

Submission
No 137

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

Organisation: Good for the Gong

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Submission to the NSW Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW

Inquiry into the Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on Rural and Regional Communities and Industries in New South Wales

Submitted by: Good for the Gong

Date: February 2025

About Good for the Gong

Good for the Gong is an independent, non-partisan community organisation based in the Illawarra. We are a group of Illawarra locals dedicated to addressing climate change, protecting our environment, and ensuring a just transition to renewable energy that delivers tangible benefits to our community. We actively engage in public outreach, community discussions, and policy advocacy to promote responsible renewable energy development. Our approach is rooted in facts, evidence-based decision-making, and community empowerment.

Introduction

Good for the Gong welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry into the impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales. We strongly support the transition to renewable energy and want to see renewable energy projects in the Illawarra that set the highest standards for environmental and community benefits.

Key Issues and Recommendations

1. Socioeconomic and Environmental Impacts (TOR a)

Opportunities for Regional Investment and Jobs:

- REZ projects present significant opportunities for economic growth, including job creation and investment in regional areas. With an estimated 450,000 jobs to be created by 2030, targeted support for skills development in renewable energy should be prioritised.
- With a long history of manufacturing, extensive academic skills and expertise at the University of Wollongong, and a deep-water port, the Illawarra is particularly well-placed to capitalise on the opportunities presented by the transition to renewable energy.



- Local businesses and existing industries should be supported to ensure they are able to capitalise on the opportunities presented by the development of renewable energy projects.
- TAFE Centres of Excellence in REZ areas, such as the Illawarra, should be expanded to provide training for renewable energy-related careers.

Balancing Environmental and Agricultural Considerations:

- Climate change poses the most severe threat to our environment, intensifying Australia's biodiversity crisis and driving climate-related disasters like bushfires and floods. The most effective way to safeguard nature and agriculture, including ecosystems and farming regions within Renewable Energy Zones (REZs), is by swiftly transitioning to renewable energy and achieving net zero emissions.
- To ensure that renewable energy projects contribute positively to the environment and to agricultural communities, biodiversity protections must be embedded at every stage of development. This includes investing in independent environmental assessments, identifying key conservation and restoration priorities for each REZ, and requiring developers to actively support local ecological health and provide community benefits to agricultural communities.
- Transparent environmental impact assessments must be mandatory for all REZ projects, with enforceable mitigation strategies for any adverse impacts.

2. Compensation and Community Benefits (TOR d, e)

Fair Compensation for Affected Communities:

- The energy transition offers a unique opportunity to build systems that reduce emissions, lower costs and deliver real benefits to communities.
- By implementing strong policies, prioritising genuine consultation for large-scale projects, and promoting community benefits, we can secure positive outcomes for both people and the environment—giving communities a greater voice and stake in their energy future.

Local Energy Hubs for Community Benefit:

- We support the establishment of Local Energy Hubs in REZ areas to ensure that regional communities receive direct benefits from renewable energy projects.
- These hubs should provide access to subsidised household solar and battery storage, lower energy costs, and local job training programs.

3. Adequacy of Community Consultation and Misinformation (TOR i)



Improving Consultation and Community Engagement:

- Community engagement must go beyond basic notification requirements and involve genuine, two-way dialogue with affected communities.
- We recommend establishing a centralised Regional Community Engagement Secretariat to coordinate outreach, provide clear information, and ensure that all affected stakeholders are heard.
- Good for the Gong volunteers' experience, through speaking to thousands of community members while holding stalls, events, and face-to-face outreach, is that most Illawarra community members are either broadly supportive of offshore wind in the region (so long as the Australian Government delivers on their promises of protecting nature and delivering community benefits), or they don't feel very strongly about it. This sentiment is reflected in several polls, including CSIRO research (April 2024)¹ that showed 76% of people in offshore wind communities are at least broadly ok with offshore wind in their area¹, and an ACM survey (July 2024) finding 61% of respondents are supportive of the technology in their community.²
- Consultation processes can often see opponents as the loudest voice, but not necessarily the voice that is representative of wider community sentiment. We believe this is potentially the case of offshore wind in the Illawarra.

Combating Misinformation:

- There has been a rise in misinformation about renewable energy projects, leading to unnecessary community division and delays.
- Our observation is that local community groups and members who are not supportive of offshore wind have resorted to misinformation and disinformation tactics that have distorted and manipulated public debate about offshore wind. This thwarted meaningful efforts at consultation that were based on facts. The most obvious example of this is an AI generated false journal article on whale mortality because of offshore wind turbines that was circulated via social media (ABC News, 07/11/23).³ This is alongside false claims of negative impacts on swells and sea breezes (ibid).
- The NSW Government should fund independent fact-checking initiatives and public awareness campaigns to ensure communities have access to reliable information.
- We believe there is an opportunity to establish a regional community and stakeholder engagement secretariat to: log and act as a clearinghouse for information disseminated by government and proponents, synthesise information on various consultation phases, and provide accurate contact information, including for grievances. We

¹ 'Australian attitudes toward the renewable energy transition' (April 2024)
<https://www.csiro.au/en/research/environmental-impacts/decarbonisation/energy-transition>.

² 'What regional communities really think about renewable energy projects' (July 2024)
<https://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/8696321/regional-voices-share-concerns-on-climate-change-action/>

³ Editor of scientific journal says fake study linking whale deaths to wind farms is 'deliberate misinformation' <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-11-07/editor-blasts-fake-study-linking-whale-deaths-to-wind-farms/103069922>



believe that ‘leaving it to the market’ (proponents and consent authorities) to coordinate engagement provides little certainty for communities.

4. Supporting Local Manufacturing and Supply Chains (TOR f)

- The growth of REZs provides an opportunity to develop a strong local supply chain for renewable energy components.
 - The NSW Government should prioritise investment in domestic manufacturing of solar panels, wind turbines, and battery storage to maximise economic benefits and create secure local jobs.
 - Wherever possible, we would like to see Illawarra businesses supported to develop their capacity to manufacture, supply and service renewable energy projects.
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Conclusion

Good for the Gong supports the transition to renewable energy and the establishment of Renewable Energy Zones that deliver clear, long-term benefits to communities and the environment. By ensuring fair compensation, strong community engagement, local economic investment, and high environmental standards, we can achieve a just and sustainable energy transition that benefits all NSW residents.

We look forward to the Illawarra seeing the community and environmental benefits of high-quality renewable energy projects developed in our region, and across NSW.

We thank the committee for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and welcome further engagement on these critical issues.

For further information, please contact:

Good for the Gong

Contact:
