



Submission on
Australian Government Productivity
Commission's
**Investing in cheaper, cleaner energy
and the next zero transformation
report**

15 September 2025

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1. Executive Summary

The Yass Valley Council welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Australian Government's Productivity Commission's *Investing in Cheaper, Cleaner Energy and the Net Zero Transformation* interim report.

YVC done significant 'heavy-lifting' towards the Australian Government's commitment to net zero emissions by 2025 which is evident with six Renewable Energy projects located within the local government area. This is despite significant community objection to the use of our prime agricultural land for this purpose. Council has actively objected to the two State Significant Developments (SSD) solar farms that are located within our buffer zone between the borders of the Australian Territory and New South Wales (Yass Valley Council).

Yass Valley Council has the following six (6) Renewable Energy Development projects constructed and/or approved within the Yass Valley Local Government Area:

No.	Name	Development Type	Location	Status	Applicant/ Company
CONSTRUCTED					
1.	Bango	Wind	Lachlan Valley Way (Hilltops and Yass Valley LGAs)	Consent granted May 2018	Squadron
2.	Rye Park	Wind	Hilltops, Upper Lachlan and Yass Valley LGAs	Consent granted May 2017	Tilt Renewables Australia Pty Ltd
APPROVED					
3.	Wallaroo	Solar	246-248 Southwell Road, Wallaroo	Consent granted September 2024	Wallaroo Solar Farm Pty Ltd
4.	Coppabella	Wind	Bookham/Illalong area (Hilltops and Yass Valley LGAs)	Consent granted March 2016	Goldwind Australia
5.	Conroys Gap	Wind	Bowning/Bookham area	Consent granted May 2007	Epuron Projects Pty Ltd
6.	Springdale	Solar	Tallagandra Lane, Sutton	Consent granted February 2021	RES Australia Pty Ltd

Through the large-scale industrial development of Renewable Energy projects already constructed and/or approved within the YV LGA, the community of YV have already made a significant contribution to the New South Wales and National Net Zero policies.

This being the case, having considered the social, environmental, economic and strategic planning impacts on the Yass Valley communities and the cumulative impacts of the four approved wind farm sites and two solar farms, Council is of the view that it has reached the maximum number of industrial turbines for the Local Government Area. While supportive of renewable energy in general, Council opposes in principle, further large scale wind turbine sites in Yass Valley.

Further, as there are also two large-scale solar farms approved within the YV LGA, one of which is clearly an inconsistent and incompatible development with Council's strategic planning documents (ie YV Settlement Strategy), Council is not supportive of any additional Renewable Energy projects (Windfarms, Solar or Battery Energy Storage Systems) which contributes to the further industrialisation of the Yass Valley LGA and impacts the viability, sustainability and growth of our agriculture, agritourism (such as the world renowned Murrumbateman Cool Wine District) and visitor economy industries.

Council advocates for stronger community consultation and improved planning coordination, particularly for projects proposed outside of designated NSW Renewable Energy Zones (REZs). Council also encourages mechanisms to address the cumulative and localised impacts of these developments while supporting the broader shift to a low-emissions future.

2. Introduction – Yass Valley Council

The Yass township is located approximately 52 kilometres northwest of Canberra via the Barton Highway, and 280 kilometres southwest of Sydney via the Hume Highway and is the main centre in the local government area of Yass Valley.

The Yass Valley Council (YVC) Local Government Area (LGA) covers 399,202 hectares and has a population of 17,281 people (I,2021). The Yass Valley consists of eight towns: Binalong, Bookham, Bowning, Gundaroo, Murrumbateman, Sutton and Wee Jasper, and Yass. YV (YV) is located close to Canberra and many residents commute to Canberra for work but choose to live in YV for the rural lifestyle and housing opportunities.

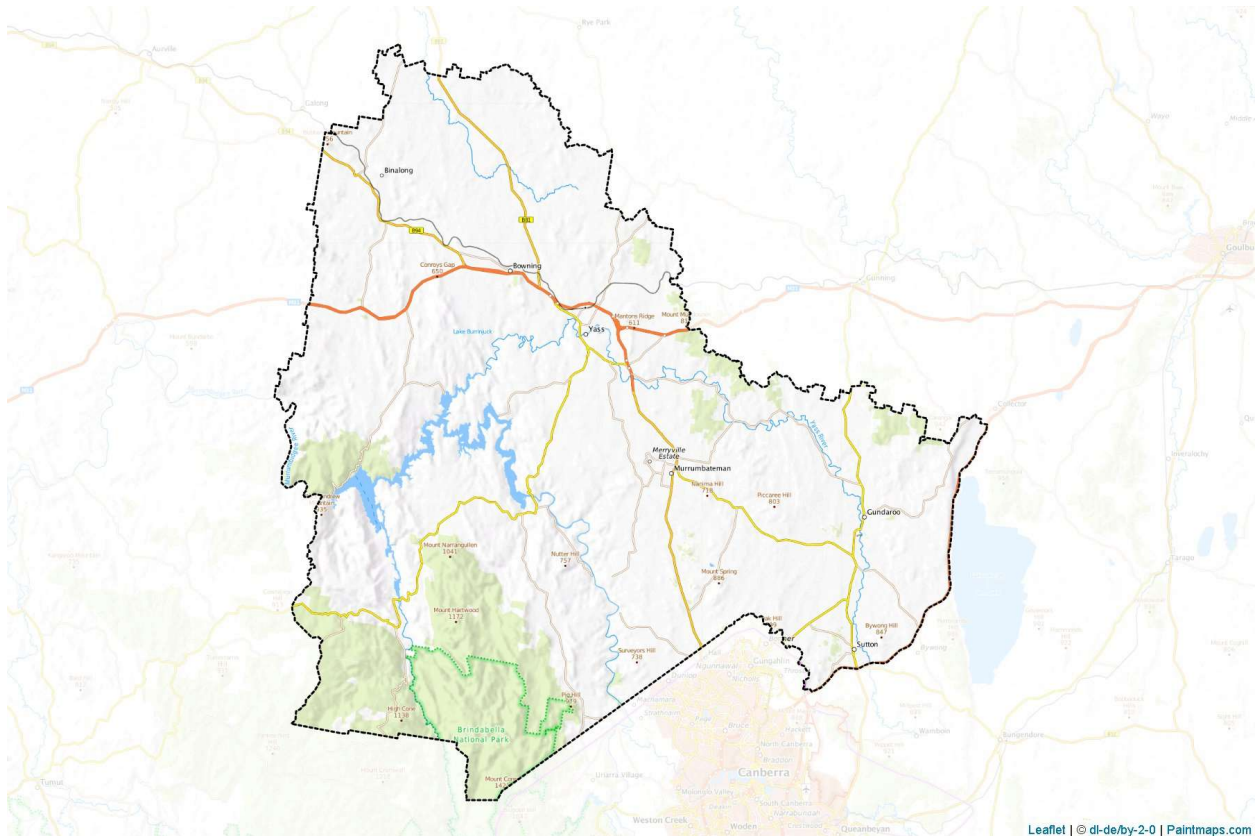


Figure 1 – Yass Valley Council Local Government Area Map

The Yass Valley has a long history in agricultural production and was “born off the sheep’s back” as early European settlers to the region established an economic base through the trade of fine wool. Today, the YV economy is more diverse with over 60 wineries in the Local Government Area (LGA), and unique opportunities for work, education and entertainment due to sharing a border with the ACT.

The foundation of the economy is tourism and agriculture, with the tourist appeal stemming from the food, wine, nature, outdoors and heritage industries (I). In 2018-2019 Gross Regional product as \$660 million. The top three industries for Yass Valley are agriculture, forestry and fishing, construction, health care and social assistance.

The LGA of Yass Valley utilises 81% (3,263km²) of its land for agricultural production, agriculture contributes \$89.6 million to the local economy with \$49.6 million (55.3%) from livestock slaughtered and \$22.93 million (25.6%) from livestock products such as fine wool (II). The remaining 19% of land is used for non-agricultural purposes which includes rivers, lakes and residential infrastructure. 28,900 hectares of land are dedicated to nature conservation.

In the 2025 Yass Valley Community Strategic Plan (III) we have stated that our community's vision is 'to build and maintain sustainable communities while recognising and respecting the environment and First nations people of the country.'

The priorities for Our Environment are:

1. Our natural environment is maintained, protected and enhanced in line with community expectations.
2. Our community is resilient to climate impacts.
3. We have a robust planning framework that protects and maintains our rural character and natural landscapes.

These priorities are supported by the following actions:

- ✓ EN. 1.1 Collaborate with community and Government to protect and enhance the natural environment.
- ✓ EN. 6.1 Forward planning is undertaken to integrate environmental, social, and economic factors for the benefit of the community and region.

The YVC is a member of the Canberra Region Joint Organisation bringing together cross border Councils of NSW and ACT to work towards the future prosperity of the region. In the 2023 Canberra Region Economic Development Strategy (IV) five key pillars were identified as critical to strengthen the economy and attract investment, pertinent to the influx of renewable energy are:

- ✓ Natural Capital – enhancing climate action increasing resilience to natural hazards and protecting the regions environmental assets.
- ✓ Livability – supporting a region that prioritizes social advancement and community wellbeing.

3. Policy Context

Yass and Upper Lachlan LGA's have 42% of NSW's wind turbines, yet not a designation NSW Renewable Energy Zone.

In the Yass Valley LGA specifically, the status of Renewable Energy projects are as follows:

Status of Project	Number
Renewable Energy projects constructed	2
Renewable Energy projects approved	4
Renewable Energy projects currently under assessment	4
Renewable Energy projects currently under investigation	2

It is estimated that if all projects are approved, this could result in **an additional 1,000 wind turbines / BESS units and associated infrastructure within the Yass Valley**, which is an unacceptable level of industrialisation and impact to what is primarily a rural and agriculture community.

After extensive consultation with the Yass Valley community, the YVC has determined a Renewable Energy Development Policy (2023) (Appendix 1) that represents our community's position on further renewable energy development in the Yass Vall:

Having considered the social, environmental, economic and strategic planning impacts on the Yass Valley communities and the cumulative impacts of the four approved wind farm sites Council is of the view that it has reached the maximum number of industrial turbines for the Local Government Area. While supportive of renewable energy in general, Council opposes in principle, further large-scale wind turbine sites in Yass Valley.

Key concerns of YVC and residents are:

- a) Land use conflict with agricultural production and agritourism sustainability.
- b) Land use conflict with continued residential growth of the LGA.
- c) Impact to local industries and organisations, such as but not limited to:
 - a. Local space industry requires low electromagnetic interference (EMI) and dark skies operating environment
 - b. Not-for-profit organization delivering horsemanship programs for current and former service men and women and their families, who may be experiencing stress related to their service, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and/or physical injury.
- d) Loss of visual amenity and increased noise

YVC has received strong local opposition to additional renewable energy developments, particularly large-scale wind turbines. The Binalong Bowning Community Action Group have been vocal in their defence of protecting our natural assets and maintaining generational agricultural land remaining as 100% agricultural production.

In recent months we have had representation from Local Government, Mayor Jasmin Jones; the Hon. Wendy Tuckerman MP (NSW Government) and the Hon. Michael McCormack MP (Federal Government) who have all made public statements to request action from the NSW Government to assist YVC in advocating for the protection of our community's lifestyle, health, wellbeing and livelihoods which is being threatened and impacted through the plethora of large scale industrial renewable energy projects being approved, constructed, assessed and/or scoped with the Yass Valley.

YVC also holds serious concerns about the decommissioning of renewable energy infrastructure and the capacity of our Local Government to be able to manage this amount of industrial waste with our limited resources. This is an unaddressed issue that developers must be responsible for providing solutions for Local Government.

**Yass Valley Council does not support the following draft recommendations, 2.0
Speeding up approvals for new energy infrastructure.**

- 3.1 Reform of national environmental laws
- 3.2 Set up a specialist 'strike team' for priority projects.
- 3.3 Establish a Coordinator-General for priority projects.
- 3.4 Consider the energy transition in approval decisions.

The following information provides the rationale for YVC:

a) EPBC Act Amendments and Environmental Protections

YVC has serious concerns about the proposal to reform environmental laws to expedite approvals for clean energy. The current *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)* provides an opportunity for communities to appeal renewable energy installations to protect biodiversity for the benefits of all Australians. This science-based approach should not be changed for the sole purpose of speeding up the construction of renewable energy infrastructure. Renewable energy development should not be at the expense to the protection of our environment and the health and viability of Australia's threatened flora and fauna.

YVC supports the current two-tiered approach to environmental protection for our landscape with the recognized NSW Government legislation, the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* and its regulations that identify and protect NSW threatened species, populations and ecological communities are, in conjunction with the Australian Government's EPBC Act. This will ensure a rigorous and science-based approach to protecting our threatened species, flora, fauna and ecological communities.

YVC is located in the South-Eastern Highlands Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation of Australia (IBRA) region. The region contains 211 nationally threatened species and a combined total of 341 state and nationally recognised species. A move to introduce national environmental standards and overlooking the state-based recognition of threatened species is to the detriment of our environment. Refer Appendix 1 and 2.

Flagship endangered and vulnerable flora and fauna species, include the nationally endangered Regent Honeyeater (*Xanthomyza phrygia*), Spotted-tail Quoll (*Dasyurus maculatus maculatus*), Wee Jasper Grevillea (*Grevillea iaspicula*), Golden Moths Orchid (*Diuris lanceolata*) and Hoary Sunray (*Leucochrysum albicans*).

Yass Valley is home to some of Australia's most picturesque and diverse landscapes, characterised by grassland plains, gently rolling hills and green valleys which give way to the spectacular Brindabella Ranges. Within the boundaries of the LGA, there is 1 National Park, 5 Nature Reserves and 1 State Conservation Area.

Some sections of Yass Valley also contain two nationally listed Critically Endangered Ecological Communities - Natural Temperate Grassland of the South-Eastern Highlands, and White Box - Yellow Box - Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Derived Native Grassland (often referred to as "Box Gum Woodland").

The YV landscape provides an important biodiversity corridor for connecting areas of remnant vegetation and habitat the adjoining regions National Reserve areas e.g. Kosciuszko National Park and we are at the headwaters of streams leading into the Murray Darling Basin.

YVC is committed to protecting important environmental assets, enhancing biodiversity connections across the landscape, increasing resilience to natural hazards, mitigating and adapting to climate. These commitments do not align with more renewable energy installations in our LGA, we have a finite area of land, and we need to protect it from development to ensure that environmental outcomes are maintained for future generations to enjoy living in our region.

b) Land Use conflicts

Yass Valley Council (YVC) is currently experiencing the challenges of Renewable Energy Development and land use conflicts firsthand.

The ‘speeding up’ of approvals for new energy infrastructure is deemed to be at detriment to our local community and industries as time is required to undertake a detailed and comprehensive assessment that fully takes into consideration real and potential land use conflicts to residents, future housing, agriculture and space industries as well as other diverse and unique organisations and industries operating within the Yass Valley LGA.

There is an urgent need to establish zones which prohibit renewable energy development occurring in conservation, prime-agriculture, agritourism and space industry zones, community villages, towns and city curtilage zones and the requirement of cumulative impact assessments across multiple projects to be completed at the very beginning of the commencement of the planning framework.

Yass Valley Settlement Strategy

The Canberra Region Economic Development Plan (2023) identified housing availability and affordability as a key issue for the region. The ACT has a rental vacancy rate of 1% and rental price are the most expensive in Australia. As a result, this increases demand in nearby LGA's including Yass Valley. YVC is working with the Canberra Region Joint Organisation to plan for a greater regional population not just within our own boundaries.

Additionally, the NSW Government has established a regional housing taskforce to investigate housing shortages.

In YVC's 2020 'Local Strategic Planning Statement' forecasts that the LGA will grow to a population of around 25,000 people by 2036 and to around 43,900 at 2056. The majority of this future growth will be focused in the existing settlements of Yass and Murrumbateman, with Murrumbateman expanding into a major town/large district town of 10,000 people.

Yass Valley is home base for a significant number of the working population who work in the ACT, 50% of the working population live locally but commute out of the LGA for work (IV).

The demand for lifestyle properties, generally under 80 hectares, is also having a flow on effect for demand of larger grazing holdings. Also, the reduction in the minimum lot size for a dwelling entitlement across the shire to 40 hectares has increased demand for those well-located properties above 80 hectares in size. (V).

Yass Valley cannot provide the opportunity for continued residential growth and host an ever-increasing number of renewable energy installations. Further Renewable Energy developments will negatively impact Yass Valley's ability to provide the much-needed housing developments required to alleviate Australia's housing affordability and availability crisis especially in consideration of Yass Valley's proximity to the ongoing population rise of Australia's Capital Territory.

The Yass Valley Settlement Strategy provides a comprehensive framework to guide growth and development in the region, with specific measures to protect the Murrumbateman Wine Precinct's economy and land use. Already, The NSW Government has overridden the Yass Valley Settlement Strategy through the approval of the Wallaroo Solarfarm development within the five-kilometre buffer along the NSW/ACT LGA border, which is identified as an area to protect and retain existing environmental values and rural character of the area, and not suitable for renewable energy infrastructure.

Agriculture

The report details that agriculture is "largely not covered by current policies" and contributes about 15% of Australia's emissions but fails to recognise the critical value of agriculture that is an industry that is vital to our very existence for food production.

Agriculture and agritourism have been a significant cornerstone of our local economy since settlement. The high level of interest from project developers in our LGA is putting pressure on local farming business owners who have experienced serious concerns about the compatibility of large-scale renewable development projects and their capacity to continue to operate a viable farming enterprise.

Farmers are very concerned that land taken out of production by renewable energy developments will make it more difficult to purchase additional to expand their farming enterprises. There is a lack of certainty in the protection of prime agricultural land which reduces the appetite for investment in agricultural businesses.

We have documented the following concerns that have been direct feedback from Council representatives and our residents:

- Community health and well-being are being negatively impacted.
- Visual, acoustic and vibration amenities
- Wind turbines will negatively impact migration pathways of bird and bat species.
- Further development will negatively impact on existing agricultural production and agritourism.
- Further development of wind turbines will ruin visual amenity of rural landscape.

Our future practical concerns include:

- i) Inability of aerial applications to be deployed within a specified distance of wind turbine installations. This will limit activities such as aerial firefighting, aerial weed spraying and aerial fertilizer applications (*2019-2020 Black Summer fires experience*).
- ii) The impact of large-scale renewable energy developments will have on local property values and property insurance premiums. The expectation of our residents is that property value across the LGA will decline, and insurance premium will increase.
- iii) Impact of YVC road infrastructure during construction.
- iv) Extensive wind turbine infrastructure will detract from the attractiveness of Yass Valley as a location for Canberra workers.
- v) YVC has grave concerns that, if additional development applications are received, the impact that it will have on the mental health and wellbeing of our community.

Agritourism

The Murrumbateman Cool Wine district is a key part of the Canberra Cool Climate Wine Region, which includes over 30 wineries and produces approximately 1,500 tonnes of grapes annually. This region is known for its premium cool climate wines, contributing significantly to the local economy and tourism industry.

Murrumbateman attracts over 100,000 visitors annually, with wine tourism being a major draw. The region's wineries, along with other local attractions, contribute an estimated \$10

million to the local economy each year. This influx of visitors supports numerous local businesses, including accommodation providers, restaurants, and retail shops, creating local jobs and fostering economic growth.

Growing our agritourism and wineries is not congruent with the construction of more industrial renewable energy installations, namely:

- Visual amenity associated with wind turbines and solar installations;
- Noise impact associated with wind turbines and BESS developments;
- Increased fire risk associated with BESS developments;
- Constrained ability of aerial bushing fighting measures due to locations of wind turbines

Tourism operators have already identified further developments for their businesses and fear visitors will seek out more natural environments to relax and enjoy their leisure time.

YVC has serious concerns about the practical management of future bushfire events caused by or close to renewal energy installations including BESS. In the development of the YVC Climate Action Plan we have identified that the region will experience more severe fire weather in the future with an increase in the number of severe fire weather days per year.

Wind turbines and battery systems pose a new and additional bushfire hazard and also risk inhibiting any fire-fighting response. BESS in particular, poses risk of the release of toxic chemicals: A lithium battery fire could release toxic chemicals into the environment, posing health risks and crop damage.

The 2019-20 bushfire crisis across regional NSW also impacted the Southern Tablelands, with physical and economic impacts on the region. While only 372 square kilometres was burnt in the region (about 2.6% of total land mass), the overall economic impact on the region was estimated to be more than \$18 million, with around 20 properties significantly damaged or destroyed. In this instance most of the damage was outside of the YVC LGA but it was in adjoining LGA's. (III)

Key local economic impacts in the region included an estimated 1,331 tonnes of grapes significantly impacted by smoke taint across the Yass Valley region, with substantial implications for the viticulture.

Smoke taint occurs when grapes are exposed to smoke from wildfires or other sources, leading to a range of negative effects on the quality and taste of the final wine causing vignerons to lose an entire harvest.

Unique and Diverse Industries Requiring Rural and Remote Locations

Yas Valley is home to an existing high-tech space communication and tracking services Australian company that have been operating since 2016. Since 2016, this Space company has proudly served a diverse range of customers: multiple international and Australian rocket companies; a significant number of Australian nationally-significant satellite missions; spacecraft and asteroid optical tracking research; rocket launch-site operators; and working with NASA for its sub-orbital rocket launches in the Northern Territory.

Further Renewable Development projects within the Yass Valley have the potential to harm the business in the following ways:

- Electromagnetic interference (EMI) from turbine generators: each wind turbine, and the 90 turbines in aggregate, will produce EMI that has the potential to cause interference to the very low-level radiofrequency signals that are required to connect and provide service to satellites.
- EMI from the new sub-station: high-voltage sub-stations can cause interference to RF signals.
- EMI from transmission line interconnect to the grid: high-tension electrical lines can cause interference to RF signals.
- Interference to radiofrequency signals from turbine blades: each turbine blade can cause blocking and scattering of the RF signals, the proposed WTA will have 270 blades, the motion of which will create huge circles of interference.
- Interference to visible light from turbine blades: blades in motion can cause blocking of light signals, and aircraft warning lights atop blades and towers appear as light-pollution.

4. Social License for Yass Valley Residents

The report calls for reforms that include “clear rules about engaging with local communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people” and notes that securing a social licence is “crucial to building energy infrastructure” and that communities “have a right to be heard”. Yet the framing throughout the report suggests engagement is mainly a tick of the box tool but the priority is to keep projects on schedule.

The sentiments of many Yass Valley community members are that renewable energy projects are being advanced at a pace that leaves communities sidelined. Our community’s concerns are dismissed as nimbyism, and as an irrelevant cost for “nation-building.” Our community wears the mental health burden of division, anxiety, and uncertainty.

Yass Valley residents have repeatedly asked for early, transparent consultation on any proposed energy projects. The Productivity Commission recommends developing “national standards for engagement” to “raise the bar” for consultation, which is welcome in principle. But such standards must go beyond paperwork and **empower locals to provide genuine input**. Residents have been frustrated by developers offering only brief meetings or written notices rather than responding to detailed submissions and concerns.

These projects threaten our landscapes and biodiversity and undermine the industries that sustain us, agriculture, tourism, and food production. The stress, uncertainty, and the despair of powerlessness is impacting the mental health of our community.

The interim report highlights benefit-sharing to “secure community support”, “meaningful consultation with host communities” and not a “one-size-fits-all” solution. This aligns with YVC and local sentiment: community funds or payments should be:

- negotiated with affected Councils or community groups
- must be commensurate with the impact of the life of the project
- provide intergenerational benefit that serves the entire impacted local government area such as long-lasting community infrastructure.

The Commission stresses that “clear national legal standards for engagement” could prevent “leaving communities behind” as projects move faster. Yet in practice there is a real risk the standards become mere speed limits rather than safeguards. The tenor of the report is that delays are the problem, not the adequacy of consultation. Our residents fear that if engagement is treated as a hurdle rather than a two-way process, valuable local knowledge on things like cumulative landscape impacts will be ignored.

This gives Council a strong base to advocate that there is no further social license for additional turbine renewable energy projects and fight for the preservation of Yass Valley's:

- community health and well being
- visual, acoustic and vibration amenity,
- aerial firefighting capacity along with aerial weed spraying land management,
- land property value and insurance,
- Bird and bat species, habitat, and migration pathways
- existing wine and food production agriculture for human consumption, agri-tourism,
- Current low Electromagnetic Interference and dark skies environment required by the local space sector, including an existing high-tech space communication and tracking services Australian company based in Yass Valley that have been operating since 2016
- Land-based tower television and radio reception

5. Conclusion

The Yass Valley community has contributed significantly to date towards the Nation's net zero efforts with six renewable projects already being approved/constructed within the Local Government Area. Yass and Upper Lachlan LGA's have 42% of NSW's wind turbines, whilst not being located with an NSW designated "Renewable Energy Zone".

After considerable community engagement with our local community, Yass Valley Council has established a clear policy position regarding future renewable energy developments within the LGA as follows:

Having considered the social, environmental, economic and strategic planning impacts on the Yass Valley communities and the cumulative impacts of the four approved wind farm sites Council is of the view that it has reached the maximum number of industrial turbines for the Local Government Area. While supportive of renewable energy in general, Council opposes in principle, further large-scale wind turbine sites in Yass Valley.

Any additional large-scale renewable energy projects, or small scale projects that are incompatible with existing and future land uses, threaten our landscapes and biodiversity and undermine the industries that sustain not only our local community but the Nation through agriculture, tourism, and food production.

As such YVC and its community, is calling on the Government to implement the following as part of the transition towards Net Zero Emissions:

- Rigorous land-use planning: there is an urgent need to establish zones which prohibit renewable energy development occurring in conservation, prime-agriculture, agritourism and space industry zones, community villages, towns and city curtilage zones and the requirement of cumulative impact assessments across multiple projects to be completed at the very beginning of the commencement of the planning framework.
- Legislated standards for undertaking meaningful, empowered local community engagement where resident voices matter and their feedback is taken into consideration as part of the decision-making / approval process
- Transparency in decision making
- Cumulative impact assessment which takes into account potential land use conflicts, social, economic, environmental and financial impacts, such as but not limited to, the:
 - number and scale of the developments

- establishment of zones which prohibit high-value industries and organisations that are potentially impacted by the proposed development
 - potential for contamination (microplastics)
 - impact to prime agricultural and agribusiness lands
 - impact to flora and fauna
- Protection of:
 - local villages (not just cities and large regional centres)
 - environment
 - Cultural significant area
- Community Benefits:
 - Legislate the requirements for developers to provide community benefits that are commensurate with the impacts and provide long-lasting legacy benefits over the life of the project.

6. References

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- III. Yass Valley Community Strategic Plan (2025) [yass-community-strategic-plan-2024_2025-final.pdf](#)
- IV. [Canberra Region Economic Development Strategy](#) (2023)
- V. QV Yass Valley Local Government Area Final Report (2018) [Yass_Valley.pdf](#)
- VI. Southern Tablelands Regional Economic Development Strategy – 2023 Update
- VII. Yass Valley Renewable Energy Policy, 2023