 April 2025 – Email from Ms Lisa Penson, Economic Development Coordinator, Mid-Western Regional Council declining the invitation to appear at the Dubbo hearing
- 30 April 2025 – Email from Mr Adam Kay, Chief Executive Officer, Cotton Australia declining the invitation to appear at the hearing on 13 May 2025 as key staff are on leave, and requesting to appear at a later hearing
- 1 May 2025 – Email from Ms Lisa Penson, Economic Development Coordinator, Mid-Western Regional Council accepting the invitation to appear at the Dubbo hearing
- 5 May 2025 – Email from Mr Peter Flowers, Head of Communications and External Affairs, APAC, Lightsource BP, declining the invitation to appear at the regional hearing in Dubbo on 16 May 2025
- 6 May 2025 – Email from Ms Anne Jones, landowner, declining the invitation to appear at the regional hearing in Dubbo on 16 May 2025
- 7 May 2025 – Email from Mr Adam Marshall, Senior Government Relations, Origin Energy declining the invitation to appear at the regional hearing in Dubbo on 16 May 2025.

Sent
- 30 April 2025 – Email from the secretariat to Ms Lisa Penson, Economic Development Coordinator, Mid-Western Regional Council requesting Council to reconsider their decision to attend the Dubbo hearing.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs MacDonald:

- That Ms Boyd as a participating member for the duration of the inquiry into the impact of REZ on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales be provided with copies of all committee papers and that all costs associated with her participation in the inquiry be covered by the committee.
- That the committee authorise the publication of correspondence from various individuals addressed to the Hon. Paul Scully, Minister for Planning and Public Spaces regarding their objection to the New England REZ Transmission Project as one document, dated August 2024, with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information.

5. Inquiry into the impact of REZ on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

5.1 Public submissions

The committee noted that the following submission was published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submission no. 140.

5.2 Inquiry timeline

The committee noted that, following the receipt of submissions, the committee has so far agreed via email to hold the following committee activities:

- 13 May – Sydney hearing
- 15 and 16 May – Regional visit to the Central West Orana region including site visits and a regional hearing
- 16 and 17 July – regional visit (location tbc).

5.3 Questionnaire summary

The committee noted that a summary report of the online questionnaire was published on the website under the authorisation of the resolution establishing the inquiry.

5.4 Supplementary questions

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs MacDonald: That members lodge supplementary questions with the committee clerk within five business days after receiving the transcript of 13 May hearing.

5.5 Public hearing

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs MacDonald: that the allocation of question to be asked at the hearing be left in the hands of the chair.

Witnesses, the public and the media were admitted at 9.03 am.

The Chair made an opening statement regarding the broadcasting of proceedings and other matters.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
- Mr Ash Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, Energy Corporation of NSW
- Mr Clay Preshaw, Executive Director, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
- Mr Matt Riley, Director, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
- Mr Anthony Hayes, Head of Regional Integration, Planning, Integration and Passenger, Transport for NSW
- Ms Suzie Matthews, Executive Director, Skills and Workforce Programs, NSW Department of Education
- Mr James Bolton, Deputy Secretary, Regional Development and Delivery, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Ms Nevenka Codevelle, Executive General Manager, AEMO Services
- Ms Melanie Koerner, General Manager – System Planning, Reporting & REZ Authorisation, AEMO Services
- Ms Janine Young, Ombudsman, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (via videoconference)
- Ms Stephanie Saill, Head of Energy Transition, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (via videoconference).

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Ms Meg McDonald, Interim Chair, Net Zero Commission
- Dr Will Rayward-Smith, Executive Director, Net Zero Commission
- Ms Alison Stone, NSW Agriculture Commissioner.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined:

- Dr Richard Parsons, Social Researcher.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Ian Barry, Landowner
- Ms Kathy Morris, Landowner
- Mr Ben Turner, Landowner.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Cr Claire Pontin, Vice President Regional/Rural, Local Government NSW (via videoconference)
- Mr David Reynolds, Chief Executive, Local Government NSW (via videoconference).

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Ms Marilyne Crestias, Head of Policy and Advocacy, Clean Energy Investor Group
- Dr Brad Smith, Policy and Advocacy Director, Nature Conservation Council NSW
- Ms Eve Altman, Clean Energy Campaigner, Nature Conservation Council NSW
- Ms Lu Allan, Advocacy Director, RE-Alliance.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Xavier Martin, President NSW Farmers
- Ms Rhiannon Heath, Policy Adviser, Environment, NSW Farmers.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Ms Leah Tucker, Senior Policy Manager, Energy and Infrastructure, Business NSW
- Mr Bob Hawes, CEO, Business Hunter, Business NSW
- Mr Andrew Abbey, Policy Director, NSW Minerals Council.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The public hearing concluded at 5.32 pm. The public and the media withdrew.

6. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 5.33 pm, until Thursday 15 May, 2025, 7.35am, Sydney Domestic Airport departure gate.

Frances Arguelles
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 35
Thursday, 15 May 2025
Portfolio Committee 4 – Regional NSW
Sydney Domestic Airport, 7.35 am, Thursday 15 May 2025

1. Members present

Mr Banasiak
Mrs MacDonald
Mrs Mitchell

Mr Primrose

2. Apologies

Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr, Murphy, Ms Boyd (participating)

3. Inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones in rural and regional industries and communities in New South Wales

3.1 Site visits – Central West Orana region

The committee attended Nigel Robert's property and was met by:

- Nigel & Emma Roberts, landowner.

Mr and Mrs Roberts gave a presentation on their property.

The committee conducted a tour of Mr and Mrs Robert's property, accompanied by Mr and Mrs Roberts.

The committee attended James and Amanda Bowman's property and was met by:

- James Bowman, landowner.
- Amanda Bowman, landowner.
- Kate Bowman, landowner.
- Jim Berry, farm manager.
- Emma Bowman, relative.

Mrs Amanda Bowman gave a presentation on their property.

The committee attended ACEREZ's site near Merotherie Road and was met by:

- Steve Masters, CEO, ACEREZ
- Robert Armstrong, Operations Director, ACEREZ
- Miranda Wood, Director Communications and Stakeholder Engagement, ACEREZ
- Grant Andersen, ACJV D&C Project Director, ACEREZ
- Tim Smith, ACJV D&C Project Manager, ACEREZ
- Brett Macauley, ACJV D&C Superintendent, ACEREZ
- Amer Hussein, Central-West Orana REZ Community and Place Director, EnergyCo

Mr Smith gave a presentation on the ACEREZ site.

The committee conducted a tour of the ACEREZ site, accompanied by Mr Masters, Mr Amstrong, Ms Wood, Mr Andersen, Mr Smith, Mr McCauley and Mr Hussein.

4. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 5.30 pm until Friday, 16 May 2025.

Frances Arguelles
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 36
Friday, 16 May 2025
Portfolio Committee 4 – Regional NSW
Dubbo Regional Council Chambers, corner of Church and Darling Streets, Dubbo, 9.15 am

1. Members present

Mr Banasiak, *Chair*
Ms Hurst, *Deputy Chair* (via videoconference)
Mrs MacDonald
Mrs Mitchell
Mr Murphy (via videoconference)
Mr Primrose

2. Apologies

Mr Donnelly, Ms Boyd (participating)

3. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 8 May 2025 – Email from Mr Peter Flowers, Head of Communication and External Affairs, APAC, Lightsource BP to secretariat, declining to host a site visit as part of the committee's visit in the Central West Orana region
- 9 May 2025 – Email from Ms Lily Habib, Project Director, Pacific Partnerships Pty Ltd, declining the invitation to appear at the regional hearing in Dubbo on 16 May 2025.

4. Inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones in rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

4.1 Public hearing

Sequence of questions

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the allocation of questions to be asked at the hearing be left in the hands of the Chair.

Witnesses, the public and the media were admitted at 9.29 am.

The Chair made an opening statement regarding the broadcasting of proceedings and other matters.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Murray Wood Chief Executive Officer, Dubbo Regional Council
- Mr Steven Jennings Director, Development and Environment, Dubbo Regional Council
- Mr Brad Cam General Manager, Midwestern Regional Council
- Mr Lindsay Mason General Manager, Warrumbungle Council
- Adjunct Prof Warwick Giblin FEIANZ, FRSN, Environmental Consultant to Warrumbungle Council.

Mr Cam tendered the following documents:

- Golden Highway Road Corridor Business Case, Connecting Orana – Hunter and Beyond, March 2024
- Map of Proposed State Significant Development prepared by Mid-Western Regional Council, March 2025
- Document titled 'EnergyCo Community and Employment Benefit Program'.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Grant Piper, AASM, DFSM, CWO REZist
- Mrs Annette Piper, Uarbry Tongy Lane Alliance

- Mr Terry Conn, Landowner
- Mrs Margaret Conn, Landowner.

Mrs Conn tendered the following document:
- Transcript of Meeting, re Valley of the Winds Wind Farm (SSD-10461) - EnergyCo & DPHI (Department of Planning, Housing & Infrastructure) Meeting, Independent Planning Commission, 16 April 2025.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Ms Emma Bowman, Landowner
- Ms Sally Edwards, Landowner
- Mr Nigel Roberts, Landowner.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Mrs Jane Hegarty Chair, Cassilis District Development Group
- Mrs Linda Gant, Committee member, Cassilis District Development Group
- Mr James Matthews, Executive Committee, Merriwa Cassilis Alliance
- Mr James Armstrong, Owner, Cassilis Park Merino Stud.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined:
- Mr Peter Rothwell Director, VRA Rescue.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Mr Steve Masters CEO, ACEREZ
- Mr Robert Armstrong, Operations Director, ACEREZ
- Mr Bart Sykes, Acting Head of Community and Regional Development, Squadron Energy.

Mr Sykes tendered the following document:
- Farm Insurance and Energy Infrastructure, Insurance Council of Australia, 14 May 2024.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Mr Stuart Hackney, Landowner
- Ms Sally Dent, Member, Three Rivers Landcare -
- Mr David Seis, Landowner and Member, Three Rivers Landcare.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The public hearing concluded at 4.08 pm. The public and the media withdrew.

Tendered documents

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee accept the following documents tendered during the public hearing:
- Golden Highway Road Corridor Business Case, Connecting Orana – Hunter and Beyond, March 2024

- Map of Proposed State Significant Development prepared by Mid-Western Regional Council, March 2025
- Document titled 'EnergyCo Community and Employment Benefit Program'
- Transcript of Meeting, re Valley of the Winds Wind Farm (SSD-10461) - EnergyCo & DPHI (Department of Planning, Housing & Infrastructure) Meeting, Independent Planning Commission, 16 April 2025
- Farm Insurance and Energy Infrastructure, Insurance Council of Australia, 14 May 2024.

5. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 4.09 pm until Wednesday, 16 July 2025.

Frances Arguelles
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 39
Wednesday, 16 July 2025
Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW
T3 Departure Lounge, Sydney Domestic Airport, 11.00 am

1. Members present

Mr Banasiak, *Chair*
Mrs Mitchell (from 2.50 pm)
Mr Murphy
Ms Munro (substituting for Mrs MacDonald)
Mr Primrose

2. Apologies

Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Ms Boyd (participating)

3. Inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones in rural and regional industries and communities in New South Wales

3.1 Site visits – New England region

The committee attended ACEN Australia's New England Solar Farm in Uralla and was met by:

- Mr Killian Wentrup, Head of Development
- Ms Sarah Donnan, NES Project Director in Construction and Engineering
- Mr Richard de Bruin, Site Manager – New England Solar
- Ms Robyn Doyle, WHS Advisor, Heritage and Grazing Liaison
- Mr Scott Green, Community Engagement and Communications Specialist – New England.

The committee conducted a tour of the ACEN site, accompanied by Mr Wentrup, Ms Donnan, Mr de Bruin, Ms Doyle and Mr Green.

The committee attended the properties of Dr John Peatfield and Mr Peter Dawson, off Thunderbolts Way, Uralla and was met by:

- Dr John Peatfield
- Mr Peter Dawson
- Mr Graham Heagney

- and Ms Kim Heagney.

Dr Peatfield and Mr Dawson gave a presentation on their property.

4. Adjournment
The committee adjourned at 5.45 pm until Thursday, 17 July 2025.

Frances Arguelles
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 40
Thursday, 17 July 2025
Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW
Auditorium, Armidale Bowling Club, 92-96 Dumaresq Street Armidale, 8.50 am

1. Members present
Mr Banasiak, *Chair*
Mrs Mitchell
Ms Munro (substituting for Mrs MacDonald)
Mr Murphy
Mr Primrose

2. Apologies
Mr Donnelly, Ms Boyd (participating)

3. Previous minutes
Resolved, on the motion of Mr Murphy: That draft minutes no. 34, 35, 36 be confirmed.

4. Correspondence
The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 11 May 2025 – Email from Mr Aaron Smith, advising that they can provide their negative experience with a renewable energy project to the committee
- 14 May 2025 – Email from Mr Michael Holz, on behalf of the Singleton Solar Standoff Group, to the Chair offering their assistance if the committee visits the Hunter region
- 17 May 2025 – Email from Mrs Amanda Bowman to the committee attaching her presentation to the committee during their site visit at her property
- 19 May 2025 – Email from Ms Kathy Morris to Mr Chris Dorahy, Research Advisor to the Hon. Mark Banasiak regarding her opening statement at the hearing on 13 May 2025
- 20 May 2025 – Email from Ms Sally Dent, Committee Member, Three Rivers Landcare, to the committee with photographs of the Solartop solar farm near Wellington
- 22 May 2025 – Email from Deyi Wu, Whip's Adviser, Office of the Hon. Chris Rath MLC, advising that the Hon. Jacqui Munro will substitute for Mrs MacDonald during 16 – 17 July regional visits
- 22 May 2025 – Letter from Mr Damien Timbs, Voice for Walcha, to the Chair offering their assistance to the committee's visit in the New England region
- 30 May 2025 – Letter from Mr Steve Masters, ACEREZ, CEO to the Chair responding to the Chair's letter regarding the committee's site visit at Merotherie Road and thanking the committee for the opportunity to appear at the public hearing on 16 May 2025

- 3 June 2025 – Email from Mr Mark Fogarty, ReD4NE, offering their assistance to the committee's visit in the New England region
- 8 June 2025 – Email from Mrs Margaret Conn, landowner, providing information supplementary to her appearance at the hearing on 16 May 2025
- 8 June 2025 – Email from Mr Terry Conn, landowner, providing information supplementary to his appearance at the hearing on 16 May 2025
- 12 June 2025 – Email from Ms Claudia Hodge, Community Power Agency, to the secretariat advising that they are unable to attend the hearing on 17 July 2025 and requests to attend a future hearing
- 16 June 2025 – Email from Ms Lara Lavers, Corporate Affairs and Stakeholder Functions, ACEN Australia, declining the invitation to appear at the hearing on 17 July 2025 and agreeing to host a site visit for the committee on Wednesday 16 July 2025
- 17 June 2025 – Letter from Mr Anthony Hayes, Head of Regional Integration, Transport for NSW to the committee, clarifying his evidence from the public hearing on 13 May 2025
- 19 June 2025 – Email from Mr Chris Betts, General Manager, Betts Transport to the secretariat advising that they are unable to attend the hearing on 17 July 2025 and requesting to attend a future hearing
- 24 June 2025 – Email from Mr Ryan Burton-Rae, Electorate Officer, Office of the Hon. Barnaby Joyce MP, advising that Mr Joyce will attend the Armidale hearing alongside Mr Aidan Morrison, Director, Energy Program, Centre for Independent Studies
- 25 June 2025 – Email from Mr Jamie Chivers, Managing Director, Someva Renewables to the secretariat advising that they are unable to attend the hearing on 17 July 2025 and requests to attend a future hearing
- 26 June 2025 – Email from Ms Caitlin Horan, Business & Operations Support, ACE Power declining the invitation to appear at the hearing on 17 July 2025
- 26 June 2025 – Letter from Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, clarifying his evidence from the public hearing on 13 May 2025
- 2 July 2025 – Email from Mr John Peatfield to the secretariat, declining the invitation to appear at the hearing on 17 July
- 4 July 2025 – Email from Mr Aidan Morrison, Director, Energy Program, Centre for Independent Studies, declining the invitation to appear at the hearing on 17 July 2025 and requesting to appear at a future Sydney hearing
- 4 July 2025 – Email from Dr Siri Gamage, Regional transport advocate to secretariat presenting a preliminary business case for the reinstatement of the Great Northern Railway Line: Armidale to Queensland Border.

Sent

- 22 May 2025 – Letter from the Chair to Mr and Mrs Roberts thanking them for hosting the committee at their property during the site visit on 16 May 2025
- 22 May 2025 – Letter from the Chair to Mrs Amanda Bowman thanking them for hosting the committee at their property during the site visit on 16 May 2025
- 22 May 2025 – Letter from the Chair to Mr Steve Masters, CEO, ACEREZ thanking them for hosting the committee at ACEREZ Merothorie Road site during the site visit on 16 May 2025.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Primrose: That the committee:

- authorise the publication of the following correspondence:
    - Ms Kathy Morris to Mr Chris Dorahy, Research Advisor to the Hon. Mark Banasiak regarding her opening statement, dated 19 May 2025

    - Mrs Margaret Conn, landowner, providing information supplementary to her appearance at the hearing on 16 May 2025, dated 8 June 2025
    - Mr Terry Conn, landowner, providing information supplementary to his appearance at the hearing on 16 May 2025, dated 8 June 2025.
- authorise the publication of the following correspondence with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information:
    - Mrs Amanda Bowman in relation to the committee's site visit at her property on 15 May 2025, dated 9 June 2025.
- authorise the publication of the following correspondence and insert footnotes at the relevant points in the transcript noting that correspondence clarifying the evidence had been received and providing a hyperlink to the published correspondence:
    - Mr Anthony Hayes, Head of Regional Integration, Transport for NSW to the committee, clarifying his evidence from the public hearing on 13 May 2025, dated 17 June 2025
    - Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water to the committee, clarifying his evidence from the public hearing on 13 May 2025, dated 26 June 2025.
- keep the email from Mr John Peatfield of 2 July 2025 declining to appear as a witness confidential as it contains sensitive information.

5. Inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

5.1 Submissions

The committee noted that the following submission was published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submission no. 141, 142, 143, 144, 146, 147.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell, that the committee authorise the publication of submission no. 149 and 151.

5.2 Confidential submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Primrose, that submission no. 145 be kept confidential.

5.3 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The following answers to questions on notice were published under the resolution appointing the committee:

- Answers to supplementary questions from Mr Ian Barry, landowner, received on 8 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Ms Jane Hegarty, Chair, Cassilis District Development Group, received on 26 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Ms Kathy Morris, landowner, received on 16 June 2025
- Answers to answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Mr Lindsay Mason, General Manager, Warrumbungle Shire Council, received on 13 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Mr Brad Cam, General Manager, Mid-Western Regional Council, received on 16 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Ms Marilyn Crestias, Head of Policy and Advocacy, Clean Energy Investor Group, received on 17 June 2025
- Answers to questions on notice and answers to supplementary questions from Dr Will Rayward-Smith, Executive Director, Net Zero Commission, received on 19 June 2025

- Answers to questions on notice and answers to supplementary questions from Mayor Phyllis Miller OAM, President, Local Government NSW, received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Ms Janine Young, Ombudsman & Chief Executive Officer, Energy & Water Ombudsman received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Mr Nigel Roberts, landowner, received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Mr James Matthews, Executive Committee Member, Merriwa Cassilis Alliance, received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Ms Rhiannon Heath, Environmental Policy Officer, NSW Farmers received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Ms Sally Edwards, Past community representative/community development coordinator received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to question on notice and supplementary questions from Mr Daniel Newlan, EGM Corporate Relations and Community, for and behalf of Squadron Energy received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Ms Alison Stone, Agriculture Commissioner, received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to question on notice and supplementary questions from Mr Steve Masters, CEO ACEREZ received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Ms Emma Bowman, landowner received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to question on notice from Mr Pete Rothwell, Director, VRA Rescue, received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Mrs Annette Piper, Secretary, Uarbry Tongy Lane Alliance received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Mr Grant Piper, Secretary, Chair, CWO REZist, received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Ms Suzie Matthews, Executive Director Skills and Workforce Programs, NSW Department of Education, received 27 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Mr Andrew Abbey, Policy Director, NSW Minerals Council received on 2 July 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Ms Eve Altman, Clean Energy Campaigner, Nature Conservation Council, received on 3 July 2025
- Answers to questions taken on notice and responses to supplementary questions, from NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water and Energy Corporation of NSW received on 3 July 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Mr Steven Jennings, Director Development and Environment, Dubbo Regional Council, received on 3 July 2025
- Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure received 3 July 2025.

The committee noted that some post-hearing responses provided extensive attachments and that the secretariat has yet to properly reviewed the attachments for sensitive or identifying material, or adverse mention. As agreed to by the committee by email, the attachments remain confidential until the secretariat has reviewed them. The secretariat will advise the committee once they are ready for publication in due course. The attachments are available for members upon request.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee authorise the publication of the following correspondence with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information:

- Answers to supplementary questions from Mr Grant Piper, Secretary, Chair, CWO REZist, received on 19 June 2025.

5.4 Public hearing

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the allocation of questions to be asked at the hearing be left in the hands of the Chair.

Witnesses, the public and the media were admitted at 9.00 am.

The Chair made an opening statement regarding the broadcasting of proceedings and other matters.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Cr Sam Coupland, Mayor, Armidale Regional Council
- Mr Stephen Wood, Senior Strategic Planner, Armidale Regional Council
- Mr James Pryor, Senior Strategic Planner, Armidale Regional Council
- Cr Robert Bell, Mayor, Uralla Shire Council
- Ms Emily Sims, Planning Officer – Strategic, Uralla Shire Council.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Mr Jordan Kirk, Renewable Energy Project Co-ordinator, Tamworth Regional Council
- Mr Sam Lobsey, Manager, Development Division, Liveable Communities, Tamworth Regional Council
- Cr Eric Noakes, Mayor, Walcha Council
- Mr Alan Butler, Acting General Manager, Walcha Council.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness were sworn and examined:
- The Hon Barnaby Joyce MP, Member for New England, Parliament of Australia.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Ms Annette Kilarr, Convenor, Climate Action Armidale of Sustainable Living Armidale
- Dr Sanaz Alian, Renewable Energy, Education, Advocacy and Community Health (REEACH) group of Sustainable Living Armidale.

Dr Alian tendered the following document:
- 'Renewable Energy Zones and Engagement', research project proposal as funded by the University of New England Internal Funding Scheme for Early Career Researchers.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Mr Cameron Greig, Member, Voice for Walcha
- Mr Damien Timbs, Member, Voice for Walcha
- Mr Tim White, President, Valley Alliance.

Mr White tendered the following document:
- 'Submission notes from the presentations made by Cameron Greig and Damien Timbs – Voice for Walcha', Armidale, dated 17 July 2025.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Mr Peter Dawson, Property owner, Salisbury Plains

- Mrs Karen Zirkler, Regenerative Agriculture Grazier, Kentucky district
- Mrs Selena Sylvester, Hills of Gold Preservation Inc.

Mrs Sylvester tendered the following document:
- Hills of Gold Preservation Inc supporting document, dated 17 July 2025.

Mrs Zirkler tendered the following documents:
- Presentation titled 'Living in an EIS environment', dated 31 August 2022
- Presentation to the NSW IPC Thunderbolt Wind Farm proposal by Neoen, dated March 2024
- Submission to the Independent Planning Commission on Thunderbold Wind Farm SSD-10807896, dated 12 April 2024.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Mr Mark Fogarty, Director, Bushtricity – ReD4NE
- Ms Susan Newey, Chair, ReD4NE
- Mr Antony (Tony) Menkens,
- Mr Stuart Grills, Property owner.

Mr Fogarty tendered the following documents:
- Document titled 'The Cumulative Effect', including a map of the New England region and a list of in progress and proposed renewable projects in the region as at 16 July 2025
- Document titled 'Is the New England REZ Broken?' by ReD4NE.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The public hearing concluded at 3.05 pm. The public and the media withdrew.

Tendered documents

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Murphy:
- That the committee accept and publish the following documents tendered during the public hearing:
    - 'Renewable Energy Zones and Engagement', research project proposal as funded by the University of New England Internal Funding Scheme for Early Career Researchers
    - 'Submission notes from the presentations made by Cameron Greig and Damien Timbs – Voice for Walcha', Armidale, dated 17 July 2025
    - Hills of Gold Preservation Inc supporting document, dated 17 July 2025
    - Presentation titled 'Living in an EIS environment', dated 31 August 2022
    - Presentation to the NSW IPC Thunderbolt Wind Farm proposal by Neoen, dated March 2024
    - Document titled 'The Cumulative Effect', including a map of the New England region and a list of in progress and proposed renewable projects in the region as at 16 July 2025
    - Document titled 'Is the New England REZ Broken?' by ReD4NE.
- The committee to accept and publish the following documents tendered during the public hearing with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information:
    - Submission to the Independent Planning Commission on Thunderbolt Wind Farm SSD-10807896, dated 12 April 2024.

6. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 3.10 pm until Friday, 15 August 2025.

Frances Arguelles
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 42
Friday 15 August 2025
Portfolio Committee No. 4 - Regional NSW
Room 1043, Parliament House Sydney at 9.02 am

1. Members present
Mr Banasiak, *Chair*
Ms Hurst, *Deputy Chair*
Mr Donnelly
Mrs MacDonald
Mrs Mitchell
Mr Murphy
Mr Primrose (via videoconference)

2. Previous minutes
Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell that draft minutes 39 and 40 be confirmed.

3. Correspondence
The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received:
- 19 June 2025 – Email from Ms Emma Bowman providing additional information regarding her submission, for the inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional communities in New South Wales
- 16 July 2025 – Email from Mr Mark Robinson, Engineering Manager, MRC Strategies & Wild River Engineering, advising that he is unable to attend the hearing on 17 July 2025 due to flight delays, for the inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional communities in New South Wales
- 11 August 2025 – Email from Mr Edward McDougall, Office of the Hon Steve Kamper MP, responding to the committee's request that Mr Michael Tidball, Secretary, Department of Communities and Justice, attend the Budget Estimates 2025-2026 Lands and Property, Multiculturalism, Sports, Jobs and Tourism hearing on 20 August 2025.

Sent:
- 18 July 2025 – Letter from the Chair to Mr Killian Wentrup, ACEN Australia thanking them for hosting the committee at the New England Solar Farm during the site visit on 16 July 2025, for the inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional communities in New South Wales
- 18 July 2025 – Letter from the Chair to Dr John Peatfield thanking them for hosting the committee at their property during the site visit on 16 July 2025, for the inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional communities in New South Wales
- 18 July 2025 – Letter from the Chair to Mr Peter Dawson thanking them for hosting the committee during the site visit on 16 July 2025, for the inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional communities in New South Wales
- 11 August 2025 – Email to Mr Edward McDougall, Office of the Hon Steve Kamper MP, advising that the committee has considered the Minister's proposed amendments to the

witness list for the Budget Estimates 2025-2026 Lands and Property, Multiculturalism, Sports, Jobs and Tourism hearing on 20 August 2025 and maintains its request that Mr Michael Tidball, Secretary, Department of Communities and Justice, appear at the hearing.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Hurst: That the committee authorise the publication of the email from Ms Emma Bowman providing additional information regarding her submission, dated 18 June 2025, with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information.

4. Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2025-2026

4.1 Witness list – Lands and Property, Multiculturalism, Sports, Jobs and Tourism

The committee considered the appearance of Mr Michael Tidball, Secretary, Department of Communities and Justice at the Lands and Property, Multiculturalism, Sports, Jobs and Tourism (Kamper) hearing on 20 August 2025.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That Mr Michael Tidball, Secretary, Department of Communities and Justice, be required to appear at the Lands and Property, Multiculturalism, Sports, Jobs and Tourism hearing on 20 August 2025.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Noes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

5. Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

5.1 Public submissions

The committee noted that the following submissions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submission nos 148, 150, 152, 153.

5.2 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The committee noted that the following answers to questions on notice were published under the resolution appointing the committee:

- answers to supplementary questions from Ms Leah Tucker, Senior Policy Manager, Energy and Infrastructure, Business NSW received on 10 July 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Ms Lu Allen, Advocacy Director, Re-Alliance, received on 14 July 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Mr Cameron Greig, Voice for Walcha received on 30 July 2025.

5.3 Attachments to supplementary questions

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee authorise the publication of the following attachments to answers to supplementary questions

- Mr Brad Cam, General Manager Mid-Western Regional Council, received 16 June 2025
- Mrs Annette Piper, Chair, Secretary, Uarbry Tongy Lane Alliance, received 19 June 2025
- Ms Sally Edwards, past community representative / community development coordinator, received 19 June 2025.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee authorise the publication of the following attachments to supplementary questions with the exception of identifying/or sensitive material:

- Mr Grant Piper, Chair, CWO REZist, received 19 and 24 June 2025.

5.4 Inquiry timeline

The committee noted that the committee agreed via email to conduct a regional visit on 24 and 25 September 2025 to the Hunter and Central Coast region.

5.5 Consideration of Chair's draft interim report

The Chair submitted his draft report entitled 'The impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries – First Report', which having been previously circulated, was taken as being read.

Chapter 1

Ms Hurst moved: That the following paragraph by inserted after paragraph 1.74:

'Economic opportunities in response to environmental challenges

The Nature Conservation Council gave evidence about the economic, social and other benefits of renewable energy developments:

> 'The build of renewable energy through REZs is a once in a generation opportunity to transform rural and regional communities in [New South Wales] for the better through economic community benefits, the ability to diversify industry and income streams for farmers, and increased nature restoration and protection opportunities. Climate change poses one of the biggest risks to nature, through impacts including drought, bushfires, storms, ocean acidification, sea level rise and global warming. Many plants and animals cannot adapt to the effects of climate change. [New South Wales] has 1000 plant and animal species and ecological communities that are at risk of extinction due primarily to climate change and habitat destruction … We need to build renewable energy in a timely manner to reach our emissions reductions targets, minimise the impacts of climate change on our environment, provide reliable energy for our state, and bring down energy prices to alleviate cost of living pressures.' [FOOTNOTE: Submission 34, The Nature Conservation Council of NSW, Page 3.]

Question put and passed.

Chapter 2

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.13 be amended by omitting 'Most landowners' and inserting instead 'A significant number of landowners'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.33 be amended by omitting 'many individuals and some local councils' and inserting instead 'some individuals and local councils'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Donnelly moved: That:

(a) paragraph 2.38 be amended by omitting 'Indeed, the evidence presented by these stakeholders suggests that the CWO REZ has had widespread negative ramifications for communities in the CWO region.' and inserting instead 'The committee clearly understands that there are concerns in the community about the impact of the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone'.

(b) **Finding 1** be omitted: 'That a significant proportion of the Central-West Orana community believe the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone has negatively impacted the region.' and the following new finding be inserted instead:

> '**Finding 1**
> That there are concerns in the community about the impact of the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.40 be amended by inserting 'however, not all projects are guaranteed to proceed.' after '31 generation projects in the CWO REZ'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.41 be omitted: 'These concerns are well-founded, considering what appears to be the NSW Government's 'hands off' approach to managing the development and implementation of the CWO REZ. The committee concurs with the inquiry participants that the NSW Government's lack of central planning for the REZ has left smaller rural and regional communities, like the Central-West Orana, facing significant cumulative impacts on local infrastructure, such as roads, and services, like health services. Moreover, this is coupled with additional pressures, such as rising rents.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That paragraph 2.41 be amended by omitting 'These concerns are well-founded, considering what appears to be the NSW Government's 'hands off' approach to managing the development and implementation of the CWO REZ.'

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.42 be amended by omitting: 'before further projects are approved in the region. To this end, the committee recommends that the NSW Government place an urgent moratorium on further renewable energy projects in the CWO REZ until an independent cumulative impact study on the region is complete and any identified impacts have been addressed.' after 'to address any identified impacts'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That paragraph 2.42 be amended by inserting 'urgently' before 'address any identified impact'.

Question put and passed.

Ms Hurst moved: That paragraph 2.42 be amended by omitting 'before further projects are approved in the region.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Donnelly moved: That Finding 2 be omitted 'That there are 31 renewable projects in the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone which is well-above the ten awarded access rights by the NSW Government, leading to community concerns about the significant cumulative impacts in the region.' and the following new finding be inserted instead:

'Finding 2

That there are 31 renewable energy projects which have applied to the planning system inside the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone. Cumulative impacts are assessed in the planning system and not all projects are guaranteed to proceed, noting that this uncertainty is causing community concern'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That recommendation 1 be omitted: 'That the NSW Government place an urgent moratorium on further renewable energy projects in the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone until an independent cumulative impact study on the region is complete and any identified impacts have been addressed.' and the following new recommendation be inserted instead:

'Recommendation 1

That the NSW Government continue its work to address cumulative impacts associated with renewable energy development, including by releasing reports on cumulative impacts'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That Recommendation 1 be omitted: 'That the NSW Government place an urgent moratorium on further renewable energy projects in the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone until an independent cumulative impact study on the region is

complete and any identified impacts have been addressed.' and the following new recommendation be inserted instead:

'**Recommendation 1**

That the NSW Government urgently conduct an independent cumulative impact study on the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone and ensure identified impacts are addressed'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.43 be amended by inserting a new sentence at the end: 'However, others such as Mr Grant Piper, Chair of CWO REZist, described constant consultation leading to community fatigue.'[FOOTNOTE: Evidence, Mr Grant Piper, Chair, CWO REZist, 16 May 2025, p 10.]

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.50 be amended by inserting 'from some community members' after 'The committee heard'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.73 be amended by omitting 'overwhelming' before 'evidence of inadequate consultation'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.73 be amended by inserting 'that there have been cases' after 'evidence'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.74 be amended by omitting 'as there is continued angst and lack of trust from the individuals, families and the wider community regarding any their engagement process.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.74 be amended by omitting 'Moreover, this lack of trust undermines' and inserting instead 'A lack of trust can undermine'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.75 be amended by:

(a) omitting 'It is disappointing and disheartening, but not surprising, to hear' and inserting instead 'The committee notes with concern'.

(b) inserting 'some' before 'community members are experiencing'

(c) omitting 'The committee therefore recommends that EnergyCo provide mental health support to landowners who are affected the by CWO REZ.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That paragraph 2.75 be amended by:

(a) omitting 'and disheartening, but not surprising'

(b) inserting 'some' before 'community members are experiencing'

(c) omitting 'often compound the poor mental health of' and inserting instead 'already increase the risk of mental health concerns for'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That Finding 3 be omitted: 'That there has been inadequate consultation between the NSW Government, renewable energy developers and the Central-West Orana community. This has had significant repercussions, including, but not limited to, impacting the mental health of community members, eroding social cohesion and undermining the social licence of renewable energy operators in the region.' and the following new finding be inserted:

'**Finding 3**

While there has been consultation with the Central-West Orana community, issues have been identified with engagement practices. A number of community members who engaged with this inquiry reported impacts to mental health and social cohesion'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That Finding 4 be amended by:

(a) omitting 'real and pressing'

(b) omitting ', including the practice of agrivoltaics'

(c) omitting 'whether renewable energy development can successfully coexist with agricultural production' and inserting instead 'any impacts'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Ms Hurst moved: That the following new paragraphs be inserted after paragraph 2.136:

'In response to concerns regarding wildlife corridors, the Nature Conservation Council gave evidence that developing regional conservation priorities for each REZ would be an effective way to ensure wildlife corridors are protected:

> 'It's a really strong impetus to develop regional conservation priorities for each REZ. If those priorities are identified, it means that developers can take them into account when they're choosing where to site their projects, which is when you can have the biggest nature impacts, reducing community impacts and so on by choosing the right site. But to choose that right site you have to know what those regional conservation priorities are, and so you have to identify where are places that would make good wildlife corridors. We strongly think that those regional conservation priorities should be identified. We think local community groups should be involved in identifying those priorities because they know their local area. [FOOTNOTE: Evidence, Dr Brad Smith, Policy and Advocacy Director, Nature Conservation Council of NSW, 13 May 2025, p 53.]'

The Nature Conservation Council further gave evidence that the best way to protect the environment is to ensure New South Wales has robust nature laws across the board:

> 'There is always a risk that any form of development can negatively impact the environment. The best way to ensure our environment is properly protected is to strengthen [New South Wales'] nature laws and reform the planning system to increase nature positive developments, as recommended in the Independent Review of the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016. [Nature Conservation Council] has welcomed the important first step taken by the NSW Government in reforming our nature laws through the passage of the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Biodiversity Offsets Scheme) Bill 2024, though there is still a lot more work to be done. [FOOTNOTE: Submission 34, The Nature Conservation Council of NSW, p 6.]

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That a new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 2.142:

> The committee heard that current support for councils includes funding for additional staff and an allocation of $11.25 million per council. [FOOTENOTE: Evidence, Mr Ash Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, Energy Corporation of NSW, 13 May 2025, p 4].

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.144 be amended by omitting 'As previously mentioned, given that the NSW Government has not taken a leading role in the REZ development, we consider' and inserting instead 'The committee acknowledges'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.144 be amended by omitting 'been insufficient' and inserting instead 'not met expectations'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Donnelly moved: That Finding 6 be amended by omitting: 'which have been further compounded by insufficient NSW Government support, planning and oversight.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Ms Hurst moved: That the following new paragraph and recommendation be inserted after paragraph 2.147:

(a) In order to ensure key wildlife corridors and biodiversity are protected, the committee recommends that the NSW Government identify ecological protection and restoration priorities for each REZ and encourage developers to contribute to nature positive environmental regional outcomes.

(b) **Recommendation X**

That the NSW Government identify ecological protection and restoration priorities for each Renewable Energy Zone and encourage developers to contribute to nature positive environmental regional outcomes.

Question put and passed.

Ms Hurst moved: That the following new paragraph and recommendation be inserted after paragraph 2.147:

(a) The committee further recommends that the NSW Government take steps to strengthen nature laws and reform the planning system to increase nature positive developments.

(b) **Recommendation X**

That the NSW Government take steps to strengthen nature laws and reform the planning system to increase nature positive developments.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Donnelly, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That:

The draft report as amended be the report of the committee and that the committee present the report to the House;

The committee secretariat correct any typographical, grammatical and formatting errors prior to tabling;

The committee secretariat be authorised to update any committee comments where necessary to reflect changes to recommendations or new recommendations resolved by the committee;

Dissenting statements be provided to the secretariat within 24 hours after receipt of the draft minutes of the meeting;

The secretariat is tabling the report at Thursday, 21 August 2025;

The Chair to advise the secretariat and members if they intend to hold a press conference, and if so, the date and time.

6. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 10.08 am, until Wednesday, 20 August 2025, 9.15am, Jubilee Room, Parliament House (PC4 Budget Estimates).

Frances Arguelles
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 45
Wednesday 24 September 2025
Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW
Macquarie Street near security entrance, Parliament House, Sydney at 8.30 am

1. Members present

Mr Banasiak
Mr Donnelly
Mrs MacDonald
Mrs Mitchell
Mr Murphy

2. Apologies

Ms Boyd (participating)
Ms Hurst
Mr Primrose

3. Inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

3.1 Site visits

The committee attended the Waratah Super Battery Project operated by Akaysha Energy, and was met by:

- Mr Robbie Shankster, Waratah Site Manager, Akaysha Energy
- Mr Jordon Doss, Delivery Site Manager, Akaysha Energy
- Ms Jasmine Kerameas, Senior Community Engagement Manager, Akaysha Energy.

Mr Shankster and Ms Kerameas gave a presentation at the Waratah Super Battery Project site.

The committee then toured the Waratah Super Battery Project, accompanied by Mr Shankster and Mr Doss.

The committee subsequently attended the Hunter Net Zero Manufacturing Centre of Excellence, TAFE NSW Tighes Hill Campus, and was met by:

- Mr Adrian Collins, TAFE Services Manager Newcastle and Lake Macquarie
- Mr Andrew McKinnon, Head Teacher Engineering Trades, Fitting and Machining
- Mr Tim de Grauw, Teacher in Electrotechnology and Course Coordinator for TAFE NSW's Diploma of Renewable Energy Engineering.

The committee toured the Hunter Net Zero Manufacturing Centre of Excellence, TAFE NSW Tighes Hill Campus, accompanied by Mr Collins. Presentations on a summary of the courses provided to students were given by Mr McKinnon and Mr de Grauw.

The committee then attended the property of Mr Michael Holz, at Mitchell's Flat near Singleton, to learn about the potential impact of the renewable energy zone on properties in the region. The committee was met by:

- Mr Michael Holz, Resident and representing Singleton Solar Standoff community group
- Mrs Cheryl Holz, resident
- Mr Robert Martin, resident
- Mr Nigel Korff, resident.

Adjournment
The committee adjourned at 6.22 pm, until Thursday, 25 September 2025.

Frances Arguelles
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 46
Thursday 25 September 2025
Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW
Singleton Civic Centre, Singleton at 8.46 am

1. Members present
Mr Banasiak, Chair
Ms Hurst, Deputy Chair (via videoconference)
Ms Boyd (participating) (via videoconference)
Mr Donnelly
Mrs MacDonald
Mrs Mitchell
Mr Murphy
Mr Primrose (via videoconference)

2. Previous minutes
Resolved, on the motion of Mr Murphy: That:

- page six of draft minutes no. 42 be amended to read:

  Ms Hurst moved: That Recommendation 1 be omitted: 'That the NSW Government place an urgent moratorium on further renewable energy projects in the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone until an independent cumulative impact study on the

region is complete and any identified impacts have been addressed.' and the following new recommendation be inserted instead:

'Recommendation 1

That the NSW Government urgently conduct an independent cumulative impact study on the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone and ensure identified impacts are addressed'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs Mitchell.

- draft minutes no. 42, as amended, be confirmed
- the updated version of minutes no. 42 be included in the final report of the inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales.

3. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received:

- 13 June 2025 – Email from ACEN Renewables to secretariat, requesting redaction of names and role titles of ACEN Australia
- 19 August 2025 – Email from Ms Kathy Morris to Chair, attaching a presentation from EnergyCo, titled 'Hunter Central Coast Regional Reference Group' dated 4 August 2025
- 9 September 2025 – Email from Ms Sharon Turkington, Unit Manager, Strategic Planning, Central Coast Council to secretariat, declining the committee's invitation to appear at the upcoming hearing in Singleton
- 10 September 2025 - Email from Mr Wesley Hain, Manager Integrated Planning, Lake Macquarie City Council to secretariat, declining the invitation to appear at the regional hearing in Singleton scheduled on 25 September 2025
- 11 September 2025 – Email from the Lord Mayor Office, City of Newcastle to secretariat, declining the invitation to appear at the regional hearing in Singleton scheduled on 25 September 2025
- 11 September 2025 – Email from Mr Martin Johnson, Strategic Planning, Cessnock City Council to secretariat, declining the invitation to appear at the regional hearing in Singleton scheduled on 25 September 2025
- 11 September 2025 – Email from ACEN Renewables to the secretariat, requesting redaction of names and role titles of ACEN Australia employees
- 12 September 2025 – Email from Mr Brock Lamont, Strategy & Environment Section Manager, Port Stephens Council, declining the invitation to appear at the regional hearing in Singleton scheduled on 25 September 2025
- 15 September 2025 – Email from Mr Chris Betts, General Manager, Betts Transport declining the invitation to appear at the regional hearing in Singleton scheduled on 25 September 2025.

4. Inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

4.1 Correspondence from ACEN Renewables

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs MacDonald: That:

- the committee authorise the republication of submission 94, with the exception of previously redacted information as well as the names and titles of two ACEN employees, which are to remain confidential, as per the request of ACEN Renewables
- the names of the ACEN employees be redacted from the minutes.

4.2 Tendered document

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That the committee authorise the publication of the video from Mr Damien Timbs, Member, Voice for Walcha received 17 July 2025.

4.3 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions – public

The committee noted that the following answers to questions on notice were published under the resolution appointing the committee:

- answers to supplementary questions from Mr Peter Dawson, landowner, received on 12 August 2025
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Mr Robert Bell, Mayor, Uralla Shire Council, received on 13 August 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Mr Daniel Boyce, Chief Officer Planning and Activation, Armidale Regional Council, on behalf of Armidale Regional Council, received on 19 August 2025
- answers to supplementary questions and attachments from Ms Megan Trousdale, Secretary, Hills of Gold Preservation Inc, on behalf of Hills of Gold Preservation Inc. received on 19 August 2025
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Mr Jordan Kirk, Renewable Energy Project Coordinator, Tamworth Regional Council, received on 22 August 2025
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Ms Annette Kilarr and Dr Sanaz Alian, Climate Action and REEACH groups of Sustainable Living Armidale, received on 25 August 2025
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Mr Tim White, President, Valley Alliance received on 27 July 2025 and 6 September 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Mr Stuart Grills, Property Owner received on 8 September 2025.

4.4 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions – partially confidential

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee authorise the publication of answers to supplementary questions from Ms Karen Zirkler , Regenerative Agriculture Grazier, Kentucky district, received 20 August 2025 with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information which is to remain confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat.

4.5 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions – confidential

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That the committee keep the attachment to answers to supplementary questions from Mr Tim White, President, Valley Alliance received on 6 September 2025 confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat, as it contains sensitive information.

4.6 Inquiry timeline

The committee noted that the committee agreed via email to conduct a regional hearing on 29 October 2025 to the Illawarra region.

4.7 Public hearing

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the allocation of questions to be asked at the hearing be left in the hands of the Chair.

Witnesses, the public and the media were admitted at 9.00 am.

The Chair made an opening statement regarding the broadcasting of proceedings and other matters.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Trevor Ryan, Director, Planning and Environment, Dungog Shire Council
- Mr Justin Fitzpatrick-Barr, General Manager, Singleton Council
- Mrs Mary-Anne Crawford, Manager, Development and Environmental Services, Singleton Council
- Cr Jeff Drayton, Mayor, Muswellbrook Shire Council
- Mr Derek Finnigan, General Manager, Muswellbrook Shire Council
- Mr Ben Maddox, Coordinator, Sustainability Strategy and Education, Maitland City Council

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Timothy Jarratt, Ausgrid Group Executive Market Development & Strategy, Ausgrid
- Mr Daniel Sartor, Ausgrid Head of Major Projects, Ausgrid
- Mr Michael Johnson, General Manager, Community and Social Licence, Transgrid
- Mr Struan Wilson, Program Director – Hunter Transmission Project, Transgrid
- Mr Richard Poole, CEO, Verdant Earth Technologies
- Mr Costa Tsiolkas, General Manager, Verdant Earth Technologies.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Justin Page, Coordinator, Hunter Jobs Alliance
- Mr Tom Edwards, Research and Policy Officer, Unions NSW (via videoconference)
- Mr Matthew Murray, Member, Newcastle Branch Committee, Maritime Union of Australia
- Mr James Miranda, Policy & Research Officer, ETU NSW & ACT Branch Electrical Trades Union.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined:

- Dr John Shiel, Member, Renew – Hunter Region Branch.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Ms Kerry Atkins, NSW Policy Director, AMEC (Association of Mining Exploration Companies)
- Ms Paula Dell- McCumstie, NSW Policy Advisor, AMEC.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Michael Holz, Resident and representing Singleton Solar Standoff community group
- Mrs Myree Russell, Farmer/landholder.

The public hearing concluded at 3.30 pm. The public and the media withdrew.

5. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 3.31 pm until Wednesday 29 October 2025.

Frances Arguelles
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 47
29 October 2025
Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW
Victory Room, WIN Sports and Entertainment Centre, Corner Crown and Harbour Street, Wollongong at 10.15 am

s Hurst, *Deputy Chair* (via videoconference)
Mr Donnelly
Mrs MacDonald
Mrs Mitchell
Mr Murphy (via videoconference)
Mr Primrose

6. Apologies

Ms Boyd (participating)

7. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That draft minutes no. 45 and 46 be confirmed.

8. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 16 September 2025 – Email from Mrs Myree Russell to secretariat, requesting to submit a statement to be read at the hearing scheduled on 25 September 2025 and inviting the committee to visit her property, for the inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zone (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales
- 26 September 2025 – Email from the Office of Ms Abigail Boyd nominating Ms Abigail Boyd as a participating member on the 2025 inquiry into the operation of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979*
- 8 October 2025 – Email from Mr David Fitzgibbon, Acting Manager City Strategy, Wollongong City Council, on behalf of Wollongong City Council, declining to appear at the hearing on 29 October 2025, for the inquiry into the impact of REZ on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales
- 9 October 2025 – Email from Professor Ty Christopher, Director, Energy Futures Network, Innovation and Commercial Research Unit, University of Wollongong, declining to appear at the hearing on 29 October 2025, for the inquiry into the impact of REZ on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales
- 9 October 2025 – Email from Ms Tania Jones, Manager – Sustainable Market Development, Green Gravity, on behalf of Green Gravity, declining to appear at the hearing on 29 October 2025, for the inquiry into the impact of REZ on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales
- 10 October 2025 – Email from Mr Jim Fraser, Environment Manager, Shellharbour City Council, on behalf of Shellharbour City Council, declining to appear at the hearing on 29

October 2025, for the inquiry into the impact of REZ on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales
- 10 October 2025 – Email from Mr Justin Page, Coordinator, Hunter Jobs Alliance to the committee, clarifying his evidence from the public hearing on 25 September 2025
- 22 October 2025 – Email from Mr Michael Donnelly, President, Animal Care Australia Inc, to the committee raising concerns about the submission timeframe for the 2025 inquiry into the operation of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979*
- 28 October 2025 – Email from Mr Frank Musumeci, Managing Director, Better Choice Fisheries, declining to appear at the hearing on 29 October 2025 for the inquiry into the impact of REZ on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales.

Sent:
- 30 September 2025 – Letter from the Chair to Mr Robbie Shankster, Site Operations Manager, Waratah Super Battery Project, Akaysha Energy, thanking Akaysha Energy for hosting the committee at the Waratah Super Battery Project on 24 September 2025
- 30 September 2025 – Letter from the Chair to Mr Adrian Collins, TAFE Services Manager Newcastle and Lake Macquarie, TAFE NSW – Newcastle, thanking TAFE NSW for hosting the committee at TAFE NSW's Tighes Hill Campus on 24 September 2025
- 30 September 2025 – Letter from the Chair to Mr Michael Holz, landowner, thanking him for hosting the committee at his property on 24 September 2025.

9. Inquiry into the impact of REZ on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

9.1 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The committee noted that the following answers to questions on notice were published under the resolution appointing the committee:
- answers to supplementary questions and attachments from Ms Susan Newey, Chair, ReD4NE, received on 18 September 2025.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee authorise the publication of the answers to questions on notice provided by Ms Emma Ashton, Senior Manager Government and Stakeholder, Stakeholder Regulatory and Corporate Affairs, Transgrid, dated 23 October 2025.

9.2 Transcript clarification

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That the committee authorise the publication of the following correspondence and insert footnotes at the relevant points in the transcript dated 25 September 2025, noting that correspondence clarifying the evidence had been received and providing a hyperlink to the published correspondence:
- Mr Justin Page, Coordinator, Hunter Jobs Alliance to the committee, clarifying his evidence from the public hearing on 25 September 2025, dated 10 October 2025.

9.3 Public hearing

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs MacDonald: That the allocation of questions to be asked at the hearing be left in the hands of the Chair.

Witnesses, the public and the media were admitted.

The Chair made an opening statement regarding the broadcasting of proceedings and other matters.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Guy Chalkley, Chief Executive Officer, Endeavour Energy
- Ms Leanne Pickering, Chief Customer and Strategy Officer, Endeavour Energy.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined:

- Mr Mark Horne, Individual.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Alex O'Brien, President, Responsible Future, Illawarra Chapter
- Mrs Amanda De Lore, Vice President, Responsible Future, Illawarra Chapter
- Mr Jim Pinkerton, Consultant Power System Engineer and Past President of Electricity Engineers Association of NSW, Responsible Future, Illawarra Chapter.

Mr Pinkerton tendered the following documents:

- Document titled 'BVG Associates, Figure 16 Floating offshore wind dynamic cable system'
- Photograph of offshore substation.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Ms Madeleine Holme, Good for the Gong
- Ms Yael Stone, Founding Director, Hi Neighbour
- Mr Francis Vierboom, Chief Executive Officer, Rewiring Australia.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The public hearing concluded at 3.23 pm. The public and the media withdrew.

Tendered documents

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That the committee accept and publish the following documents tendered during the public hearing:

- Document titled 'BVG Associates, Figure 16 Floating offshore wind dynamic cable system'.
- Photograph of offshore substation.

10. Next meeting

The committee adjourned at 3.24 pm until *sine die*.

Frances Arguelles
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 48
Tuesday 17 February 2026
Portfolio Committee 4 – Regional NSW
Sydney Domestic Airport departure gate, Terminal 3, 8.40 am

1. Members present

Mr Banasiak, *Chair*
Mrs MacDonald

Mrs Mitchell
Mr Primrose

2. Apologies

Ms Boyd
Mr Donnelly
Ms Hurst, *Deputy Chair*
Mr Murphy

3. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 6 February 2026 – Email from the Office of the Hon. Chris Rath MLC advising that Mrs Aileen MacDonald MLC will be substituting for Mr Scott Barrett MLC for the duration of the inquiry into the impact of Renewable Energy Zones on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales.

4. Inquiry into the impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

4.1 Site visit – Dinawan sub-station, Bundure

The committee attended the Dinawan sub-station and adjoining workers accommodation camp and was met by:

- Michael Johnson, General Manager of Community and Social Legacy, Transgrid
- David Moore, Construction Manager, Transgrid
- Matt Hatty, Construction Manager, Transgrid
- Emma Van Bijon, Community and Stakeholder Manager – EnergyConnect, Transgrid
- Jim Hutchinson, Community and Stakeholder Lead – EnergyConnect, Transgrid
- Genny Murina, Community and Stakeholder Coordinator, Transgrid
- Nathan Menser, Community and Stakeholder Manager – VNI West, Transgrid
- Emma Ashton, Senior Manager Government Relations and Stakeholder, Transgrid
- Cameron Walters, Manager Government Relations, Transgrid
- Levi Joule, Senior Media Advisor, Transgrid
- Cliff Pistorious, Substation Construction Manager, Elecnor
- Andrew Hosi, HSE Partner, Elecnor
- Nathan Miller, Camp Coordinator, Elecnor.

The committee toured Dinawan sub-station, accompanied by the abovementioned Transgrid and Elecnor representatives, and participated in discussions about the capacity of the sub-station, as well as its impact on and contribution to the surrounding regions.

4.2 Site visit – Property of Mr Tom Hooke, Wanganella

The committee attended the property of Mr Tom Hooke at Wanganella, and was met by Mr Tom Hooke, resident. Mr Hooke provided a briefing on the potential impact of the South West REZ and related renewable energy projects on properties in the region.

5. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 6.30 pm, until 8.45 am Wednesday 18 February 2026 (public hearing for inquiry into the impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales).

Frances Arguelles

Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 49
Wednesday 18 February 2026
Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW
Hay Services Club, Hay, 8.45 am

1. Members present
Mr Banasiak, *Chair*
Mr Donnelly
Mrs MacDonald
Mrs Mitchell
Mr Murphy (via videoconference)
Mr Primrose

2. Previous minutes
Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That draft minutes no. 47 be confirmed.

3. Correspondence
The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 3 November 2025 – Email from Ms Ann Hare to the committee, requesting that the committee hold a public hearing in the South West REZ
- 3 November 2025 – Email from Ms Honey Hare to the committee, requesting that the committee hold a public hearing in the South West REZ
- 3 November 2025 – Email from Mr Gary Hare to the committee, requesting that the committee hold a public hearing in the South West REZ
- 4 November 2025 – Email from Ms Lynette LaBlack, Save our Surroundings Riverina and NREN, to the committee, requesting that the committee hold a public hearing in the South West REZ
- 21 November 2025 – Email from Mr Roydon Ng objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue
- 22 November 2025 – Email from Ms Sonja Feil objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue
- 22 November 2025 – Email from Jea hee Lee objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue
- 22 November 2025 – Email from Mr Michael Stanislas objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue
- 22 November 2025 – Email from Ms Nicole Neuss objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue
- 22 November 2025 – Email from Ms Marie Stanislas objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue

- 24 November 2025 – Email from Ms Annie Hong objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue
- 24 November 2025 – Email from Sam Chahrouk objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery *(previously circulated)*
- 24 November 2025 – Email from Mr Mohamed Hassan objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue
- 24 November 2025 – Email from Ms Phebe Fidge, Research Assistant, Centre for Nature Positive Solutions, STEM College, RMIT University, advising that she was unable to attend the hearing on 29 October 2025 as she was overseas
- 28 November 2025 - Letter from Mayor Ola Hamad, Mayor of Cumberland City Council advising that Cumberland City Council resolved to seek that PC4 undertake an inquiry into Metropolitan Memorial Parks' Carnarvon Golf Course Proposal
- 30 November 2025 – Email from Mr Ian Dittman objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue
- 30 November 2025 – Email from Mr Louise Lane objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue
- 7 December 2025 – Email from Zita Latorre objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue
- 11 December 2025 – Email from Ms Maria Dera objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue
- 11 December 2025 – Email from Mr Jeffrey Tan objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue
- 11 December 2025 – Email from Ms Patricia Tan objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery
- 14 December 2025 – Email from Ms Amy Deng objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue
- 14 December 2025 – Email from Bojiang Shen objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue
- 14 December 2025 – Email from Ms Glenda Yau objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue
- 14 December 2025 – Email from Mr Jack Nguy objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue
- 14 December 2025 – Email from Jie Shi objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue
- 14 December 2025 – Email from Ms Joanne Feng objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue

- 14 December 2025 – Email from Keqi Dou objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue
- 14 December 2025 – Email from Linong Guo objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue
- 14 December 2025 – Email from Mr Simon He objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue
- 14 December 2025 – Email from Wenfei Cac objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue
- 14 December 2025 – Email from Yan He objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue
- 20 January 2026 – Email from Ross objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery
- 21 January 2026 – Email from Lang Ngo objecting to the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery and request for a parliamentary inquiry into the issue
- 28 January 2026 - Email from Ms Lisa Tibbs, Manager, Government Relations (NSW), Origin Energy declining the invitation to appear at the regional hearing in Hay on 18 February 2026
- 30 January 2026 & 2 February 2026 – Email from Ms Emma Ashton Senior Manager Government and Stakeholder, Stakeholder Regulatory and Corporate Affairs, Transgrid, to the committee suggesting site visits for the committee to visit in the South West REZ and surrounds
- 2 February 2026 – Email from Mr Bryce Kilian, Director Sustainability and Growth, Murray River Council, declining witness invitation
- 2 February 2026 – Email from Mr Garry Stoll, Director of Planning & Infrastructure, Murrumbidgee Council, requesting that Murrumbidgee Council appear at the hearing in Hay on 18 February 2026
- 2 February 2026 – Email from Ms Felicity Stening, Director of Community and Government Engagement, Someva Renewables, declining witness invitation
- 4 February 2026 – Email from Marju Tonisson, Senior Communications Manager, Spark Renewables, declining witness invitation
- 10 February 2026 – Email from Jang Kim, Head of Development, Bayware RE, declining witness invitation.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That the committee defer consideration of the issues raised in correspondence about the Carnarvon Golf Course until its next meeting.

4. Inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

4.1 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The committee noted that the following answers to questions on notice were published under the resolution appointing the committee:

- answers to questions on notice from Ms Mary-Anne Crawford, Manager Development and Environmental Services, Singleton Council, received 23 October 2025
- answers to questions on notice from Ms Kerry Atkins, Director, New South Wales, Association of Mining and Exploration Companies, received 24 October 2025

- answers to questions on notice from Mr Marc Landrigan, Senior Government Relations Lead, Market Development & Strategy, Ausgrid, received 30 October 2025
- answers to questions on notice from Mr Vida Cheeseman, Head of Corporate Communications, Endeavour Energy, received 20 November 2025
- answers to questions on notice from Ms Yael Stone, Founding Director, Hi Neighbour, received 25 November 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Ms Madeleine Holme, Good for the Gong, received 28 November 2025.

4.2 Inquiry timeline

The committee noted that it previously agreed via email on 30 October 2025 to conduct the following activities:

- 17 to 18 February 2026 – South West REZ regional activity (overnight stay)
- 31 March 2026 – one day Sydney hearing.

4.3 Public hearing

Sequence of questions

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the allocation of questions to be asked at the hearing be left in the hands of the Chair.

Witnesses, the public and the media were admitted at 9.00 am.

The Chair made an opening statement regarding the broadcasting of proceedings and other matters.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Ms Alison McLean, Executive Manager – Economic Development and Tourism, Hay Shire Council
- Mr Jack Bond, Chief Executive Officer, Edward River Council
- Mr Garry Stoll, Director, Planning & Infrastructure, Murrumbidgee Council
- Mr Steven Parisotto, Senior Planner, Murrumbidgee Council

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Brett Stonestreet PSM, Interim Executive Officer, Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation (RAMJO)
- Mr Terry Dodds, Chair, RAMJO Energy Security and Affordability Committee and CEO, Balranald Shire Council
- Ms Hodi Beauliv Executive Manager, Governance & Economic Services, Balranald Shire Council.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Richard Coughlan, Secretary, Bundure District Landholders Group (BUNDL)
- Mr Andrew Browning, Committee member, BUNDL.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Michael Johnson, General Manager Community and Social Licence, Transgrid
- Mr Nathan Menser, Community and Stakeholder Manager, Transgrid.

Mrs Mitchell tabled Transgrid & Elecnor Australia, 'EnergyConnect Community Newsletter', dated Q4 2025 and EnergyConnect Project snapshot, Transgrid.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The public hearing concluded at 12.09 pm. The public and the media withdrew.

Tendered documents

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee accept and publish the following documents tabled during the public hearing:

- Document titled 'EnergyConnect Community Newsletter', Transgrid & Elecnor Australia dated Q4 2025
- Document titled 'EnergyConnect Project snapshot', Transgrid.

5. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 12.10 pm until Thursday 5 March 2026 (public hearing – Budget Estimates).

Frances Arguelles
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 52
Tuesday 31 March 2026
Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW
Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney at 8.47 am

1. Members present

Mr Banasiak, *Chair*
Mr Donnelly
Mr Fang (participating)
Dr Kaine (substituting for Mr Primrose from 9.00 am)
Mrs MacDonald (via videoconference)
Mrs Mitchell
Ms Suvaal (substituting for Mr Primrose until 9.00 am).

2. Apologies

Ms Boyd (participating), Ms Hurst.

3. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That draft minutes no. 48 and 49 be confirmed.

4. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 6 February 2026 – Email from Ms Nadia Repin, regarding the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery
- 16 February 2026 – Bundle of emails from Ms Lynette LaBlack to the committee, providing additional information in relation to the inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales
- 16 February 2026 – Email from Mrs Helen Dalton MP to the Chair, responding to the Chair's email informing them of the committee's visit to their electorate as part of the inquiry

into the impact of REZ on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales
- 17 February 2026 – Email from Mr Mark Abood to the committee, regarding the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery
- 5 March 2026 – Email from Mr Graeme Connors, regarding the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery
- 10 March 2026 – Email from Ms Kristy Walters, Policy & Engagement Officer, Energy Transition team, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) to the secretariat, advising that EWON intends to make a supplementary submission for the inquiry into the impact of REZ on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales and expressing interest in appearing at the upcoming hearing
- 11 March 2026 – Email from Mr Joe Abood, regarding the Metropolitan Memorial Parks' proposal to convert Carnarvon Golf Course in Lidcombe into a cemetery
- 16 March 2026 – Email from Ms Claudia Hodge, Community Power Agency to the committee, declining the invitation to appear at the hearing on 31 March 2026
- 17 March 2026 – Emails from Mr Stephen Bunney, Chair of the Abalone Industry Association, to the Chair, regarding the Budget Estimates hearing on 9 March 2026
- 18 March 2026 – Email from Ms Sonja Hewison, Policy Lawyer, The Law Society of New South Wales to the committee, declining the invitation to appear at the hearing on 31 March 2026
- 20 March 2026 – Email from Mr Tom Lunn, Director Insurance Lines, Insurance Council of Australia to the committee, declining the invitation to appear at the hearing on 31 March 2026
- 23 March 2026 – Email from Mr Douglas McCloskey, Program Director, Energy and Water Justice, Justice and Equity Centre to the committee, declining the invitation to appear at the hearing on 31 March 2026.

Sent
- 24 February 2026 - Letter from the Chair to Ms Emma Ashton, Senior Manager Government and Stakeholder, Stakeholder Regulatory and Corporate Affairs, Transgrid, thanking Transgrid for hosting the committee at the Dinawan sub-station and accommodation camp on 17 February 2026
- 24 February 2026 - Letter from the Chair to Mr Tom Hooke, landowner, thanking him for hosting the committee on his property near Wanganella on 17 February 2026.

5. Inquiry into the impact of REZ on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

5.1 Public submissions

The committee noted that the following submissions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: nos. 154 and 155.

5.2 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The committee noted that the following answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee:
- answers to supplementary questions from Mr Richard Coughlan, Secretary, Bundure District Landholders Group (BUNDL) and Mr Andrew Browning, Committee member, BUNDL, received 8 March 2026

- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Ms Alison McLean, Executive Manager – Economic Development and Tourism, Hay Shire Council, received 19 March 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Ms Emma Ashton, Senior Manager Government and Stakeholder, Stakeholder Regulatory and Corporate Affairs, Transgrid, received 20 March 2026.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee authorise the publication of the answers to supplementary questions provided by Mr Terry Dodds PSM, Chair, RAMJO Energy Sub-Committee, Chief Executive Officer, Balranald Shire Council, received 24 March 2026.

5.3 Public hearing

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the allocation of questions to be asked at the hearing be left in the hands of the Chair.

Witnesses, the public and the media were admitted at 9.00 am.

The Chair made an opening statement regarding the broadcasting of proceedings and other matters.

The following witnesses were examined on their former oath or affirmation:
- Ms Janine Young, Ombudsman, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW
- Ms Stephanie Saill, Head of Energy Transition, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW.

Ms Young tendered the following document:
- 'Renewable Energy Infrastructure Impact Report', Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined:
- Mr Aidan Morrison, Director, Energy Programs, Centre for Independent Studies.

Mr Morrison tendered the following documents:
- Document titled 'New England REZ transfer capacity claims'
- Submission to AEMO Draft 2024 ISP, Transgrid.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Ms Verity Morgan-Schmidt, Acting CEO, Farmers for Climate Action
- Mr Andrew Locke, Member, Farmers for Climate Action.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined:
- Mr Mark Robinson, Director, Wild Rivers Engineering.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Ms Saideh Kent, Program Director – Energy, The Next Economy
- Mr William Churchill, Chief Policy and Impact Officer, Clean Energy Council
- Mr Chris O'Keefe, National Spokesperson, Clean Energy Council.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Councillor Leeanne Hampton, Deputy Chairperson, NSW Aboriginal Land Council and Councillor for the Wiradjuri Region, NSW Aboriginal Land Council

- Councillor Charles Lynch, Councillor for the Northern Region, NSW Aboriginal Land Council.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined:
- Professor Ivan R. Kennedy AM FRACI CChem, Professor Emeritus in Agricultural and Environmental Chemistry, School of Life and Environmental Sciences, Institute of Agriculture, University of Sydney.

Professor Kennedy tendered the following documents:
- Document titled 'Evidence presented here is relevant to Terms of Reference (a), (b) and (h)'
- Bundle of articles.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Commissioner Jeremy Fewtrell, AFSM Commissioner, Fire & Rescue NSW
- Deputy Commissioner Ben Millington, Deputy Commissioner, Operational Coordination, NSW Rural Fire Service
- Chief Superintendent Laurence McCoy, Chief Superintendent and Manager Predictive Services, NSW Rural Fire Service.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were examined on their former oath or affirmation:
- Mr Ashley Albury, Executive Director, Planning & Communities, Energy Corporation of NSW
- Mr Anthony Hayes, Head of Regional Integration, Planning, Integration and Passenger Division, Transport for NSW
- Mr Clay Preshaw, Executive Director, Planning System Reform, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Mr Liam Ryan, Executive Director, Energy Infrastructure, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
- Ms Hannah McCaughey, Chief Executive Officer, Energy Corporation of NSW
- Mr Chris Ritchie, A/Executive Director, Energy and Resource Assessments, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The public hearing concluded at 5.06 pm. The public and the media withdrew.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That the committee accept and publish the following documents tendered during the public hearing:
- Renewable Energy Infrastructure Impact Report, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW
- Document titled 'New England REZ transfer capacity claims'
- Submission to AEMO Draft 2024 ISP, Transgrid
- Document titled 'Evidence presented here is relevant to Terms of Reference (a), (b) and (h)'.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That the committee accept the following documents tendered during the public hearing:
- Bundle of articles tendered by Professor Kennedy.

6. Adjournment
The committee adjourned at 5.08 pm until Thursday 2 April 2026.

Frances Arguelles
Committee Clerk

Draft minutes no. 55
Thursday 23 July 2026
Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW
Room 1043, Parliament House, Sydney, 10.02 am

1. Members present
Mr Banasiak, *Chair*
Ms Hurst, *Deputy Chair*
Mr Donnelly
Mrs MacDonald (via videoconference)
Mrs Mitchell
Mr Murphy (via videoconference)
Mr Primrose

2. Apologies
Ms Boyd

3. Previous minutes
Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That draft minutes no. 52 & 54 be confirmed.

4. Correspondence
The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 1 May 2026 – Correspondence from Ms Janine Young, Ombudsman & Chief Executive Officer, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) to the committee, clarifying her evidence from the public hearing on 31 March 2026 – see item 5.3.

5. Invitation to meet with Veterinary Specialists of Sydney

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the secretariat write to Mr Ben Gingold, Head of Surgery and Anaesthesia, Veterinary Specialists of Sydney, to suggest that he contact individual members of parliament who may be interested to discuss the reform of the veterinary complaints process in New South Wales.

6. Inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

6.1 Public Submissions

The committee noted that the following submissions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submissions no 156 and 157.

6.2 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The committee noted that the following answers to questions on notice were published under the resolution appointing the committee:

- answers to supplementary questions from Mr Terry Dodds, Chair, Energy Security and Affordability Committee, Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation, and Chief Executive Officer, Balranald Shire Council received 24 March 2026
- answers to supplementary questions from Mr Garry Stoll, Director, Planning & Infrastructure,
  Murrumbidgee Council received 1 April 2026
- answers to supplementary questions from Professor Ivan R. Kennedy AM FRACI CChem, Professor Emeritus in Agricultural and Environmental Chemistry, School of Life and Environmental Sciences, Institute of Agriculture, University of Sydney received 27 April 2026
- answers to supplementary questions from Farmers for Climate Action received 1 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Ms Stephanie Saill, Head of Energy Transition, EWON received 1 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water received 1 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Fire & Rescue NSW received 1 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from NSW Rural Fire Service received 6 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Mr Aidan Morrison, Director, Energy Program, Centre for Independent Studies received 6 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Mr William Churchill, Chief Policy and Impact Officer and Mr Chris O'Keefe, National Spokesperson, Clean Energy Council received 11 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from the NSW Aboriginal Land Council received 13 May 2026
- answers to supplementary questions from the Ms Saideh Kent Program Director, Energy, The Next Economy received 5 June 2026.

6.3 Transcript clarification

The committee noted that it previously agreed via email to:

- publish the correspondence from Ms Young, EWON, clarifying her evidence at the public hearing on 31 March 2026
- insert footnotes at the relevant points in the transcript dated 31 March 2026 noting that correspondence clarifying the evidence has been received and providing a hyperlink to the published correspondence:
  - Ms Janine Young, Ombudsman & Chief Executive Officer, EWON to the committee, clarifying her evidence from the public hearing on 31 March 2026, dated 1 May 2026.

6.4 ACEREZ statement regarding the destruction of the Mudgee rock shelter dated 25 May 2026

The Chair tabled the ACEREZ statement dated 25 May 2026 regarding the destruction of the Mudgee rock shelter.

6.5 Consideration of Chair's draft final report

The committee considered the Chair's final report, entitled 'Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales – Final report'.

Chapter 1

Mrs MacDonald moved: That the following new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 1.57:

'The committee recognises that the transition to a more diverse and secure energy system presents significant opportunities for New South Wales. Renewable Energy Zones have the potential to support investment, improve energy reliability, create employment, strengthen regional economies and contribute to the state's long-term energy security and emissions reduction objectives. Realising these benefits, however, depends upon effective planning, genuine community engagement and a coordinated whole-of-government approach that ensures regional communities share in the opportunities created by the transition'.

Question put and passed.

Mrs MacDonald moved: That the following new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 1.57:

'The committee notes that the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies represent an important step in identifying cumulative pressures associated with Renewable Energy Zones. However, stakeholders questioned whether the measures identified through those studies have been implemented consistently or at sufficient scale to address the impacts being experienced by regional communities'.

Question put and passed.

Chapter 2

Mrs MacDonald moved: That the following new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 2.21:

'While some stakeholders advocated for a reduction in the scale of Renewable Energy Zone development, other evidence received by the committee focused on improving strategic planning, sequencing, infrastructure coordination and community benefit arrangements to better manage impacts associated with the energy transition'.

Question put and passed.

Mrs MacDonald moved: That the following new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 2.43:

'The committee notes that the evidence also demonstrated that, where negotiations were undertaken in good faith and appropriate safeguards, compensation arrangements and community benefit mechanisms were established, some landholders reported more positive experiences. This highlights the importance of consistent standards and early engagement across all Renewable Energy Zone projects'.

Question put and passed.

Ms Hurst moved: That the following new paragraph and finding be inserted after paragraph 2.116:

'The committee recognises that REZs are an essential part of New South Wales' energy transition and supports their timely implementation. The committee also acknowledges that the success of the rollout depends on regional communities being meaningfully engaged, adequately supported and able to benefit from the transition. The challenge for the NSW Government is to achieve this balance without unnecessarily slowing the urgent transition to renewable energy. The committee

believes the Government can achieve this with a well-planned and properly supported rollout that will not only deliver the energy infrastructure New South Wales needs, but also strengthen community confidence in the transition and ensure its benefits are widely shared.

Finding X
Given Renewable Energy Zones are an essential part of New South Wales' energy transition, the NSW Government must find a way to deliver the Renewable Energy Zone rollout as a matter of urgency, while ensuring regional communities are meaningfully consulted, adequately supported through the transition, and able to share in its benefits'.

Question put**.**

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Ms Hurst moved: That Finding 1 be amended by omitting: 'industrialisation of regional landscapes over the protection of rural and regional communities, demonstrating a fundamental misalignment between state policy objectives and' and inserting instead 'implementation of REZs, sometimes at a cost to'.

Mr Primrose moved: That the motion of Ms Hurst be amended by also inserting a new sentence at the end of Finding 1: 'However, it is important to continue these measures to ensure the economic benefits, reliability and climate benefits'.

Amendment of Mr Primrose put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell,.

Amendment of Mr Primrose resolved in the affirmative.

Original question of Ms Hurst, as amended, put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Original question of Ms Hurst, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Finding 2 be omitted: 'The NSW Government has presided over the rollout of Renewable Energy Zones without a coherent, enforceable, whole-of-government planning framework, resulting in predictable and avoidable harm to rural and regional communities.' and the following new finding be inserted instead:

'The rollout of the renewable energy Zones required a whole of government planning framework that is predictable and avoids harm to rural and regional communities'.

Question put**.**

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Finding 3 be omitted: 'The adverse impacts of the Renewable Energy Zone development are not incidental or transitional, but structural and inherent to the current model.' and the following new finding be inserted instead:

> 'Renewable energy development poses a long-term change for some regional communities. There are challenges and opportunities to manage as a part of this to ensure that, on balance, it is a positive change with long lasting benefits.'

Question put**.**

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Finding 4 be omitted: 'The NSW Government has not exercised appropriate stewardship of the Renewable Energy Zone rollout, allowing the expansion of projects in the absence of coordinated planning, effective safeguards, and demonstrated community benefit.' and the following new finding be inserted instead:

> 'While there are strong coordination and community benefit measures within REZ boundaries there are improvements that could be made to planning, appropriate safeguards, and demonstrated community benefits.'

Question put**.**

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Ms Hurst moved: That:

a. paragraph 2.127 be omitted: 'Consequently, the committee recommends that the government impose an immediate moratorium on the approval of new generation projects across all REZs until independent cumulative impact assessments are completed for each REZ and binding mitigation measures are in place.' and the following new paragraph be inserted instead:

> 'Despite this, the committee also recognises the importance of moving towards renewable energy sources for the environment and for the benefit of regional and rural communities already experiencing the impacts of climate change. The committee therefore recommends that the government review each REZ and the impacts on each regional community affected while each REZ is rolled out'.

b. Recommendation 1 be omitted: 'That the NSW Government impose an immediate moratorium on the approval of new generation projects within existing Renewable Energy Zones until:

- independent cumulative impact assessments are completed for each zone
- binding mitigation measures are in place.'

and the following new recommendation be inserted instead:

'That the NSW Government review each Renewable Energy Zone and the impacts on each regional community affected while each zone is rolled out.'

Question put**.**

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Finding 5 be amended by omitting 'imposed acute and compounding pressures on local services such as housing, road infrastructure, water security, waste, emergency services and local economies, without corresponding investment or mitigation.' and inserting instead 'poses challenges for local services such as housing, road infrastructure, water security, waste, emergency services, and local economies. Some of these impacts can be addressed through individual planning consents and others require strategic coordination.'

Question put**.**

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Primrose moved: That:

a. Finding 6 be omitted: 'EnergyCo, as the infrastructure planner for the Renewable Energy Zones has failed to perform its central coordinating role, particularly in relation to:

- cumulative impact management
- sequencing of development
- coordination of infrastructure and services.' and the following new finding be inserted instead:

'EnergyCo has undertaken activities including cumulative impact studies, coordination of infrastructure, and services.'

b. Finding 7 be omitted: 'Local councils have been left to manage the consequences of state-led infrastructure expansion without sufficient authority, resources, or strategic direction.' and the following new finding be inserted instead:

'Energy development poses a challenge for councils with continued support required.'

c. Finding 8 be omitted: 'The NSW Government has failed to adequately address known risks relating to agricultural productivity, land value impacts, and insurance availability, leaving landholders exposed to ongoing uncertainty.'

d. Finding 9 be omitted: 'The benefits of Renewable Energy Zone development are unevenly distributed, while the burdens are concentrated on host communities, resulting in structural inequity.'

Question put**.**

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, , Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Recommendation 2 be amended by omitting 'seek to amend' before 'the *Electricity Infrastructure Amendment Act* 2020' and inserting instead 'consider amending'.

Question put**.**

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Recommendation 3 be amended by omitting 'statutory' before 'reporting on cumulative impacts'.

Question put**.**

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs MacDonald moved: That Finding 8 be amended by omitting 'has failed to adequately address' and inserting instead 'has not yet adequately addressed'.

Question put and negatived.

Mrs MacDonald moved: That the following new paragraph be inserted before paragraph 2.141:

> 'The committee notes that the evidence received regarding consultation was not uniform across all Renewable Energy Zones or proponents. While many stakeholders described consultation as occurring too late or having limited influence over decision-making, other witnesses gave evidence that consultation practices had improved over time, particularly where early engagement, ongoing communication and stronger relationships between proponents, EnergyCo and local councils had been established. The committee considers these examples demonstrate that improved consultation practices are achievable and should inform future Renewable Energy Zone delivery.'

Question put and passed.

Mrs MacDonald moved: That Recommendation 6 be amended by inserting the following dot points at the end:

- publish clear eligibility criteria for all community benefit and compensation programs
- provide annual public reporting on the allocation and expenditure of community benefit funding within each Renewable Energy Zone.

Question put and passed.

Mr Primrose moved: That Finding 10 be amended by omitting 'sufficiently' before 'provide affected communities' and inserting instead 'always'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Finding 11 be omitted: 'The consultation model is structurally flawed, characterised by:

- project-by-project engagement
- information asymmetry
- late-stage engagement after key decisions are made

and has therefore failed to meet reasonable community expectations.'

and the following new finding be inserted instead:

'The consultation model could be improved by:

- whole of area rather than project-by-project engagement
- reducing information asymmetry
- earlier engagement before key decisions are made.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Finding 12 be amended by omitting ', as applied to Renewable Energy Zone projects, systematically privileges proponents over affected communities and does not provide equitable procedural rights to landholders.' and inserting instead 'acknowledges the importance of particular developments to the state as a whole and has benefits as well as trade-offs for local engagement.'

Question put**.**

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs MacDonald moved: That Finding 13 be amended by omitting 'actively undermined' after 'individualised negotiations has' and inserting instead 'contributed to undermining'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Donnelly, Mrs Mitchell, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Finding 13 be omitted: 'That the widespread use of non-disclosure agreements and individualised negotiations has actively undermined transparency, fragmented communities, and exacerbated social division.'

and the following new finding be inserted instead:

'That the widespread use of non-disclosure agreements and individualised negotiations has raised concerns about transparency, fragmenting communities, and exacerbating social division.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Finding 14 be amended by inserting 'Some witnesses felt' before 'That as a direct consequence'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mrs MacDonald moved: That Recommendation 7 be amended by inserting an additional dot point at the end of the recommendation:

'require proponents to publish a response explaining how community feedback has influenced project design or, where it has not, the reasons why.'

Question put and passed.

Ms Hurst moved: That Recommendation 7 be omitted: 'That the NSW Government seek to introduce legislation that requires the consultation process to:

- occur prior to key planning decisions
- demonstrate measurable influence on project design
- include independent auditing of engagement outcomes.'

and inserting instead:

'That the NSW Government seek to find ways to ensure the consultation process where possible:

- occurs prior to key planning decisions
- demonstrates measurable influence on project design
- includes independent auditing of engagement outcomes.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Recommendation 8 be omitted: 'That the NSW Government prevent the use of non-disclosure agreements in renewable energy project negotiations as they restrict community-wide transparency and inhibit effective consultation.'

and the following new recommendation be inserted instead:

'That the NSW Government consider limiting or preventing the use of non-disclosure agreements in renewable energy project negotiations.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose,.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That Recommendation 8 be amended by omitting 'prevent' before 'the use of non-disclosure agreements' and inserting instead 'review'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mrs MacDonald moved: That Recommendation 9 be amended by inserting the following paragraph at the end:

'The review should specifically consider:

- cumulative impact assessment across multiple projects within a Renewable Energy Zone;
- opportunities for earlier strategic planning prior to project assessment;
- procedural fairness for directly affected landholders and neighbouring properties;
- consistency in assessment requirements across Renewable Energy Zone projects.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Noes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Recommendation 9 be omitted: 'That the NSW Government review the State Significant Development framework with a view to:

- strengthen landholder rights
- extend consultation timeframes
- require independent peer review of impact assessments.'

and the following recommendation inserted instead:

'That the NSW Government consider reviewing the State Significant Development framework with a view to:

- extend consultation timeframes
- require independent peer review of impact assessments.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That Recommendation 9 be amended by omitting: 'That the NSW Government review the State Significant Development framework with a view to:

- strengthen landholder rights
- extend consultation timeframes
- require independent peer review of impact assessments.'

and inserting instead:

'That the NSW Government review the State Significant Development framework with a view to:

- consider landholder rights
- ensure consultation timeframes are adequate
- consider independent peer review of impact assessments.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms. Hurst, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Finding 15 be omitted: 'Social Impact Assessments have been inconsistently applied, inadequately scoped, and are incapable of capturing cumulative and intangible impacts, rendering them ineffective as a regulatory safeguard.'

and the following new finding be inserted instead:

'Social Impact Assessments need more consistency of application and adequate scoping, and are incapable of capturing cumulative and intangible impacts. These issues should be addressed via cumulative impact studies'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mrs MacDonald moved: That Recommendation 10 be amended by inserting a new sentence at the end: 'Social Impact Assessments should be completed before transmission corridors and Renewable Energy Zone boundaries are finalised and should be updated as projects progress through the planning system.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Noes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Recommendation 10 be amended by omitting 'alter' before 'the Social Impact Assessment process' and inserting instead 'review'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Recommendation 11 be omitted: ' That the NSW Government seek to establish a statutory Community Advocate for Renewable Energy Zone regions to:

- represent landholders
- provide independent advice
- participate in planning and assessment processes.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Finding 16 be omitted: 'The extension of the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW to renewable energy infrastructure has not provided a sufficient mechanism for resolving disputes arising from Renewable Energy Zone development.'

and the following new recommendation be inserted instead:

> 'The extension of the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW to renewable energy infrastructure has to continue to develop resolving disputes arising from Renewable Energy Zone development so that it captures more disputes arising from Renewable Energy Zone development.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Finding 17 be omitted: 'The role of the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW is currently inadequate for addressing the scale and complexity of Renewable Energy Zone-related grievances due to insufficient:

- enforcement powers
- systemic oversight capability
- capacity to address cumulative or cross-project issues.'

and the following new finding be inserted instead:

'The role of the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW struggles to address the scale and complexity of Renewable Energy Zone-related concerns, in particular:

- enforcement powers
- systemic oversight capability
- capacity to address cumulative or cross-project issues.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Finding 18 be amended by omitting 'that it has not established robust, proactive protections for affected communities' and inserting instead: 'a common approach across many areas of industry and government where disputes may arise'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Recommendation 12 be amended by:

a) omitting 'undertake and urgent review of' and inserting instead 'assess'

b) omitting 'significantly expand' before 'its powers regarding'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs MacDonald moved: That Recommendation 12 be amended by inserting a new sentence at the end: 'The review should include an assessment of the effectiveness of cumulative impact management, community engagement, regional economic outcomes, housing impacts and the delivery of community benefit commitments.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Noes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Chapter 3

Ms Hurst moved: That the following new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 3.1:

'There is also potential economic risk to communities if REZs do not proceed, as noted in evidence given by stakeholders such as the Nature Conservation Council:

> There is also the economic risk of not acting and delaying the transition to renewable energy, significantly impacting not just rural and regional communities but all of Australia. New modelling shows that Australia's GDP will take a hit of $6.8 trillion between 2024 and 2050 as a result of the broad impacts of climate change, if serious action is not taken. [FOOTNOTE: Submission 32, Nature Conservation Council NSW, p 4]

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Ms Hust moved: That paragraph 3.107 be amended by inserting a new sentence 'There is also economic risk to delaying the transition to renewable energy, noting evidence that Australia's GDP will reduce by $6.8 trillion between 2024 and 2050 as a result of the impacts of climate change, if serious action is not taken.' after ' host communities and landowners'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Ms Hurst moved: That:

a. paragraph 3.111 be omitted: 'Therefore, we find that while REZ development is projected to deliver economic benefits, these do not consistently reflect the lived experience of rural and regional communities.' and the following new paragraph be inserted instead:

> 'Therefore, we find that while REZ development is projected to deliver economic benefits, this is not consistently reflected in the lived experience of some rural and regional communities.'

b. Finding 19 be amended by inserting 'some' before 'rural and regional communities'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Finding 20 be amended by omitting: 'is inadequate.' and inserting instead 'uses a combination of voluntary and compulsory acquisitions, with the latter posing more significant challenges for landholders'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs MacDonald moved: That Recommendation 13 be amended by inserting the following dot point at the end of the recommendation:

'include minimum standards for:
- independent legal advice funded by proponents;
- valuation processes;
- mediation prior to compulsory acquisition;
- transparent compensation principles.'

Question put and passed.

Mr Primrose moved: That Recommendation 13 be amended to by omitting 'urgent' before 'update regarding the review'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Finding 21 be omitted: 'Decommissioning bonds are a necessary part of any significant infrastructure as they provide reassurance to the community regarding long-term environmental and economic impacts.' and the following new finding be inserted instead:

'Decommissioning bonds could provide reassurance to the community in case of unexpected insolvencies, environmental, or other economic impact.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs MacDonald moved: That Recommendation 14 be amended by inserting the following dot point at the end of the recommendation:

'including requirements for:
- rehabilitation standards;
- restoration of agricultural capability where practicable;
- ongoing monitoring following decommissioning;

- periodic review of financial assurance to reflect actual costs.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Noes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs MacDonald moved: That Recommendation 14 be amended by inserting the following dot point at the end:

- 'including requirements for periodic review of financial assurance to reflect actual costs'

Question put and passed.

Mrs MacDonald moved: That Recommendation 15 be amended by inserting at the end: 'together with requirements for early engagement in strategic planning, cultural heritage assessment and route selection before project locations are finalised'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Noes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Recommendation 15 be omitted: 'That the NSW Government provide additional funding to the local Aboriginal land councils in each Renewable Energy Zone to assist with complex land analysis and negotiations with large-scale developers.' and the following new recommendation be inserted instead:

'That the NSW Government provide funding or support to the local Aboriginal land councils in each Renewable Energy Zone to assist with demands imposed by energy development.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Finding 23 be amended by omitting 'a gap between acknowledgment and action.' and inserting instead: 'the Government's view that many of the recommendations were being addressed, if not in the specific form but across all the recommendations.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Primrose moved: That Finding 24 be omitted: 'The response of the NSW Government to the first report lacked clear timelines, deliverables, and accountability mechanisms, undermining confidence in its implementation and the commitment to ensuring rural regional communities are part of the energy transition.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs MacDonald moved: That Recommendation 16 be amended by inserting the following sentence at the end of the recommendation: 'The implementation plan should:

- identify the lead agency responsible for each recommendation;
- specify implementation timeframes;
- include measurable performance indicators;
- provide annual public progress reports until implementation is complete.

Question put and passed.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That:

The draft report as amended be the report of the committee and that the committee present the report to the House;

The transcripts of evidence, tabled documents, submissions, correspondence, proformas, responses and summary report to the online questionnaire, and answers to questions taken on notice and supplementary questions relating to the inquiry be tabled in the House with the report

Upon tabling, all unpublished attachments to submissions and individual responses to the online questionnaire be kept confidential by the committee

Upon tabling, all unpublished transcripts of evidence, tabled documents, submissions, correspondence, proformas, responses and summary report to the online questionnaire, and answers to questions taken on notice and supplementary questions related to the inquiry be published by the committee, except for those documents kept confidential by resolution of the committee

The committee secretariat correct any typographical, grammatical and formatting errors prior to tabling;

The committee secretariat be authorised to update any committee comments where necessary to reflect changes to recommendations or new recommendations resolved by the committee;

Dissenting statements be provided to the secretariat within 24 hours after receipt of the draft minutes of the meeting;

The secretariat is tabling the report at 2 pm Wednesday 29 July 2026.

7. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 11.09 am until Thursday 20 August 2026.

Frances Arguelles
Committee Clerk

Appendix 4 Dissenting Statement

Hon Greg Donnelly MLC, Hon Peter Primrose MLC and Hon Cameron Murphy MLC, Australian Labor Party

The evidence seen by this inquiry has highlighted both the challenges and opportunities associated with the transformation of our energy system.

There is significant work undertaken to coordinate and deliver this generational project, including:

- Completion of the Regional Major Infrastructure Studies;
- Coordination of projects via access rights tenders;
- Financial support for resourcing within local government;
- Delivery of additional compensation to that provided under the Just Terms Act; and
- The direction of significant community benefits to host communities.

This is not to discredit evidence provided to the committee. Rather, there is substantial work done to date which is in our view not entirely reflected in the findings and recommendations.