

**Submission  
No 114**

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

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Submission to the Inquiry into the impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales Inquiry)

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I very much welcome the Inquiry. I wish committee members every success in producing a high-quality, comprehensive report.

As a general comment, I would like to mention the need for a greater emphasis on and broader approach to energy efficiency. We all consume too much and every commodity we consume requires energy for R&D, production, transport, use, reuse, disposal, etc. It is of course essential that we continue to reduce dependence on fossil fuels, but renewables have 'current and projected socioeconomic, cultural, agricultural and environmental impacts' (TOR a), some heftily adverse, as the concerns underwriting the Inquiry's terms of reference indicate. Renewable energy is urgently needed for a safer climate. We are hard pressed to produce enough of it in time to prevent increasing catastrophe. It's a precious resource and comes with the full gamut of costs. We can't afford to waste it. Among OECD countries, Australia is, per capita, among the top energy consumers. With little inconvenience, we could significantly reduce our energy demands.

**TOR i)** In my locality (the Illawarra), major barriers to realising our declared status as a renewable energy hub include:

- lack of sound information and effective community engagement and consultation;
- lack of financial incentive for households and small businesses to adopt roof solar, batteries and community-level batteries.

In the case of the poor acceptance of proposals for offshore wind farms, resident scepticism in the Illawarra was particularly high due, I think, to two factors:

- rushed and poorly conceived community engagement unable to compete with mis- and dis-information campaigns; and
- fear, even among well-informed residents, that environmental assessment of local reefs and marine ecology would be inadequate and result in avoidable destruction of important eco-values.

Means to counteract these barriers include:

- expert, well-thought-out community engagement and consultation programs. People's concerns must be heard and addressed. Full transparency of risks as well as benefits—social, environmental and economic—must be guaranteed.
- independent and reputable environmental, economic and social assessments of proposals. Monitoring as the development precedes must also be independent. To be successful, proponents need win social licence. Government and their planning departments must recognise that self-regulation by developers is not acceptable and will not win social licence.

**TOR k)** For the sake of a liveable future, we must transition, locally and statewide, to clean energy as rapidly as possible. The state's emissions reduction targets need to be more ambitious and need to be legislated and enforced. A net zero target by 2035-40 is realistic

for our state. The science is available to support this more robust target and the Net Zero Commission should be tasked to advise on a doable pathway.