COMMUNITY BENEFITS HANDBOOK

How Regional Australia Can Prosper From The Clean Energy Boom

RE ALLIANCE

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO POWER

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RE-Alliance (the Renewable Energy Alliance) works to secure meaningful benefits for regional Australians from the transition to clean power. We do this by listening to the needs and concerns of local residents, facilitating collaboration across the industry to achieve social outcomes and advocating for improved regional benefits at a policy level.

This report has been prepared predominantly on the lands of the Gadigal, Wiradjuri, Wailwan and Kamilaroi peoples. RE-Alliance wishes to acknowledge them as Traditional Custodians and pay our respects to their Elders, past and present. We wish to extend that acknowledgement and respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people whose knowledge and connection to Country is integral to our resilient, sustainable futures.

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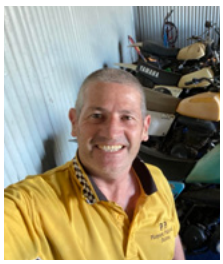
Comments from local residents in the Central-West Orana region, where the pilot REZ for NSW is beginning to attract renewable projects.



"In my view the Dubbo - Wellington area is standing at the dawn of a new age when it comes to the potential of skilled new jobs thanks to the massive investment of hi-tech money which will flow into this region as the first Renewable Energy Zone in Australia. This investment should create pathways for local youth to train for future jobs and work in skilled industries without having to move to Sydney."

— **John Ryan**, Dubbo Photo News, news editor, Dubbo Regional Councillor

"The transition to renewables demonstrates the maturing of Australia's energy sector. The Central-West Orana REZ offers my community the chance to showcase the enormous capability of our local energy service providers. Partnering with local communities to deliver the REZ will leverage the significant skills and talent on offer here. The REZ will support the expansion of local businesses, including renewables recycling and remanufacturing initiatives, which will provide local jobs and benefit my community into the future. I'm excited to be here in Dubbo at this pivotal moment in Australia's energy transition."

— **Megan Jones**, Entrepreneur and Renewable Energy Advocate

"I live on a property in Wellington in the heart of the first REZ being established in the Central-West of NSW. Currently our locality is host to one wind farm and two solar farms (one still under construction), with at least 2 further wind farms under proposal as well as another two solar farms being considered.

As a host landholder to several wind turbines as well as being a member of the Community Consultative Committee I have seen the benefits that these projects have in the community. Not only do they provide a large employment project during construction as well as ongoing employment these companies that own and operate these projects are putting money back into the community each year as well as to the local council to maintain infrastructure. All of this helps our local businesses as well as our sporting clubs, arts, environmental interests, fairs, schools and many other community groups.

On a personal level the money we receive from hosting these turbines has drought proofed our property which is very current after our last big drought. We have had a good season now for 18 months grass wise but we are still in a financial drought. I have just in the last week had my first income from livestock sales in 19 months so the returns from hosting the turbines has kept us financially viable over this period."

— **Simon Barton**, Farmer

Benefits of renewables for regional communities

Direct Benefits

All the direct forms of payment and compensation transfered to others as the renewable company does business

Direct jobs in renewables

Business for local contractors

Lease payments to farmers and landholders

Neighbour payments to nearby properties

Indirect Benefits

Positive local side-effects of the renewable energy transformation

Boost in hospitality industries to service construction workers

Local procurement and contracting for project delivery

Education & Tourism

Community Benefit Schemes

What can be achieved when communities and renewable companies work together for the benefit of the region

Community Funds

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Co-investment and co-ownership

Employee volunteerism

Regionwide community funds

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Unique & emerging benefit-sharing models

1. Introduction

The need to significantly reduce emissions this decade presents a great challenge for us in making the transition from fossil fuels to cleaner and cheaper renewable energy. Regional communities see the effects of this change, both positive and negative, whether from the widespread benefits of wind & solar farms or the closure of old power industries.

With so much noise and political point-scoring around emissions targets it can be easy to miss the strides that have been taken by state governments, renewables investors and local communities preparing the way for our future grid. Investment in clean power can give regional Australian families certainty that there will be prosperity, economic growth and job opportunities in their local communities for decades to come.

Renewable Energy Zones, (REZs) will be the power stations of the future. Distributed over a region, solar, wind, pumped hydro and battery projects will collectively provide a steady supply of clean power that can be delivered to the National Electricity Market via high voltage transmission lines. Using existing lines as much as possible and then building new lines to projects concentrated in REZs is the most efficient and cost effective way to bring this clean power online.

Each state's energy department looks after REZ development. Exactly what a REZ entails will be different between states. Even within a state, each REZ will look very different to the next depending on local geography, existing industry and demographics.

Local communities themselves will, if they choose, play a massive role in determining what each REZ will look like and what local benefits they will deliver. The next couple of years will be critical for REZ communities in articulating what they would each like to see come out of the influx of renewable energy investment in their region.

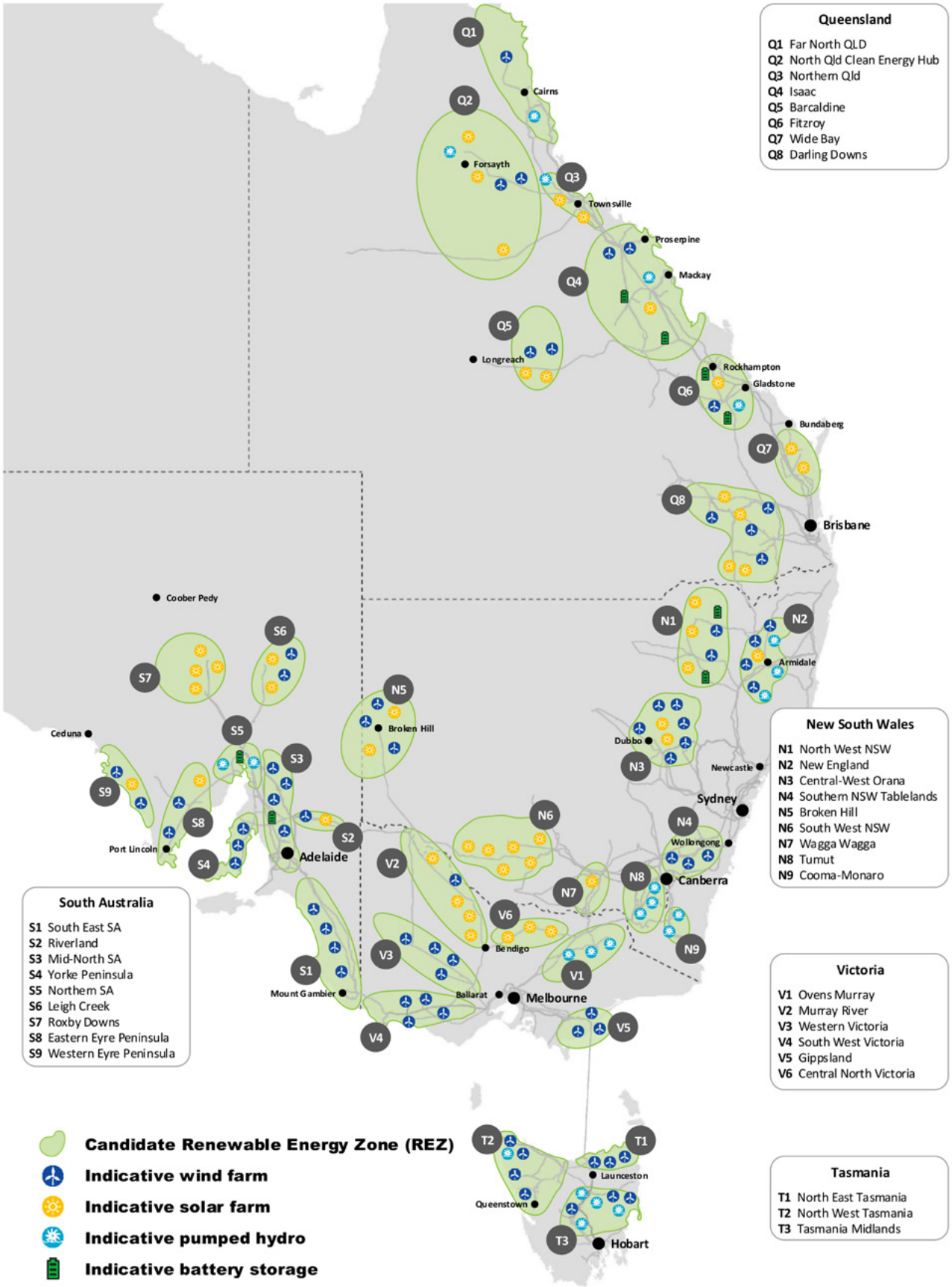
Regional communities can have valid concerns in regards to the establishment of new large-scale infrastructure projects, including renewable energy. In our own work, the typical complaints that we have heard include:

- Visual amenity impacts
- Noise concerns
- Property price concerns
- Lack of genuine consultation and access to decision-making
- Changes of project ownership
- Disruption of community cohesion
- Land-use conflicts (real or perceived) with agriculture

These complaints align with those reported annually by the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner [1].

Renewable companies can vary in terms of the quality of their local engagement, communication, and community benefit programs. All of the above concerns can be addressed at the company level, however there is a role for governments to prioritise community concerns as they regulate industry practice and issue licences for grid connection.

[1] Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner Observations and Recommendations. Available at: https://www.nwfc.gov.au/observations-and-recommendations



Identified candidate Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) for assessment in developing the optimal development path in the NEM. © AEMO 2020.

Companies should be striving to outdo each other in terms of community engagement practice, especially as the market becomes crowded and as they jockey for a position in a REZ.

The purpose of this handbook is to equip local community leaders with information and ideas to get started thinking big about how to leverage the renewables boom into local opportunities that address local needs and desires. It covers what kinds of benefits regional communities are already seeing in different parts of the country from large-scale renewables and begins to picture what these might look like on a bigger scale with industry investment concentrated across a region.

Types of benefits locals are already seeing include:

- Direct payments to farmers for hosting wind and solar, often drought-proofing agricultural businesses
- Neighbour payments
- Direct and indirect jobs created in construction, electrical work, manufacturing and maintenance
- Procurement of local goods and services
- Neighbour benefit schemes (road upgrades, tree planting)
- Funding for local community groups, schools and not-for-profits via community enhancement funds
- Community investment and ownership opportunities in renewable projects
- Renewable energy tourism
- Agricultural benefits such as improved carrying capacity of grazing land with solar panels providing shade for grass and sheep

However, we shouldn't stop there. The cumulative benefits of multiple projects across a locality created by the REZ system means we can dream big about projects that will have a legacy for decades into the future.

2. Local Decision-Making Power

Naturally, regional people are the ones who care most about where they live and have the strongest desire to contribute to the future of their region. This local connection and passion should be harnessed into ensuring that regional communities strongly benefit from the establishment of REZs.

Community engagement protocols used by government and industry are often designed using the below trajectory designed by the International Association for Public Participation:[2]

INFORMING > CONSULTING > INVOLVING > COLLABORATING > EMPOWERING

Many regional communities will be familiar with what are often seen as 'tick-box' approaches to large-scale infrastructure projects that rarely go beyond the informing and consulting stages.

REZ community engagement could go beyond these 'tick-box' approaches and instead collaborate with and empower local communities. Research shows that community engagement needs to move beyond managing or avoiding negative public responses and move towards a more proactive approach, recognising the importance of listening, engaging and encouraging participation[3].

[2]Public Participation Spectrum International Association for Public Participation. Available here: https://iap2.org.au/resources/spectrum/
[3]Aitken et al. 2016, "Practices and rationales of community engagement with wind farms: awareness raising, consultation, empowerment" available at:

Every Australian region is unique, and every town or village within each region has its own distinct character. If locals are involved in the development of REZs from an early stage, then community issues, desires and ideas can be identified much earlier in the REZ design process than currently occurs. Ideally, we will see a process being established that allows for host communities to collaborate with government and industry on aspects of REZs to ensure local empowerment, pride and a sense of ownership over the REZ.

There should not be a one-size-fits-all approach to the roll-out of REZs, and the right approach to local engagement, collaboration and empowerment will necessarily vary across the different REZs, and across the communities within each REZ.

We know that locals know best. Local knowledge on land-use, community needs and regional priorities is valuable, useful information that could drastically improve the outcomes from REZs. We also know that regional communities are connected communities with deep networks of pre-existing relationships that would be beneficial to any major project being established in the region.

There are many aspects in the roll-out of REZs where collaboration and empowerment of the local community would significantly enhance the REZ model. REZ decisions that could be made stronger with participation of the local community include:

- Site selections
- Tourism and education programs
- Measures to enhance or mitigate visual impacts
- Target priorities for community funds
- Solar panel arrangements that can allow for different types of crops or grazing around the panels
- Code of conduct for projects
- Co-investment or co-ownership models
- Community benefit sharing models

However, without people in the regions raising their voices, the opportunity for local communities to collaborate on and help to shape the future of REZs could sail past. Now is the time to talk to your neighbours, colleagues, family and friends. Let's make REZs something regional Australians are proud to host!

Case Study: Co-design in Walcha

MirusWind (now WalchaEnergy) began engagement with the local community of Walcha almost twenty years ago, in 2004. In the years following that early engagement, MirusWind embarked upon a journey with local landholders to co-design aspects of the Winterbourne Wind segment of the Walcha Energy Project. Host landholders collectively negotiated a code of conduct for the project, were involved in project site and turbine site selections, and designed an innovative co-ownership and benefit sharing model, that is further discussed in the section of this report on Co-Investment and Co-Ownership.

Case Study: Collaboration & empowerment: community benefits for the New England Solar Farm

UPC/AC Renewables Australia recognised the importance of collaborating with the impacted community when establishing a Community Benefit Sharing Initiative (CBSI) for their New England Solar Farm project. Through the establishment of a Community Reference Group, UPC/AC was able to co-design their CBSI based on input from the reference group on how the funds should be spent, where the funds should be spent geographically, and legal and governance arrangements for the fund.

A second Community Reference Group has since been established to implement the CBSI during the life of the project—more on this in the Community Enhancement Fund section of this report.

Case Study: Collaborative future-planning in the Latrobe Valley

In 2016 the Government of Victoria established the Latrobe Valley Authority. In part due to regional advocacy, the Government recognised the importance of a local, coordinating vehicle for managing the complex and multifaceted array of issues and opportunities that arise out of regional industry transformation. In responding to the decline of fossil-fuel industries in the Latrobe Valley, the Authority draws on local research, ideas and actions to build a resilient and robust future for the Latrobe Valley. They identify their fundamental frameworks as[4] :

- Locally-owned ideas
- Coordinated effort
- Outcomes focused
- Action oriented
- Genuine partnerships

A similar community-led organisation could feasibly be established in each of the five designated REZs in NSW.

[4]Cain, K. 2019 A just transition for the Latrobe Valley. Available at: https://www.climate-transparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/17.Karen-Cain-Latrobe-Valley-Authority-February-2019.pdf

3. Community Enhancement Funds

The most straightforward action energy companies often take to create benefits in host communities is to carve out a stream of profits for that purpose. Many wind farms and a growing number of solar farms in Australia have Community Enhancement Funds (CEFs)—voluntary payments made by renewable energy companies for distribution to community groups, programs or projects. CEFs are currently the most common avenue through which regional communities have sought to benefit from renewable energy projects located in their backyards.

While urbanisation and a changing climate can threaten the livelihood of regional and rural townships, REZs present an enormous opportunity to invest in regional economic sustainability and growth. However for this opportunity to be realised, people in regional communities need to get involved in the creation, governance and decision-making processes for these pools of funds. We know that locals have a deep understanding of where an influx of funds could best be spent in the region, and getting involved in administering a CEF is a great opportunity to direct funds to worthy local projects.

Over the years, hundreds of community applications have been made and granted. Local not-for-profits, Country Women's Associations, climate action groups, Landcare groups, golf and bowling clubs, local schools, theatres, men's sheds and progress associations are just some of the many organisations that have replaced equipment, run projects, built community infrastructure and supported their communities through CEF grants. Overwhelmingly, CEFs have supported the volunteer-led organisations that underpin country towns.

Community projects that have been realised as a result of renewable energy project CEFs range from small scale such as Indigenous and community gardens, workshops for resilient living and health initiatives, food coops, local tourism marketing materials, through to more substantial 'legacy' type projects such as community microgrids, solar arrays for hospitals and large scale revegetation projects. You name it, somewhere, a local community has found a way to fix it, upgrade it or make it happen with the support of wind or solar farm CEF funding.

CEFs should be based on local needs, co-designed with the local community, and form part of the genuine community engagement, collaboration and empowerment discussed earlier in this report. And for that to happen, locals need to get involved.

[5]Inverell Times (2018) Sapphire Wind Farm construction in the Community Projects planned for Inverell and Glen Innes, New England. Available at: https://www.inverelltimes.com.au/story/5434613/sapphire-wind-farm-legacy-to-live-on-through-community-projects/

[6]Geraldton Newspapers (2014) Putting a whoosh into tourism. The West Australian. Available at: https://thewest.com.au/news/gascoyne/putting-a-whoosh-into-tourism-ng-ya-256408

[7]AGL Energy (2019) Working in Silverton, for Silverton, available at:

Recipients of Taralga Wind Farm CEF grants for 2018 recognised for their work. © Adam Chandler, Pacific Hydro

CEF GOVERNANCE

Commonly, a set amount of funding per year is made available to local communities during the operational life of the project. The funding amount is typically based on installed megawatts with different methodologies across different technologies and capacity factors, and is typically CPI linked. In many cases, funding grants are made through an application process and in accordance with guidelines or terms of reference determined by the management committee to achieve fairness and transparency.

There are currently no federally legislated requirements for CEFs in Australia, although there are often state-based norms, which has led to enormous diversity in the form, function and size of funds from region to region and project to project.

Ideally, the shape and workings of the CEFs in Australia reflect the community hosting the renewable energy project. For instance, some CEFs are managed by the project company, with input from community representatives. Some CEFs are managed by community representatives with input from the project company. In NSW, CEFs are commonly run by S355 Council-managed committees comprised of a range of Council and community stakeholders; some CEFs are entirely managed by community representatives.

[8]Spark Infrastructure 2021 "Bomen Solar Farm commits $500,000 to long term partnership with Mount Austin High School in Wagga Wagga" available at: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5de5eaa02625a4608a274e37/t/606419b95487fa23c0bf3fcf/1617172923568/BSF+Media+Release+-+31+March+2021.pdf

[9]Ibid

[10]Republished from RE-Alliance 2019 Building Stronger Communities, p.9 . Available at: https://www.re-alliance.org.au/bsc2

IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS

An example of innovation in the community enhancement space is the provision of in-kind contributions.

At Sapphire Wind Farm in the Northern Tablelands of NSW, for example, project owners wanted to make a contribution to the local community during construction of the project, and approached their construction team, and the local community for assistance to discuss how to realise long term benefits. The result was their legacy program "Construction in the Community," which saw the wind farm construction team work on small to medium sized infrastructure projects for local organisations. [5]

Wind turbine blades have been reimagined as tourist attractions and donated to local communities, such as at Mumbida Wind Farm in Western Australia.[6] In sunny Western NSW, Silverton Wind Farm offered 5kW solar PV systems to the residents of Silverton. [7]

Case Study: Spark Infrastructure & Westpac Support Mount Austin High School

$1 million of the profits made from the Bomen Solar Farm located in Wagga Wagga have been allocated to a decade-long community benefit fund.

Spark Infrastructure, in partnership with Westpac, will contribute $500,000 over the next decade to two programs aimed at high school students from Mount Austin High School. The partnership with Westpac is through a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) between Spark Infrastructure and Westpac. Their co-funding of this program highlights the opportunity for both project owners and PPA partners to contribute meaningfully to host communities.

Across the next decade an annual contribution of $25,000 will be granted to the 'Girls @ the Centre' program, which "supports female students to stay in school and complete Year 12, and provides opportunities to enhance students' career options.[8]"

Similarly, $25,000 annually, for the same time period will be granted towards the 'Transition Program', a pre-existing program that aims to support "as many students as possible to transition from school into the wider society".

Anthony Marriner, Head of Renewables at Spark Infrastructure said of the contributions:

> *"We are delighted to have finalised this donation to two very important programs at Mount Austin High School. We have one of the largest solar farm community funds in Australia and are pleased to be giving back to the local community .[9]"*

Case Study: Over a hundred projects and counting: Snowtown's Lend-a-Hand Foundation

> *"It's helping the community, and not just Snowtown, but all the towns in sight of the wind farm."*

The Snowtown Wind Farm Lend a Hand Foundation has been operating for as long as the wind farm—almost ten years. Alan Large, a Snowtown resident, has sat on the foundation committee since it was formed and has a lot of stories to tell about what the foundation means for his community.

[11]Neoen 2021 Bulgana Green Power Hub available at:

> *"In the last two years we've provided funds for a weather station for the Snowtown Country Fire Service, supported the Bute Men's shed, and contributed to the Brinkworth history group for their museum and a reprint of their centenary book through grant funding. In the past, we've helped the Brinkworth bowling club paint their building; the Bute Lions club and primary school plant trees and paint telegraph (stobey) poles and the Snowtown football club upgrade their changing rooms."*

In 2017 the Lend a Hand committee contributed $15,000 to get the Snowtown primary school Barunga Gap school bus route up and running again. The government-run bus route had been cut because of dwindling student numbers and the school was looking for money to continue the school run with a new bus. For families of out-of-town preschool and primary school students, the bus was a critical service.

The school was able to leverage Lend a Hand funds to raise additional funding from other avenues, and now has the school bus route running again.

Snowtown also has a community bus which the foundation supported a few years back—which any community group can hire.

> *"At the end of the day, almost ten years on, we still manage to spend all the money each year—we still get plenty of application forms. The foundation is good for the community."*

Case Study: Bulgana Combined Wind & Battery brings local benefits to the Northern Grampians

Neoen's Bulgana Green Power Hub is injecting an extra $120,000 to the Northern Grampians economy each year through their Community Benefit Fund for the combined wind and battery project. Like similar schemes, the fund provides grants for local community groups including environment groups, sports clubs and schools.

Established in 2018 the project has provided grants ranging from $1,500 to $20,000 to local initiatives including Grampians Community Health, Concongella Primary School, Stawell Senior Citizens, St Arnaud Sports Stadium Association and the Great Western Future Committee.

> *"We applied for a grant to install a wind turbine & solar panel array at the school. The purpose was for the students to understand the different streams of energy production. It was a very simple application process." — Kristie Miller, Principal, Concongella Primary School*

Case Study: New England Solar Farm Uralla Grants Program

UPC/AC's New England Solar Farm in Uralla, NSW has established Uralla Grants which is a part of the Community Benefit Sharing Initiative for the project[12]. The program will be funded through annual contributions of $250 for every MW of power generating capacity for the project. The grant program commenced in 2021, with $50,000 already allocated to local initiatives, and another $50,000 set to become available in the second half of 2021. **Crucially, UPC/AC made the decision to start allocating grant funding prior to project construction.** This allowed for benefits to the community to be seen prior to construction disruptions.

[12]UPC/AC Australia Uralla Grants available at:https://www.newenglandsolarfarm.com.au/urallagrants-information

Students from Kairi State School in Far North Queensland, at their Kairi Kitchen Garden sustainable garden project, funded by Mt Emerald wind farm's community fund. © RATCH Australia.

The program is independently run by a Community Reference Group that was established in 2020 following public expressions of interest and nominations. Reference Group member Sandra Eady said the Uralla Grants program is the first step in what will be an exciting range of initiatives, conceived and developed by the local community for the local community.

> *"The grants could support a range of projects from facility upgrades, local sporting or education programs or energy efficiency or beautification projects. We hope to see a broad range of proposals that provide maximum benefit to different parts of our local community and encourage potential applicants to get working on their proposals. Our community has faced the impacts of the drought, bushfires and now COVID-19 over the past 12 months. These grants will make a positive contribution back into our community."*

Importantly, the initiative acknowledges that piecemeal community initiatives requiring funding could feasibly drop off after the first few years. UPC\AC Renewables has stated that they

"will consider other opportunities for using the available funds, which includes employment of a Community Coordinator to help organize local events and administer the CBSI. The funds may also be used towards establishing a revolving low-interest loan to support residents fund energy saving activities."

Case Study: Big Battery providing big local benefits

The Hornsdale Power Reserve—or SA's 'Big Battery'—as it's more commonly known provides $60,000 annually to the community of Jamestown and surrounding areas in the form of a community benefit fund[13]. Administered by the Northern Areas Council, local community groups can apply for grants that range from $1000 to $8000.

The fund is linked to community growth focus areas that include environmental sustainability, health and wellbeing, arts and culture, strong connected communities, sports and recreation, and skills, education and training.

Previous grant recipients have included Mid North Suicide Prevention Network, Jamestown Country Women's Association, Jamestown Mural Festival, Tarcowie Landcare, Spalding Cricket Club and Gladstone History Group.

[13]Neoen 2021, Hornsdale Power Reserve: Local Benefits, available at: https://hornsdalepowerreserve.com.au/local-benefits/

4. Regional Enhancement Funds

One of the beauties in hosting a REZ is the potential for bigger and better benefits than individual projects alone can provide. **The volume of potential community funding from industry over time in REZs presents an opportunity to fund ambitious and strategic local ventures if a percentage of those funds are coordinated.** One avenue through which this could be achieved is with the establishment of regional enhancement funds (REF). REFs, with community control, could open the opportunity for greater and longer-lasting benefits to reach REZ communities.

Both this opportunity and need was also identified by the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner[14].

> *"Some regions of Australia are experiencing increased clustering of proposed and approved wind farms which may result in multiple wind farms infiltrating and 'surrounding' communities. As a result, there is both the need and opportunity for individual project developers to communicate more effectively with each other and better coordinate engagement with the affected community. This could range from combined initiatives by wind farm developers through to coordination of construction programs in order to minimise cumulative impacts on residents and townships. Developers should also be aware of other key infrastructure projects that may be taking place in a region and ensure that project schedules are planned and coordinated to minimise impacts to communities."*

[14]Australian Energy Infrastrastructure Commissioner Community Engagement available at: https://www.nwfc.gov.au/observations-and-recommendations/community-engagement

The NSW Victorian, Tasmanian and Queensland governments have all indicated an intention to coordinate community funds across a REZ. However, **we'll need to make the voices of regional Australia heard to ensure that local communities have a say in how the funds are allocated and spent.**

A coordinated fund that operates across a number of projects must be able to demonstrate capacity to deliver planned outcomes, must draw on local knowledge, and must demonstrate transparency and legitimacy in the eyes of the local community. REFs are not designed to replace the more localised, targeted CEFs, and must allow for CEFs to continue delivering for their local communities.

REFs should act as a vehicle which can facilitate cooperation to deliver larger community projects that can have economic, social, health or environmental outcomes. Examples of potential outcomes outlined in the Clean Energy Council's *A Guide to Benefit Sharing Options for Renewable Energy Projects*[15] which go beyond grants include:

- Building a community solar project for a local business or developing a micro grid for a portion of the community
- Allocating the profits from a portion of the project to go into a revolving fund that can operate in perpetuity
- Creating a targeted legacy community benefit initiative for at-risk populations in the local community (this could have a medium to long- term scope to address particular social issues)
- Working with a local partner to roll out a bulk buy program for solar and heat pumps in the local area
- Tourism and education programs in the region, which could also act as additional income generation
- Electric vehicle charging station at viewing location of the generator to encourage engagement

[15]Lane, T and Hicks, J (2019) A Guide to Benefit Sharing Options for Renewable Energy Projects, p.21 Clean Energy Council available at: https://assets.cleanenergycouncil.org.au/documents/advocacy-initiatives/community-engagement/guide-to-benefit-sharing-options-for-renewable-energy-projects.pdf

Examples of potential outcomes that have been identified by community members within the CWO pilot REZ include :

- Working with local landcare groups to fund environmental and biodiversity projects, including re-vegetation, creek rehabilitation and wildlife corridors
- Providing accommodation and medical facilities to attract permanent GPs to towns with doctor shortages such as in Wellington, NSW
- Electric vehicle charging stations at local tourist attractions and town centres
- Partner with local or government bodies to fund adequate retirement villages
- Partner with heritage organisations and landholders to fund heritage restoration
- Establish a revolving fund for new businesses to access to help with start up costs and addressing legal requirements such as wheelchair ramps.
- In-kind support from solar farms - they order 1% more panels then needed and donate this to Council, public schools, houses or community owned projects etc
- Enhancing rural internet - adding optic fibres onto transmission towers
- Fund a battery storage project for the region - in Wellington reduce use of combustion wood stoves, which is causing air pollution and encourage electric heating.

RE-Alliance has been working with renewable energy proponents in Moyne Shire in Victoria on a model to coordinate Community Enhancement Funds across multiple projects that we hope can be replicated in NSW REZs.

Case Study: Moyne Regional Fund

RE-Alliance is leading efforts in wind and solar farm communities to develop mechanisms that coordinate the increased community funding on offer in REZs in a way that delivers strategically for local communities.

Our work in Moyne Shire in South West Victoria aims to bring together Council, wind farm developers and operators, and communities in a collaborative approach that delivers best practice community benefit sharing. One challenge faced by funds that have run for a number of years is identifying projects across the full 25 year operational life of a wind farm after the most pressing initial projects are complete.

We've been working with seven of the region's growing number of wind farms on a joint fund which, when completed, will allow the local committees to fund larger projects that could improve the lives of everyone across the region. Mental health services, disability support, conservation projects and parks are just some ideas of what a region-wide fund could achieve.

In Moyne, the seven local community funds could grow up to $700,000 annually, amounting to over twenty million dollars over the next thirty years. Although the funds will each have their own mandates and processes, portions of the joint pool of funds could be leveraged to make an even bigger impact if used for seed funding, to support larger government grants, or secure a loan. The community has a massive opportunity to pull together behind projects that will leave a lasting legacy.

As part of our process to date we have considered and worked through many of the key issues around how cumulative benefits and legacy projects can be coordinated . Some of those issues include governance, stakeholders, timing, branding and potential outcomes.

[17]RE-Alliance 2021 "Proposed Community-Driven Fund for Moyne" available at: https://www.re-alliance.org.au/moyne_community_controlled_joint_fund

5. Empowerment of First Nations Communities

TRADITIONAL CUSTODIAN BENEFITS

The theme for NAIDOC week 2021 was 'Heal Country.' For many of us interested in the clean energy transformation, we see the replacement of coal mines and gas wells with wind turbines and solar farms as vital to moving towards more green, regenerative futures. We have witnessed fossil fuel corporations get it wrong time, and time, and time again. And each time we shout "this is another reason why we need renewable energy!"

However, the transition to renewable energy will not automatically align with the healing of Country that is being advocated for by First Nations communities during NAIDOC 2021. We can all commit deeply to advocating for and contributing to a renewable energy future that has healing of Country at its heart.

First Nations-led organisations including Original Power and Aboriginal Land Councils are working broadly on ways in which Land Rights can be central to the transformation to renewable energy, and how Traditional Custodians can share in the benefits of renewable energy projects. The First Nations Workers Alliance, an affiliate of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, is reportedly developing resources to assist Traditional Custodians and industry to "establish what best practice engagement and involvement of Traditional Custodians in major projects—including renewable energy projects—looks like."

As the renewable energy transformation continues to build steam, we should be looking to create a renewable energy industry that has Healing Country at its heart. Part of this could be considering what benefits specifically for Traditional Custodians and Land Councils can be built into the roll-out of Renewable Energy Zones that is occurring in NSW, VIC, QLD and TAS.

A positive example of proactive engagement with local Traditional Custodians is the Hornsdale Wind Farm's relationship with the Ngadjuri and Nukunu people. Trust was built through engagement conducting the Cultural Heritage Management Plans resulting in the first wind farm towers featuring Indigenous art as outlined in the Clean Energy Council's Guide to Benefit Sharing Options for Renewable Energy Projects[18]. The Chair of the Ngadjuri Nations Aboriginal Corporation Quentin Argus said "Recognition towards our people and to the both groups — the Ngadjuri and Nukunu — it's been a long process but a good one" and "anything to do with renewable energy which leaves a lesser footprint on the land is good for us all, so we welcome the development"[19].

Some of the priorities that have already been identified in relation to the renewable energy industry include:

[18]Lane, T and Hicks, J (2019) A Guide to Benefit Sharing Options for Renewable Energy Projects, p.12 Clean Energy Council available at: https://assets.cleanenergycouncil.org.au/documents/advocacy-initiatives/community-engagement/guide-to-benefit-sharing-options-for-renewable-energy-projects.pdf

[19]Fowler,C (2017) "World's first wind farm towers featuring Indigenous art unveiled in South Australia's mid-north" available at: https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2017-02-17/sach-wind-farm-art/8248950

murals on the two wind turbines created by Ngadjuri and Nukunu artists. Photo credit Siemens Australia

- Establishment of engagement protocols that uphold free, prior and informed consent
- Inclusion of First Nations representatives in project design and planning
- Partnerships between Local Aboriginal Land Councils and renewable energy proponents for the leasing of land holdings for generation or transmission infrastructure
- Ensuring benefits of projects flow to First Nations, and consulting with Traditional Custodians on what they believe this should look like
- Identifying and maximising employment opportunities for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander workers in both the construction and operations phase of renewable energy including the development of targeted apprenticeship/ traineeship programs
- Commitment to guarantee ongoing access to sites of significance once the project is underway.
- Commitment to employing local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people to restore the land at the end life of the project[20].

There are many pre-existing projects from which to take inspiration. The Centre for Appropriate Technology, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-controlled business, ran a program called 'Bushlight' from 2002 to 2013. The program saw over 130 stand-alone renewable energy systems installed in remote communities across the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland, providing reliable and affordable power to Aboriginal communities[21]. The Valley Centre, an organisation focused on supporting sustainable, resilient futures has developed the Indigenous Solar Rolling Fund to enable Indigenous communities to install solar and potentially batteries in their communities. Beon Energy undertook a targeted training and employment program in the construction of a solar farm, resulting in the training and employment of 38 Aboriginal workers[22].

[20]Ibid, p.32
[21]Centre for Appropriate Technology Ltd. (2021), Bushlight Energy Archive, available at: https://cfat.org.au/bushlight-archive
[22]Beon Energy Solutions (2020) Bomen Solar Farm providing clean energy for homes and businesses, available at: https://beon-es.com.au/latest-news/bomen-solar-farm-providing-clean-energy-for-homes-and-businesses/

6. Neighbour Benefit Schemes

One often-reported source of discord around renewable energy developments over the years has been that lease payments only accrue to host landholders, and that immediate neighbours, who may also live in close proximity to wind turbines, solar arrays and transmission lines are not accommodated. In recent years, agreements have been increasingly offered by renewable energy project proponents to neighbouring landholders to address this perceived inequity. Research using an Australian wind farm as a case study found that the local host community perceived there to be "winners and losers'' from the project - with the 'winners' being host landholders who would receive an annual income and the 'losers' being neighbouring landholders who would be impacted but receive no direct benefits .

In NSW, the State Government's 2016 Wind Farm Guidelines encouraged consideration of neighbour (or negotiated) agreements as a form of benefit sharing. The Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner has also encouraged developers to consider neighbour agreements as a component of community consultation plans, highlighting that

> *"developers have not always understood the importance of consulting and working with neighbours in proximity to a project ."*

The NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap states that landholders in the CWO REZ are expected to receive $430M in lease payments up to 2042, and rightly, presents this as a benefit for the local community . The roadmap also highlighted that 'this additional income for landholders will help farmers supplement their income and drought proof their businesses ." The establishment of neighbour agreements, particularly those that include financial benefits or co-investment, would similarly represent a drought-proofing avenue for neighbours and a stimulus to the local economy.

As with other community benefit initiatives, neighbour agreement structures differ from project to project; and while this diversity can reflect the diversity of regional communities, the methods used to determine a fair and equitable agreement is important. It should be noted that in some cases the local region will not be impacted at all due to topography and/or small population and therefore a neighbour benefit scheme may not be appropriate. The agreements are typically negotiated on the basis of proximity to a renewable energy project and/or in relation to impacts associated with the project. **Agreements can take the form of direct annual or one-off payments to landowners and can include in-kind contributions to a landowner, such**

[23]Gross, C. 2007, "Community perspectives of wind energy in Australia: the application of a justice and community fairness framework to increase social acceptance" p. 2733, available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2006.12.013

[24]NSW DPIE 2016 Wind Energy Guideline, p.16 available at: https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/~/media/Files/DPE/Guidelines/wind-energy-guideline-for-state-significant-wind-energy-development-2016-12.ashx

[25]Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner "Neighbour Consultation and Agreements" available at: https://www.nwfc.gov.au/observations-and-recommendations/chapter-2-neighbour-consultation-agreements

[26]NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap Detailed Report NSW DPIE 2020, p.9. Available at: https://energy.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-12/NSW%20Electricity%20Infrastructure%20Roadmap%20-%20Detailed%20Report.pdf

as tree planting to screen the view of solar arrays or wind turbines, or include other mechanisms such as neighbour investment or a gift of equity.

It is RE-Alliance's view that neighbour agreements should not include conditions that preclude recipients from voicing their opinion about a project, including formally objecting to the project in planning processes. They should be offers made to project neighbours in good faith, not a means of stifling objections.

One example of a neighbour agreement model is the Proximity Rent Model. The Proximity Rent Model was developed with the intention to "assist projects to achieve a social licence to operate." This model proposes a payment system based on land owned in proximity to wind turbines, transmission lines or solar arrays where landowners are paid per hectare within specific areas, rather than based on the number of wind turbines on their land. Other models currently being implemented are based on amenity considerations such as noise and visual assessments, while others still consider residences within distance zones from a wind farm or solar array.

Case Study: Tilt Renewables[32]

Tilt Renewables' Palmer Wind Farm in South Australia announced its intention to establish agreements with wind farm neighbours in late 2013. This project sought to enter into agreements with neighbours with property within one kilometre or a residence within two kilometres of a wind turbine, with a minimum payment of $2,000 per annum.

Tilt Renewables' Rye Park Wind Farm is currently in development in NSW. As part of the CBSI for this project they are again offering neighbour agreements. Tilt's website explains,

[27]NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap Detailed Report NSW DPIE 2020, p.36. Available at: https://energy.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-12/NSW%20Electricity%20Infrastructure%20Roadmap%20-%20Detailed%20Report.pdf

[28]Pyramus Pty Ltd (2014) A practical shared-benefit model for wind farms—The Proximity Rent model. Pyramus Pty

> *"We are inviting our closest neighbours to share in the financial benefits of the wind farm through neighbour agreements. These agreements are part of our commitment to being a good long-term neighbour, sharing benefits and contributing to the local community[29]."*

Case Study: Culcairn Solar Farm's Construction Disruption Payment[30]

Neoen's Culcairn Solar Farm, located in the South-West of NSW, is currently negotiating and finalising one-off Construction Disruption Payments with eligible neighbours. This payment seeks to compensate in part for the inconvenience and disruption experienced by neighbours of a large-scale solar farm, and is part of Neoen's response to community consultation.

In their June 2020 Response to Submissions Neoen explained,

> *"The Construction Disruption Payment was developed by Neoen in response to community concerns relating to the impact of dust, noise and traffic during the construction period. It was also proposed as a result of lessons learnt from previous projects, and feedback from neighbours living adjacent to the site & the construction traffic route. The one-off payment of $15,000 will be made at the start of construction to enable the residents to mitigate and address these construction-related impacts in whatever way they feel appropriate to their circumstances– for example through house cleaning or additional glazing [31]"*

Case Study: Golden Plains Wind Farm[32]

WestWind Energy's Golden Plains Wind Farm offered a range of incentives for neighbours of their project. This included a financial incentive project where owner-residents within 2km of a constructed wind turbine for the project are provided an annual financial incentive, which is based on the level of impact for each property.

The project has also implemented an electricity offset and energy audit scheme for residents within 3km of a constructed turbine. These residents are offered a payment equal to the amount of the average electricity bill of a Victorian home for the life of the project.

Finally, the project is planning to offer a community investment program whereby community members living within an approximate 10km radius of the wind project are able to financially invest in the project. This type of community co-investment is further discussed in the following section on co-ownership and co-investment.

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[29]Tilt Renewables 2021 "Rye Park Wind Farm: Community" available at: https://www.tiltrenewables.com/assets-and-projects/Rye-Park-Wind-Farm/community/

[30]Neoen 2021 "Culcairn Solar Farm: Local Benefits" available at: https://culcairnsolarfarm.com.au/local-benefits/

[31]Neoen & NGH Consulting 2020 Response to submissions: Culcairn Solar Farm, p.67 available at: https://majorprojects.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/prweb/PRRestService/mp/01/getContent?AttachRef=EXH-2683%2120200604T055155.831%20GMT

[32]WestWind Energy 2020 Golden Plains Wind Farm: Community, available at:

Local landowners with a Sapphire Wind Farm turbine blade in New England

7. Community Co-Investment & Co-Ownership

Perhaps the most direct way for regional communities to develop a sense of ownership around a new industry, is to literally become owners through co-ownership or co-investment options. Co-investment describes a model in which a community buys rights to a portion of the earnings of the renewable energy project but has no decision-making power or control over the operation of the asset. Co-ownership, however, is where a community-owned vehicle owns a portion of the renewable energy development and plays an active role in decision making[33].

Overseas, community ownership, community co-ownership and community co-investment are commonplace for renewable energy projects, particularly wind farms, and these models enjoy high levels of community support[34]. For example, in Denmark in 2001, 86 percent of the wind turbines in the country were cooperative owned, and in 2013, 46 per cent of Germany's 63 GW of renewable energy was locally owned[35]. In the Danish private sector there has been a long established requirement of all new developments that a minimum of 20 per cent ownership is offered to the local community[36]. In general, the European wind industry found its feet through community investment and provides many examples of how the sector could be opened up in Australia.

[33]Lane, T. and Hicks, J. (2017) Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing in Renewable Energy Development: A Guide for Applicants to the Victorian Renewable Energy Target Auction. p 26. Available at: https://www.energy.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0027/91377/Community-Engagement-and-Benefit-Sharing-in-Renewable-Energy-Development.pdf

[34]Rueter, G. (2012) The global boom in wind energy. Available at: http://p.dw.com/p/15NVm

[35]Farrell, J. (2013) Half of Germany's 63,000 megawatts of renewable energy is locally owned. Available at: https://ilsr.org/germanys-63000-megawatts-renewable-energylocally-owned/

[36]World Wind Energy Association, (2018). Policy Paper Series: Denmark. Available at: https://www.wwindea.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Denmark_full.pdf

By their very nature, such projects deliver substantial benefits to their local communities, through ownership and decision-making roles. The support for and engagement with renewable energy projects that incorporate co-ownership or co-investment opportunities show that the benefits of renewable energy go far beyond a cleaner environment, and can be enjoyed by a wide cross-section of stakeholders when an emphasis is placed on inclusion of all stakeholders, and community led development.

There is increasing interest in co-ownership and co-investment in renewable energy projects within Australia. Developers around the country are actively working with communities on this model and we anticipate the interest will keep growing. Community co-investment and co-ownership options for generation, storage and transmission infrastructure could feasibly be offered through the REZ model, if this is something people in host regions wish to pursue.

Case Study: Sapphire Wind Farm co-investment

In NSW, the Sapphire Wind Farm has become the first commercial wind farm to make investment available via a public offer. 100 investors across NSW and the ACT have taken up approximately $1.8m in community shares and were eligible to be part of the project's Community Advisory Panel. The owner of Sapphire Wind Farm, CWP Renewables, has indicated they will make a similar offer available to the local community for their current Bango Wind Farm in NSW[38].

Case Study: Winterbourne Wind co-ownership

Winterbourne Wind near Walcha, NSW has embarked upon a community co-design process, resulting in an innovative co-ownership model for the project. Turbine host landholders, easement owners and selected neighbours will be invited to join an ownership stake in the project at no cost. The ownership vehicle, WalchaWind, will hold 5% ownership of the project. Of this 5% stake, 50% of the benefits will return to these community owners, with the remaining 50% being contributed to Walcha community projects.

> *"Engagement, transparency and benefit-sharing with the local community is critical to a successful project. Without a social licence to operate in the region, there can be no project."*

Case Study: Capital Battery Co-Investment

Neoen's innovative Capital Battery Community Co-investment scheme is in early stages of development, set to become one of the first battery co-investment schemes in the world. As described by project proponent Neoen:

> *"Community co-investment supports the ACT in achieving its Climate Change Strategy through community leadership, by involving and leveraging the power of community towards an emissions-free future...And as far as we're aware this is the first time this has been proposed for battery storage anywhere in the world.*

[37]CWP Renewables 2021 Sapphire Wind Farm, available at:https://cwprenewables.com/our-projects/sapphire-wind-farm

[38]CWP Renewables (2020) "Bango Wind Farm Community Consultative Committee Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday 18th August 2020", available at: https://cwprenewables.com/assets/main/PDFs/Bango/Minutes/Meeting-16-18-Aug-2020.pdf

[39]Winterbourne Wind (2021) Community Benefits, available

8. Direct & Indirect Jobs

One of the most impactful potential benefits that regional communities can access through hosting a REZ is the growth in direct and indirect jobs that arise as a result. Additional business activity in a regional town is generally welcome, which is why local training and jobs pathways are a key benefit host communities should be advocating for. Through working with government and industry on actions such as identifying training needs, ensuring training capacity, delivering apprenticeship programs, prioritising local employment and maximising local procurement and manufacturing, the potential for jobs and economic security is massive.

Host communities can start advocating that REZ contracts embed local capacity building and employment. Local upskilling through apprenticeships and training can be a great way to make sure there's a skill transfer to our regions, and a great way to retain young people in our regions.. Manufacturing is another area that can be supported through local procurement.

Several existing research reports published by experts in this field have already addressed the issue of jobs, procurement and content in the renewable energy industry. These reports include:

- Clean Energy Council's Clean Energy at Work Report
- Australian Council of Trade Unions: Sharing the benefits with workers: a decent jobs agenda for the renewable energy industry
- The Climate Council: The Clean Jobs Plan
- UTS Institute for Sustainable Futures: Renewable Energy Jobs in Australia
- The Australia Institute: Submission to Energy Security Board REZ consultation paper

The provision of safe, secure local jobs, local procurement and local content are vital to the success of REZs. These direct jobs would have an incredible impact on the host regional communities. However, it's not only direct jobs that could grow out of hosting a REZ - there can also be indirect jobs and growth in other industries. For example, in tourism.

TOURISM

The establishment of REZs opens up opportunities to value-add onto existing regional tourism industries and to drive new tourism opportunities, including educational tourism. Growth in regional tourism has been identified as a key project within regional renewal strategies. If the tourism opportunities that REZs offer are taken up, this could be a further avenue through which to contribute to the growth in the local economy.

Researchers in Europe have examined the viability of renewable energy as tourist attractions and have found that a wide range of visitors seek out renewable energy tourism due to education, sustainability and nature, technical fascination, emotion, leisure and fun . There's an important legacy in Australia of tourist attractions, tour programs, lookouts and education programs centred around coal mines and power stations. There's an interest and a need to do this for renewables now too. Not only can these initiatives bolster the local tourism industry, they also contribute to a greater sense of community pride in the local industry.

Case Study: Glen Innes White Rock Wind Farm

Glen Innes, a regional town in NSW's New England region, has recognised the tourism potential of hosting large-scale renewable energy projects. In 2018 a wind turbine blade that was damaged during construction of the White Rock Wind Farm was given to the local Glen Innes Severn Council and was installed as an artistic tourist attraction. The Council has since received a grant from the NSW government to more permanently display the blade and to build a picnic area, including a viewing platform.

> *"While the development of local wind and solar farms has generated jobs, it has also created a new tourism opportunity for our area, with visitors often saying to me how they intentionally detour from their trip down the New England Highway, just so they can see the turbines ."*
> — *Glen Innes Severn Mayor Carol Sparks*

Case Study: Educational tours in Gullen Range

The co-located Gullen Range Wind and Solar Farm, North-West of Goulburn NSW regularly offers educational tours of the projects to the public, and particularly encourages children to visit.

[40]Lun (2019) The viability of renewable energy sources as tourist attractions in the Alps, available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-28110-6_13

[41]Glen Innes Examiner (2020) Wind farm viewing platform for White Rock at Glen Innes, available at: https://www.gleninnesexaminer.com.au/story/6669874/87000-to-build-viewing-platform-at-wind-farm/

Project proponent BJCE Australia has recognised the opportunity for the public to understand more about Australia's energy infrastructure. They announce on their website, "You will be able to see how our wind and solar farm works, learn about renewable energy and get up close to a wind turbine and a solar array ."

Case Study: Victorian Government 'Local Jobs First' Policy

The Victorian Government required projects applying to the first Renewable Energy Target (VRET) auction to adhere to a 'Local Jobs First' Policy. This policy required a local content target of 64 percent, a local operations target of 90 percent, and a local steel target of 90 percent. For VRET1, projects that exceeded these targets scored higher than projects that only met the minimum targets.

Case Study: Going above and Beon employment and training

Beon Energy Solutions has been leading the way for innovative training and employment initiatives in the Australian renewable energy sector. Working alongside SunITAFE in 2018 Beon established a six-month Solar Industry Career Pathway program that linked targeted local traineeships to employment at the Karadoc Solar Farm in Mildura . The same project also saw Beon partner with Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN), resulting in 40 of the over 200 workers hired for the Karadoc Solar Farm as part of the Mildura Regional City Council Employment Program . In 2020 Beon established a pilot program aimed at increasing the number of women working in the solar industry. Their 'Women in Solar' pilot program was linked to the Bomen Solar Farm in NSW and resulted in eleven women achieving training and employment for the project, including women who were Aboriginal, long-term unemployed and single parents .

A detailed case study of the Karadoc employment and training program can be found in the Clean Energy Council's Guide to Benefit Sharing Options for Renewable Energy Projects.

[42]BJCE (2021) Gullen Solar Farm: Wind and Solar Farm Tours, available at: https://www.gullensolarfarm.com/wind-and-solar-farm-tours/

[43]Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning 2017 FAQ. Available at: https://www.energy.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0023/391172/VRET_FAQ.pdf

[44]New program offers job pathway into Sunraysia's solar industry Beon Energy Solutions 2018. Available at: https://beon-es.com.au/latest-news/new-program-offers-job-pathway-into-sunraysias-solar-industry/

[45]Solar farm project providing local employment for the Sunraysia community Beon Energy Solutions 2018. Available at: https://beon-es.com.au/latest-news/solar-farm-project-providing-local-employment-for-the-sunraysia-community

[46]Award nomination for helping more women find work in solar Beon Energy Solutions 2020. Available at: https://beon-es.com.au/latest-news/award-nomination-for-helping-more-women-find-work-in-solar/

9. Agriculture & Renewables

WInd and solar farms can be seamlessly integrated with a host of agricultural land uses if they are planned well in accordance with host landholder's needs.

If done in partnership and collaboration with local landholders, government departments and farming peak bodies, REZs will become a value-add industry for the agricultural sector. The willingness of farming communities to host a REZ will depend on how much they believe renewable infrastructure will assist the farming economy on their farms and in their region. **There are myriad opportunities and almost endless possibilities for innovation in the renewables-in-agriculture sphere.** The Clean Energy Council recently released a report detailing some of the innovative practices already in place in Australia and globally. These include:

- Sheep grazing, growing food, beekeeping or biodiversity regeneration co-developed with ground-mounted solar panels
- Grazing, horticulture & viticulture co-developed with elevated solar panels
- Solar Greenhouses
- Floating solar panels co-developed with aquaculture systems

These practices offer a range of benefits for both farmers and renewable energy proponents, including increased productivity of land, reduction in operating costs, and contributing towards clean energy and a healthier environment.

However, these opportunities need to be communicated and demonstrated with the agricultural community early on in the REZ process. Currently there is a lack of understanding about these possibilities, and often renewable energy is seen by farmers as an industry in competition with agriculture for access to land. Organisations such as Farmers for Climate Action, events such as the Renewables in Agriculture conference, and reports such as the Clean Energy Council's Agri-Solar report are all contributing to the growth in knowledge and awareness of the opportunities that are available.

Although there are many opportunities for agriculture and renewable energy to harmoniously co-exist, the perception held by some that the two are incompatible has not arisen out of nowhere. There have been instances where renewable energy projects have failed to adequately address detrimental flow-on impacts for farmers. RE-Alliance is aware of issues throughout the country with contractors not shutting gates on farms, contractors diverting water streams and impacting on down-stream properties and projects that do not accommodate co-production of renewable energy and agriculture on their sites. There are also concerns within the community about obtaining fire insurance and the responsibility for fire management plans.

Due to the nature of solar, wind, battery and transmission infrastructure and where they are typically located, rural residents will bear the most direct impacts of these projects. Impacts and benefits should be balanced out, with initiatives to target those most directly impacted. Examples of benefits identified by residents in REZs that are targeted to rural landholders could include:

- Rural rubbish collection service,
- Biodiversity plantings along corridors across several landholder properties
- Upgrades to telecommunication to reduce issues with internet connectivity on many farming properties.

Case Study: Solar and sheep in Dubbo

There are already existing examples within the CWO REZ of agriculture and energy production co-existing. Tom Warren, a farmer in Dubbo, hosts an 18MW solar farm and grazes his merino sheep between the panels. Tom has stated that he believes the solar farm has increased the carrying capacity of his land and there are multiple benefits for his sheep from having shade in summer and wind protection in winter.

[47]Clean Energy Council (2021) Australian Guide to Agrisolar for Large-Scale Solar, available at: https://www.cleanenergycouncil.org.au/resources/resources-hub/australian-guide-to-agrisolar-for-large-scale-solar-1

10. Get Involved

GET INFORMED

A great initial step, and one you're already taking by reading this guide, is to equip yourself with knowledge. We know that energy policy can sometimes be an overwhelming arena to step into, which is why we've tried to take some of the work out of it for you.

Need to know

Just want the top level information that will help you on your journey to getting involved in your local REZ? These are the resources for you!

1. RE-Alliance Website
2. Energy NSW REZ Website
3. NSW Department of Planning, Industry & Environment REZ Fact Sheet
4. NSW Department of Planning, Industry & Environment REZ FAQ

Delve deeper

Love diving deep into policy details and discussions? Check out these more detailed resources:

1. Energy NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap
2. RE-Alliance 'Building trust for transmission' report
3. RE-Alliance (2019), Building Stronger Communities
4. Australian Council of Trade Unions (2020), Sharing the benefits with workers: a decent jobs agenda for the renewable energy industry
5. Clean Energy Council, Best Practice Charter
6. Clean Energy Council (2019), A Guide to Benefit Sharing Options for Renewable Energy Projects
7. Clean Energy Council (2020), Clean Energy at Work
8. Clean Energy Council (2021), Australian Guide to Agri-Solar for Large-Scale Solar
9. Helen Haines (2020), The Local Power Plan

Host landholders

Have you been approached about hosting wind, solar, storage or transmission on your land? Host landholders are in a great position to advocate for strong local benefits at the individual project level. Here are some suggestions and resources for you:

1. The Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner has recently published a checklist to assist host landholders in negotiating commercial agreements with renewable energy proponents
2. NSW Farmers have a very comprehensive Renewable Energy Landholder Guide
3. Talk to your neighbours. Find out who else has been approached, whether your neighbours have any concerns and whether they could be alleviated through neighbour benefit programs.
4. Get in touch with landholders who already host renewable energy infrastructure and ask them about their experience. RE-Alliance can help to put you in touch with current host landholders.
5. Advocate for your neighbours and your community in your lease negotiations

Traditional Custodians

In the establishment of REZs, government and industry will be looking for ways in which First Nations communities can benefit. This will be a relatively new area for some industry and government stakeholders, however there are First Nations-led organisations that are thinking through what the relationship and benefits could be. Check out some of the following resources:

1. NSW Aboriginal Land Council Solar Power Factsheet
2. NSW Aboriginal Land Council Wind Power Factsheet
3. Original Power Clean Energy Campaign

GET INVOLVED

Now that you've equipped yourself with some information on REZs, it's time to get active in your local REZ.

Join us

RE-Alliance exists to help you ensure that your regional community benefits from Australia's clean energy transformation. We support you to secure tangible benefits for your local community.

You can **join us as a financial member, as a volunteer, donate, or simply sign up to our email list** to keep up to date with what's happening in your REZ.

Talk to your friends and neighbours

Knowledge shared is knowledge gained. Now that you've learnt more about your local REZ, a great next step is to start talking to your neighbours, friends and family in the region about what you've learnt, and what benefits you want to see come out of the REZ for your region.

If you're unsure how to approach the conversation, reach out to our team at RE-Alliance - we've been hosting conversations in REZ communities and have a range of resources available to help you.

Speak to your elected representatives

You've learnt a lot about REZs, you've shared your knowledge with your friends and neighbours, and you've started dreaming big about the benefits that hosting a REZ can mean for your community. A useful next step is to get in contact with your local, state and federal

representatives and request a meeting with them. If you can, go as a group and have a clear ask that you would like your representative to enact.

Keep an eye out for engagement opportunities

As both the NSW government and industry progress their plans for your local REZ, there will be a range of opportunities for you to engage with the REZ process. These include calls for submissions about REZ regulations, open-invitations to public consultation sessions, nominations for committees and more.

To help implement a more collaborative and empowering community engagement process for REZs, here are a few ideas for things to advocate for:

- Local voices for local decisions
- Early & genuine community engagement
- Openness, transparency and accountability

Nominate to join a project Community Consultative Committee (CCC) or Community Reference Group (CRG)

Most wind, solar, transmission and battery projects of utility-scale, such as those being built in REZs, will have some form of community committee. These typically take the form of a CCC or a CRG. For these committees, there is usually a nomination process for local residents to join the committee. One of the best ways you can get involved in governance of CEFs is by joining one of these committees. And the more passionate and creative local people who join these committees, the better the funded projects are likely to be. So when you see nominations open for your local CCC or CRG - don't hesitate to sign up and help bring meaningful projects to your region.

Apply for a grant to fund your project

Another great way to get involved in renewable energy Community Enhancement Funds (CEFs) is to apply for funding for a project or organisation you're involved in once the CEF opens to applications. Want to establish an art program for kids? Apply for a grant! Need new BBQ equipment for your local sporting team? Apply for a grant! Want to expand your Caring for Country program? Apply for a grant! The possibilities for what local projects can be funded through CEFS stretch almost as far as your imagination.

My Local Community Enhancement Fund (CEF) Is Run By The Council - How Can I Get Involved?

While there are some CEFs managed entirely by the local Council, this can lead to tensions where funding originally intended to benefit the impacted community is spent across the LGA more broadly.

Talk to your local Councillor/s

Councillors on your local council are there to represent you and your fellow constituents. When there is a local issue you have concerns with, particularly where council decisions are involved, your local Councillor is a great person/s to approach. Send an email detailing your concerns and request a meeting. Be polite and be prepared. Take a copy of the above mentioned research, bring along a copy of this guide, use case study examples of how other projects and other councils have organised the governance of their CEFs so that the local community has a voice, and decision-making power. If your neighbours and friends are similarly concerned, a united approach through a group meeting with your Councillor/s can be stronger than meeting as an individual.

Talk to the project manager

From the renewable company's perspective, a key role of CEFs is to ensure that the directly impacted community is receiving benefits from the renewable energy project. Council control of CEFs can negatively impact the purpose of the fund from the company's perspective, which is to build and maintain social licence in the community. If you're concerned that there is no community voice for your local CEF, this is an issue you can raise directly with the project manager. If the project manager similarly considers the lack of community voice to be an issue, they can also approach the Council to advocate for more community control over the CEF.

DREAM BIG

The opportunity for ambitious projects to be achieved in your region through REZ regional enhancement funds is one of the most exciting parts of the REZ model. Now is the time for your region to dream big, and make the most out of the opportunities heading your way.

Attend our events

RE-Alliance will be hosting events in NSW REZs to help local communities understand, envision and advocate for innovative, locally-desired benefits. Check out our events page to find out when your next local event is scheduled. Nothing scheduled? Get in touch and we'll see what we can organise!

Pitch a partnership

Are you a local business owner or work for a local community organisation? Do you see an opportunity where the goods & services you provide could better serve your community if you had access to more resources and project partners? Now is the time to start thinking about how your organisation could partner with the renewable energy sector and/or the NSW government to make the most of the influx of community benefit funds that come with hosting a REZ.

Plan a project

Is there a project you've had your eye on that you think would make an incredible difference to your local community? Does your organisation have a project for the local community that is ready to go, all it needs is some funding to get it started? Now is the time to envision big, bold, transformative projects - and be ready to snap up funding opportunities that arise through your community hosting a REZ.

RE-ALLIANCE

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO POWER

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