

Submission
No 84

**INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF RENEWABLE ENERGY
ZONES (REZ) ON RURAL AND REGIONAL
COMMUNITIES AND INDUSTRIES IN NEW SOUTH
WALES**

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
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Submission Renewable Energy Zones (REZ)

I believe that REZs are vital if we are to dramatically reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and provide cheap, efficient and reliable power to regional areas and the state. The most recent projections for NSW's emissions reductions show that the targets for 2030 and 2035 will not be reached. Significant decarbonisation in the electricity and energy sector is central to reaching net zero by 2050.

NSW's continued reliance on power from aging coal-fired power stations is resulting in an energy system that is increasingly unreliable and expensive for consumers. The focus of the NSW government should be to continue rolling out renewable energy developments in a timely manner in REZs to ensure the best outcomes for communities and the environment.

These are the actions I believe the NSW government should undertake to help regional communities benefit from REZs, particularly when the positive economic impacts that REZs are bringing to rural and regional communities are already being felt through community benefits and economic activity.

Agricultural impacts

REZs are strengthening long-term security for regional farmers. The ability for farmers to host renewable energy projects on their land allows for the opportunity to diversify their income. There are also opportunities for dual land use, allowing farmers to retain agricultural practices while hosting renewable energy. Colocation of solar farming and sheep grazing is an increasingly common practice and successful model of dual land use.

Environmental impacts

The impacts of climate change pose the biggest threat to the environment. The renewable energy transition presents opportunities to protect and restore nature.

There are several case studies across Australia that demonstrate these opportunities including; Neon Energy establishment of World's End Gorge National Park as part of the vegetation offset strategy for the Goyder South wind farm; SA Water & Seeding Natives revegetation project, involving the planting native grass and saltbush seed under thousands of solar panels across the state to secure the return of native scrub vegetation and local jobs and Cattle Hill wind farm use of Identiflight AI technology as part of their mitigation strategy to protect eagles from turbine blade strike.

The best way to ensure our environment is properly protected is to strengthen NSW's nature laws and reform the planning system to increase nature positive developments, as recommended in the Independent Review of the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016.

Post mining land use opportunities

For regional communities that are transitioning away from coal mining and becoming industrial hubs for renewable energy generation and green manufacturing, such as in the Hunter and Illawarra. The NSW government should prioritise the development of region-wide post-mining land use plans that have positive biodiversity outcomes and do not allow mining companies to evade rehabilitation obligations as set out in their development consents.

Mixture of renewables

A mix of utility scale renewables, rooftop solar, large-scale and household batteries are needed to achieve a reliable modern energy system. Pursuing alternatives to renewable energy, such as nuclear energy, would worsen climate change impacts by delaying the renewable energy transition and furthering the lifetime of carbon polluting coal-fired power generation.

Community consultation

Early and genuine consultation and engagement with communities of a consistent standard is essential in any development.

A regional community benefits plan should be developed, which prioritises the aspirations of both the local and broader communities of impact and include benefits such as discounted power for residents and co-ownership of assets like community batteries.

First Nations communities

Genuine engagement and consulting with First Nations communities is essential to achieving positive environmental and cultural outcomes through the transition to renewable energy. These communities must remain a central part of the process of planning, construction and operations. Policy mechanisms to achieve this can include weighted criteria for local First Nations business participation, and resourcing First Nations ranger programs.

The NSW government should continue working with the Federal government and directly with First Nations communities to meaningfully implement an impactful and well-resourced rollout of the First Nations Clean Energy Strategy in NSW. This includes the three focus areas of: Power First Nations communities with clean energy; enable equitable partnerships and achieve economic benefits with First Nations people