

**Submission
No 116**

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

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The Illawarra is a fast-growing community that is picking up the spillover of people from Sydney's expansion and housing crisis. Over the last 10 years there has been vast urban development in the West Dapto area of both the Wollongong and Shellharbour LGAs, as well as increasing population densities around established suburban hubs. Most of Illawarra's urban areas are on the floodplain or tucked up under the escarpment much of which is flood prone. The change in the weather patterns is very noticeable here over the last few years, we have experienced frequent, seriously damaging flood events from sudden storms, hot, minnie droughts at unusual times of the year, and unusually hot ocean temperatures impacting many coastal activities. The Illawarra, like everywhere in NSW, needs urgent action to reduce GHG emissions to avoid catastrophic changes to our climate, we are already struggling.

Establishing Renewable Energy Zones is the first step in transitioning energy production from fossil fuels to sustainable sources to reduce our GHG emissions and deadly climate change impacts.

The Illawarra REZ promises many benefits for the community and the state:-

1/Transitioning away from fossil fuels is essential in this largely industrial centre, for NSW to reach its GHG reduction targets.

2/The transition to renewable energy generation offers opportunities for alternative industries and employment for the Illawarra, essentially a new lease of life for the local economy

3/Transition to renewable energy also offers the Illawarra a golden opportunity to clean up the natural environment and make this old industrial area a much healthier place to live. Reuse and rehabilitation of contaminated lands must be part of the planning in siting renewable industries here.

My concerns about establishing a REZ in the Illawarra are more about how long it is taking and the adverse impacts on the process from misinformed sections of the community.

Any delay in establishing the Illawarra REZ could result in:-

1/ a missed opportunity for sustainable economic growth for the region and

2/ a missed opportunity to halt the environmental pollution, a legacy of the last 150+ years of fossil fuel-powered industry.

3/ It will add to the NSW government's dilemma that we are not on track to reach emissions reduction targets for 2030 and 2035, (as outlined in the NSW Net Zero Commission's 2024 report).

4/ Any delay in transitioning to clean energy underlines the fragility of NSW's electricity supply which relies on the aging coal-fired generators that are unreliable, and expensive to operate. This leaves the people of NSW with high-cost power and an electricity supply that is unreliable at peak times.

Misinformation and the government's role:-

My experience during the community consultation process of the Federal government's offshore REZ in 2024 indicated a great deal of ignorance within the community about renewable energy generation which was fed by misinformation and led to disruptive hysteria. I believe this underlined a need for proactive direction from the government, as the approving body for renewable energy projects, to ensure that :-

1/public consultation is undertaken early and is genuine and of a high, comprehensive and consistent standard.

2/Consent for projects requires approval criteria that stipulate the right of the community to benefits from hosting renewable energy projects in its locality. Benefits might include:-

a) discounted energy rates for residents

b) ensured jobs and skills training for local people and First Nations Peoples

c) co-ownership of assets like community batteries

d) co-management with First Nations People of land relevant to the project

e) independent environmental assessment which is overseen by the government but financed by the proponent

f) Lastly, as mentioned above the reuse and rehabilitation of old mining and old industrial sites in the Illawarra because every living creature needs a clean environment to live in and the people of Wollongong are no exception.

Yours sincerely, Annie Marlow,