



Name: Community Power Agency

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1. Reduce the cost of meeting carbon targets

1. What could be done to improve the cost-effectiveness and alignment of policies to reduce emissions across the industrial, electricity and transport sectors?

The participant did not respond to this question.

2. Are there gaps in the emissions-reduction policies in the industrial, electricity and transport sectors which should be addressed?

The participant did not respond to this question.

3. Are there any duplicative emissions-reduction policies in the industrial, electricity and transport sectors which could be streamlined?

The participant did not respond to this question.

2. Speed up approvals for new energy infrastructure

1. Are planning and approvals processes for large energy infrastructure taking too long? If so, what causes the most delay?

Planning and approvals processes for large energy infrastructure projects are fundamental to ensuring that the transition to renewable energy minimises negative impacts on communities and nature, while maximising positive benefits. However, these processes are currently taking too long, contributing to delays in the transition and creating uncertainty and concern within host communities.

One cause of these delays is the under-resourcing of local planning authorities. Even when state government agencies are the lead assessment managers, local councils often bear a significant burden in consultation and negotiation processes, such as in negotiating Voluntary Planning Agreements (VPAs).

Another cause is the under-resourcing of communities themselves to effectively participate in consultation and engagement. Without adequate support and coordination, community members often experience engagement fatigue, especially when faced with overlapping processes from multiple project proposals. This erodes social licence and leads to further delays.

A third major issue is the inadequacy of current environmental laws, which are outdated and not equipped to assess and manage the cumulative impacts of large-scale renewable infrastructure projects. The lack of clear national environmental standards, an independent regulator, and reliable environmental data contributes to slow and uncertain assessment processes.

2. How can planning and approvals processes be sped up without unduly compromising regulatory standards?

To accelerate planning and approvals processes without compromising regulatory standards, we need to clarify standards and strengthen capacity for community and local stakeholders to engage in the process in a timely, coordinated and meaningful manner.

For example, the Queensland Government's proposed requirement for community benefit agreements (CBAs) between developers and local governments presents an opportunity for meaningful community outcomes – but only if councils are properly resourced to negotiate these agreements. Providing additional funding and guidance for local authorities will be essential.

Similarly, federal funding for initiatives like Local Energy Hubs (<https://www.localenergyhubs.org.au/>) can support communities to engage more effectively and avoid engagement fatigue. These hubs can help coordinate consultation processes across multiple developments in a region, facilitating more timely, efficient, and constructive engagement in the planning approvals process.

Finally, reforms to environmental laws should focus not on weakening standards, but on making the system more effective, transparent and predictable. This includes implementing national environmental standards, establishing an independent regulator, and ensuring access to high-quality environmental data to support fast, evidence-based decision-making. We urge the government to complete the much-needed nature reforms process by amending the EPBC Act in line with these recommendations as soon as possible.

3. Should clean energy projects be treated differently to other projects for the purpose of environmental and other approvals? If so, how?

We support calls to prioritise renewable energy project development assessments over that of fossil fuel projects, given the urgent need to meet decarbonisation targets. At present, some jurisdictions have streamlined coal and gas project approvals while raising the bar for renewable energy projects, creating an uneven playing field and delaying Australia's capacity to reach decarbonisation targets. We suggest that the government work to prioritise renewable energy projects in the environmental approvals process to ensure no further unnecessary delays to the transition.

We recommend the inclusion of climate change as a new 'matter of national environmental significance' (MENS) in the EPBC, acting as a 'climate trigger' to ensure that all projects which would have a significant impact on climate change are assessed under the EPBC Act. However, we do not consider that the climate benefits for renewable energy projects should be grounds for overriding environmental protections. The strength of environmental protections is vital to protect nature and retain social licence for the transition.

4. What can be done to build local community support for new energy infrastructure projects?

Local community support for new energy infrastructure projects hinges on genuine community engagement and empowerment in the process. The Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner (AEIC) released the independent Community Engagement Review (a.k.a. 'Dyer Review') in 2024, providing recommendations for improving

community engagement on renewable energy infrastructure developments. We strongly urge the government to fully implement these recommendations, including by funding Local Energy Hubs (<https://www.localenergyhubs.org.au/>), which would significantly contribute toward achieving better outcomes across several themes outlined in the Dyer Review. Local Energy Hubs would significantly help to proliferate evidence-backed information about renewable energy development, including by addressing mis- and dis-information.

Our recent public submission (available here: <https://cpagency.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/1.-CPA-Submission-to-NSW-Parliamentary-Inquiry-into-Impact-of-REZs.pdf>) to the NSW inquiry into the impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZs), we made several recommendations that would help to build local community support for new renewable energy infrastructure, many of which are also relevant to this review by the Productivity Commission, including our recommendations for:

1. Maximising the socio-economic and community benefits of renewables projects by:
 - 1.1. Enhancing workforce development and procurement through greater coordination and investment in local workforce training, improved incentives for developers and contractors to meet local content targets, and stronger partnerships with local organisations to ensure that participation is inclusive and equitable
 - 1.2. Improving housing and accommodation strategies for the clean energy workforce by mandating local employment targets, coordinating the sequencing of renewable energy projects, and implementing shared partnership models for housing development and legacy use
 - 1.3. Supplementing community engagement and benefit sharing practices with initiatives, such as Local Energy Hubs (<https://www.localenergyhubs.org.au/>), to support communities to engage in consultation processes, and to enhance best-practice standards and a 'race to the top' for benefit sharing
 - 1.4. Exploring options for community co-ownership and co-investment in large-scale renewable to build community wealth and share long-term revenue from energy production, and consider the introduction of local community ownership quotas and/or carve outs in price guarantee mechanisms such as the Capacity Investment Scheme
 - 1.5. Developing guidance on benefit sharing payments to significantly impacted neighbours of transmission infrastructure to create more equitable outcomes
 - 1.6. Developing guidance on benefit sharing payments to local communities hosting nearby transmission infrastructure, beyond host landholders and neighbours
 - 1.7. Developing guidance on community-led decision-making for Council-managed benefit sharing programs under VPAs, acknowledging that benefit sharing programs are not always best managed by Councils, and that the most appropriate management structure should be determined according to place-based circumstances and informed by community consultation
 - 1.8. Considering adopting a clear mechanism for contributions to Councils beyond VPAs, such as by requiring payments in lieu of rates, to avoid confusion between community benefit sharing and contributions to Councils
 - 1.9. Resourcing the implementation of a place-based, community development approach to manage the energy transition in regional and rural communities
 - 1.10. Developing regional community benefit plans and strengthen developer consultation with communities
 - 1.11. Investing in community-scale energy initiatives to enable residents to achieve their own energy aspirations, such as community owned energy projects, household and small business electrification and energy efficiency initiatives

2. Ensuring strong community participation and First Nations empowerment by:
 - 2.1. Prioritising genuine engagement, consultation and partnerships with First Nations communities
 - 2.2. Investing in on-the-ground community development staff in renewables regions, and ensuring that oversight committees and reference groups include representation from the community development sector and First Nations organisations
 - 2.3. Meaningfully engaging with local First Nations communities as early as possible in project feasibility stages, and acknowledging the rights of Traditional Owners, with an aim to build long-lasting partnerships to manage cultural impacts and opportunities
 - 2.4. Providing First Nations communities with greater information and resources on the employment and supply chain opportunities associated with renewable energy developments
 - 2.5. Incentivising renewable energy developers to engage local First Nations businesses in project partnerships and within their supply chains
 - 2.6. Increasing opportunities for local, First Nations people to build skills and experience in alignment with renewable energy employment demands and targets
3. Strengthening environmental protections and providing incentives for better biodiversity and shared-land use outcomes by:
 - 3.1. Normalising, promoting and incentivising dual land use opportunities such as agrivoltaics (agrisolar) and agro-wind for farmers and developers
 - 3.2. Identifying ecological protection and restoration priorities and requiring developers to contribute to specific nature-positive environmental regional outcomes (for more information and examples, see our biodiversity guide (available here: https://cpagency.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Better_Biodiversity_on_Solar_Farm_Guide_May_2024-high-res.pdf) for nature-positive solar farming in regional Australia).
 - 3.3. Ground-truthing environmental data and incorporating local knowledge into the management of environmental impacts from renewable energy developments
 - 3.4. Supporting research and communication to address community concerns and misinformation about the environmental impacts of renewable energy development
 - 3.5. Resourcing the research and development of guidance and training specific to fire risk, management and containment of fires involving renewable energy technologies, and continue to ensure that fire risk management strategies, emergency plans and communications protocols remain fit for purpose
 - 3.6. Supporting more robust regional planning around land use, nature, housing and other areas as they relate to visitation and tourism in regional areas
 - 3.7. Embracing new opportunities for renewable energy tourism, increased economic activity and infrastructure development to positively impact visitation rates
 - 3.8. Investing in recycling capacity and technology for wind, solar and battery storage materials in NSW, and ensuring that decommissioning agreements are publicly available to build transparency, community confidence and developer best-practice
4. Managing the cumulative impacts of multiple renewables projects in regions by:
 - 4.1. Requiring the identification of cumulative impacts on issues such as housing, workforce, nature and land use
 - 4.2. Integrating the consideration of cumulative impacts into the planning and approvals process for renewable energy developments
 - 4.3. Resourcing communities to co-design regional benefit sharing programs that

maximise the cumulative opportunity of benefit sharing from renewable energy projects

Implementation of these recommendations will require a whole-of-government approach, with cross-collaboration between local, state and federal government agencies. This approach would significantly contribute toward stronger community support for renewable energy projects, and is fundamental to ensuring a just transition to renewable energy that works for people and nature.

5. Please outline any evidence showing the productivity benefits of faster approvals for energy projects.

The productivity benefits of faster approvals for renewables goes beyond the benefits of individual projects. Robust and efficient environmental and planning approvals processes for renewable energy projects will allow communities to unlock earlier access to benefit-sharing mechanisms and local economic activity, while also protecting the natural environment that so much of our socio-economic activity is dependent upon.

Quality community benefit sharing and local procurement outcomes will keep wealth circulating in local economies, and will have long-term ripple effects on the productivity and vitality of regional communities. As outlined in the Clean Energy Council and Farmers for Climate Action's 'Billions in the bush' report (available here: [https://cleanenergycouncil.org.au/news-resources/billions-in-the-bush-energy-shift-delivers-\\$1-billion-to-farmers-and-\\$200-million-to-regions](https://cleanenergycouncil.org.au/news-resources/billions-in-the-bush-energy-shift-delivers-$1-billion-to-farmers-and-$200-million-to-regions)): "Modelling by the Regional Australia Institute shows that the increase in large-scale solar and wind projects across the National Electricity Market could result in a value-added contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) of more than \$25 billion by 2030. When including flow-on supply chain and consumption effects, the Regional Australia Institute calculated that the total national economic output from this renewable energy investment would be over \$68 billion."

There is great potential for community benefit sharing funds to be pooled and invested for long-term legacy impacts and leveraging, as outlined in our Discussion Paper on Regional Benefit Sharing (available here: <https://cpagency.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Regional-benefit-sharing-paper-2023.pdf>). These funds can be used to seed local enterprise and community development initiatives, generating greater productivity in the long term. For example, the Victorian Government's Community Power Hub pilot program between 2017 and 2020 successfully delivered 15 community energy projects, generated 1.35MW of renewable energy and created \$14.5 million in value that could be reinvested back into the local community, representing an impressive 13-1 leverage of government investment. While this pilot was funded by the Victorian government, similar initiatives are likely to be funded under community benefit sharing agreements, generating compounding benefits for regional communities.

Delayed approvals for renewable energy projects that inhibit Australia's ability to reach out decarbonisation targets will also contribute to declining productivity, particularly given that our economy is deeply tied to natural capital. As outlined in the World Bank in their 2021 study on the 'Economic Case for Nature' (available here: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/environment/publication/the-economic-case-for-nature>), if nature declines at Australia's current rate we will lose about \$16.8 billion per year from our economy by 2030.

These factors point to the urgent need to promote efficient and robust environmental and planning approvals for renewable energy projects, so that Australia can mitigate the negative impacts of climate change on our environment and economy, and maximise the positive socio-economic benefits that the transition to renewable energy has to offer.

3. Encourage adaptation by addressing barriers to private investment

1. What are the barriers and enablers impacting decisions by owner-occupiers, landlords and developers about how housing is built and updated over time so that it is resilient to the effects of climate change?

The participant did not respond to this question.

2. What information do people need to make decisions about where to live, how to build and how to upgrade their homes to appropriately factor in climate change?

The participant did not respond to this question.

3. What are the most cost-effective retrofitting options for improving the resilience of Australia's existing housing stock? What are their costs and benefits?

The participant did not respond to this question.

4. What role might minimum standards play in ensuring the resilience of Australia's housing stock?

The participant did not respond to this question.

5. The impacts of climate change are being factored into the regulation of where and how houses are built in different ways around Australia. What does leading practice look like? Where is there room for improvement? Are there lessons we can learn from other countries?

The participant did not respond to this question.