

Questions on Notice from Post Mining Land Use Inquiry - Geni.Energy feedback

## **Changes to Planning System Required to Facilitate increased community benefits from mining and renewable energy developments**

Community scale renewable energy projects have been dubbed the “missing middle”, where we do household scale solar and batteries, incentives and regulatory environment well and also at grid scale, however the community scale is much more complex, time consuming and challenging.

Some suggestions include:

1. Community co-investment for large scale renewable energy developments
2. Network of local energy hubs across the nation;
3. Proposed Changes to the NSW *State Environmental Planning Policy (Transport and Infrastructure) 2021* (the ISEPP) to facilitate development of mid scale community batteries (more details below);
4. Royalties for Rejuvenation local authority to drive place-based transition planning;
5. Expand definitions of “community consultation.”

### **1. Community co-investment on large scale renewable energy developments**

Denmark has legislated for more than two decades that >20% of each windfarm must be owned by locals within a given radius of the wind farm. There are also examples in Australia of local people investing in projects located near them and receiving dividends from the profits, these include Sapphire Wind Farm in the New England of NSW, Coonooer Bridge Wind Farm near Bendigo in Vic. This is also applicable for mid- and large-scale solar projects and could be required as part of the planning process.

### **2. Local Energy Hubs**

This is a policy proposal being canvassed with the federal government that would see a network of ~50 locally based shopfronts that employ local people to help drive local benefits from the transition to renewable energy, that could also be utilized by the NSW state government. The Hubs act in the best interests of the community in engaging with large scale renewable developers, educating locals about solar and batteries and driving local community energy projects. These Hubs could provide the support needed to navigate the “missing middle” and help community energy projects be implemented.

### **3. Proposed changes to ISEPP to facilitate development of community batteries**

The NSW *State Environmental Planning Policy (Transport and Infrastructure) 2021* (the ISEPP) currently lacks accurate characterisation for battery-only projects, particularly smaller scale proposals such as community batteries. Whilst section 2.35 lists a definition of small-scale battery system, it is then only

mentioned again in 2.41 Exempt Developments in Note (5) (e) where it describes small-scale batteries as batteries under 20kWh.

The Narrabri Community Battery is 500kWh so does not meet this definition. Batteries of this scale are therefore not listed as Exempt Developments, Permissible Developments nor Developments Requiring Consent. Only battery projects that have a generation component (that is, a solar and battery project together behind the meter) seem to have a clear direction in the ISEPP. This makes it difficult to secure development consent for battery-only projects, of which community batteries usually are.

In our situation, in partnership with Narrabri Shire Council, we developed a project that included a generation component of a solar car park but this was a time consuming workaround simply because the SEPP1 did not have a proper characterisation of a community battery.

#### **4. Royalties for Rejuvenation local authority to drive place-based transition planning**

The previous structure utilised local expert panels, made up of people who lived and worked locally. As the proposed new structure (currently termed Future Jobs and Investment Authorities) is designed, ensuring that the authorities are locally-informed is crucial. Transition planning can then be place-based and embedded, identifying local solutions that are suited to the local context. For instance, in this region there is a proposal for providing water security to the post-mining land use landscape around Maules Creek mine. This type of proposal is an ideal solution to the local context, but may well not be conceived by a centralised body unfamiliar with the locally-specific issues and opportunities.

#### **5. Expand definitions “community consultation”**

Whilst most renewable energy companies complete a community consultation phase, these can be reduced to a tick-the-box exercise. We would like to see the use of “consultation” to include deeper engagement such as creating a role for the public to influence and directly drive decision-making (by being part of a project management board, for instance, that can drive actual project changes based on community feedback) and involvement in financial aspects of projects (such as partial ownership), not just hosting meetings and other passive consultation activities. Procurement of consultants, materials, inputs, expertise etc can all be considered as part of the community engagement aspect of a development and should be procured locally where possible.