



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 4

Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

First report

Report 62

August 2025

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Portfolio Committee No. 4 - Regional NSW

Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

First report

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Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

August 2025

Chair: **Hon Mark Banasiak MLC**



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Table of contents

	Terms of reference	v
	Committee details	vi
	Chair's foreword	vii
	Findings	ix
	Recommendations	x
	Conduct of inquiry	xi
	Glossary	xii
Chapter 1	Background	1
	The New South Wales energy transition	1
	The role of Renewable Energy Zones in the New South Wales electricity system	2
	Key policy and legislative frameworks underpinning the energy transition	3
	<i>Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020</i>	3
	The New South Wales planning framework	5
	Key organisations	7
	Government agencies	7
	Non-government organisations	11
	Role of local councils	12
	Overview of Renewable Energy Zones	13
	Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone	14
	New England Renewable Energy Zone	15
	Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone	15
	Illawarra Renewable Energy Zone	16
	South West Renewable Energy Zone	16
	Network capacity vs generation capacity	16
	Potential economic and social benefits in Renewable Energy Zones	17
	Economic opportunities in response to environmental challenges	17
	Benefit Sharing Guideline	18
	Compensation for the acquisition of easement	18
	Strategic Benefit Payment Scheme	19
	Community and Employment Benefit Program	19
	Other infrastructure and related government services	19
	Cumulative impact studies	20
	Housing	20
	Decommissioning	21
	Roads	21

	Committee comment	23
Chapter 2	Impacts of the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone	25
	Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone	25
	Key concerns raised in the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone	29
	Growing size and scale of the renewable energy projects	29
	Cumulative impact of projects	32
	Proposed moratorium on further projects	34
	Committee comment	35
	Community consultation	36
	Inadequate and lack of meaningful consultation	38
	The inherent power imbalance between developers and individuals	41
	Lack of consideration for neighbours and the use of Non-Disclosure Agreements	42
	Erosion of social cohesion	43
	Use of Social Impact Assessments	44
	Committee comment	45
	Impact on farmers and the agricultural industry	46
	Public liability insurance	48
	Economic impact	50
	Concerns regarding acquisition of land and compensation to landowners	51
	Devaluation of land	52
	Adequacy of economic benefits to the community	53
	Committee comment	53
	Environmental impact	54
	Fire risks	55
	Uncertainty regarding decommissioning	57
	Land clearing and impact on wildlife corridors	58
	Impact on local councils	60
	Committee comment	61
Appendix 1	Submissions	63
Appendix 2	Witnesses at hearings	68
Appendix 3	Minutes	71
Appendix 4	Dissenting statements	114

Terms of reference

That Portfolio Committee No. 4 - Regional NSW inquire into and report on the impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales, and in particular:

- (a) current and projected socioeconomic, cultural, agricultural and environmental impacts of projects within renewable energy zones in New South Wales including the cumulative impacts
- (b) current and projected considerations needed with regards to fire risk, management and containment and potential implications on insurance for land holders and/or project proponents in and around Renewable Energy Zones
- (c) the historical, current and projected future financial costs associated with construction and maintenance of large scale projects within Renewable Energy Zones
- (d) proposed compensation to regional New South Wales residents impacted by Renewable Energy Zone transmission lines:
 - (i) adequacy of compensation currently being offered for hosting transmission lines
 - (ii) adequacy of the shared benefits being offered to neighbours of large scale renewable projects
 - (iii) financial impact of compensation on the state's economy
 - (iv) tax implications resulting from compensation received by impacted residents
- (e) adequacy, and management of voluntary planning agreements and payments made to the LGAs impacted by Renewable Energy Zones
- (f) current and projected supply and demand levels of manufactured products, raw materials, and human resources required for completion of Renewable Energy Zones and their source
- (g) projected impact on visitation to regional areas with renewable energy zones resulting from changes to land use
- (h) suitable alternatives to traditional renewable energy sources such as large-scale wind and solar
- (i) adequacy of community consultation and engagement in the development of Renewable Energy Zones, and associated projects
- (j) how decommissioning bonds are currently managed and should be managed as part of large scale renewable projects
- (k) the role and responsibility of the Net Zero Commission and Commissioner in addressing matters set out above, and
- (l) any other related matters.

The terms of reference for the inquiry were self-referred by the committee on 30 July 2024.

Committee details

Committee members

Hon Mark Banasiak MLC	Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party	<i>Chair</i>
Hon Emma Hurst MLC	Animal Justice Party	<i>Deputy Chair</i>
Ms Abigail Boyd MLC*	The Greens	
Hon Greg Donnelly MLC	Australian Labor Party	
Hon Aileen MacDonald MLC	Liberal Party	
Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC	The Nationals	
Hon Cameron Murphy MLC	Australian Labor Party	
Hon Peter Primrose MLC	Australian Labor Party	

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* Ms Abigail Boyd MLC is a participating member from 5 August 2024 for the duration of the inquiry.

Secretariat

Frances Arguelles, Principal Council Officer

Margaret Pollard, Senior Council Officer

Glenn Hill, Council Officer

Alex Stedman, Director

Chair's foreword

Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) are a key part of the state's energy transition, which is moving largely from coal-fired power plants towards renewable energy sources. There are five REZ locations in New South Wales: Central-West Orana, New England, Hunter-Central Coast, Illawarra and South West region. The development and implementation of REZs are within rural and regional communities. This inquiry therefore focuses on the impact of REZs on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales.

While this inquiry was established to investigate the impact of all REZs in New South Wales, the committee, through the submissions process and by holding a public hearing in Dubbo, as well as conducting site visits in the surrounding area, has received a significant amount of evidence focusing on the Central-West Orana REZ (CWO REZ). This is understandable as the CWO REZ is the first of its kind and is far more progressed than the others. As such, the committee produced this first report to shine a light on the CWO REZ, its unfolding impacts in the community and to help ensure that the same mistakes do not occur in the other REZs as they progress.

A key finding from this first report found that a significant proportion of the Central-West Orana community believe the CWO REZ has negatively impacted the region. The growing size and scale of the CWO REZ has led to frustration and angst amongst the community. The committee heard that the government has expanded the CWO REZ without appropriate planning and coordination and that more renewable energy projects may be approved in the zone. Indeed, the government confirmed that they are unable to stop the renewable energy proponents from submitting development applications for projects in the CWO REZ.

The committee heard that the NSW Government's lack of central planning for the REZ has left smaller rural and regional communities, like the Central-West Orana, facing significant cumulative impacts on local infrastructure and social services. Moreover, this is coupled with additional pressures, such as rising rents. This is a problem requiring urgent attention.

With this in mind, it is disappointing that some members of the committee amended some of the findings and recommendations in the report. This includes a recommendation to place an urgent moratorium on further renewable energy projects in the CWO REZ until an independent cumulative impact study on the region is complete and any identified impacts have been addressed. The recommendation, as amended, does not go far enough to ensure that the real and pressing concerns raised by the CWO community are properly addressed.

It is clear that there has been inadequate consultation between the NSW Government, renewable energy developers and the CWO community. This has had significant repercussions in the community, including but not limited to, impacting the mental health of community members, eroding social cohesion and undermining the social licence of the renewable energy operators in the region. To this end, I am pleased that the committee recommended that EnergyCo provide mental health support to landowners who are affected by the CWO REZ.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the large number of CWO community members who took time out of their busy schedules to participate in this inquiry so far. In particular, the committee would like to thank the landowners who generously hosted the committee on their properties so we could see the impacts of the CWO REZ first-hand.

In addition, I would like to thank and acknowledge the New England community who recently hosted the committee in Armidale. While this interim report focuses on the CWO REZ, the committee emphasises that the evidence heard will be documented in the final report. Indeed, there is more work to be done and as the inquiry continues the committee will explore all other REZs and their impact on local communities.

I thank my committee colleagues for their thoughtful engagement on this issue, and the secretariat for their professional assistance.

Hon Mark Banasiak MLC
Committee Chair

Findings

- Finding 1** 35
That a significant proportion of the Central-West Orana community believe the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone has negatively impacted the region.
- Finding 2** 36
That there are 31 renewable energy projects which have applied to the planning system inside the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone. Cumulative impacts are assessed in the planning system and not all projects are guaranteed to proceed, noting that this uncertainty is causing community concern.
- Finding 3** 45
That there has been inadequate consultation between the NSW Government, renewable energy developers and the Central-West Orana community. This has had significant repercussions, including, but not limited to, impacting the mental health of community members, eroding social cohesion and undermining the social licence of renewable energy operators in the region.
- Finding 4** 54
That there are concerns within the Central-West Orana community about the impact on its agricultural industry. The NSW Government should continue to monitor any impacts.
- Finding 5** 54
That despite assurances from the NSW Government and renewable energy proponents, landowners who neighbour renewable energy developments maintain concerns around access to, and suitability of, public liability insurance for their properties.
- Finding 6** 62
That the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone has caused significant challenges for local councils in the region.

Recommendations

- Recommendation 1** **36**
That the NSW Government urgently conduct an independent cumulative impact study on the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone and ensure identified impacts are addressed.
- Recommendation 2** **45**
That EnergyCo provide mental health support to landowners who are affected by the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone.
- Recommendation 3** **46**
That the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) review the use of Social Impact Assessments (SIA). Amongst other issues, this review should consider:
- opportunities to enhance engagement with affected communities
 - opportunities to identify, measure and mitigate intangible impacts, such as noise and dust
 - opportunities to identify, measure and mitigate social cohesion impacts
 - whether the DPHI has adequate resourcing to assess SIAs.
- Recommendation 4** **54**
That the NSW Government investigate options to ensure payments for land acquisition are not taxed. As part of this process, the government could work with the Australian Government to examine whether changes to federal legislation are required.
- Recommendation 5** **62**
That the NSW Government identify ecological protection and restoration priorities for each Renewable Energy Zone and encourage developers to contribute to nature positive environmental regional outcomes.

Conduct of inquiry

The terms of reference for the inquiry were self-referred by the committee on 30 July 2024.

The committee received 153 submissions and 1 supplementary submission.

The committee held 3 public hearings: 1 at Parliament House in Sydney and 1 in Dubbo and 1 in Armidale.

The committee also conducted 5 site visits to the property of Nigel Roberts, the property of James and Amanda Bowman, ACEREZ site in Merotherie Road, ACEN Australia site in Uralla and a property in Uralla.

Inquiry related documents are available on the committee's website, including submissions, hearing transcripts, tabled documents and answers to questions on notice.

Glossary

AEMO	Australian Energy Market Operator
CIS	Cumulative Impact Studies
CWO	Central-West Orana
DCCEEW	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
DPHI	Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EnergyCo	Energy Corporation of NSW
EWON	Energy & Water Ombudsman
GW	Gigawatt
KV	Kilovolt
IPC	Independent Planning Commission
LTESA	Long-Term Energy Service Agreement
NEM	National Energy Market
OSOM	Over-size and over-mass
P2R	Port to REZ
REZ	Renewable Energy Zones
SBP Scheme	Strategy Benefit Payments Scheme
SEAR	Secretary's Environmental Assessment Report
SIA	Social Impact Assessment
SSD	State Significant Development
SSI	State Significant Infrastructure
TfNSW	Transport for NSW

Chapter 1 Background

Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) were established in 2020, as set out in the *Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020*. REZs are a key part of the broader energy transition in New South Wales, which is moving from coal-fired power plants towards renewable energy sources. The focus of this inquiry is the impact of REZs on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales, beginning with an interim report focused on the state's first REZ - the Central-West Orana REZ.

This chapter begins with an overview of the state's energy transition, leading to the creation of five REZs. It then outlines the key policy and legislative framework which underpins the government's path towards the energy transition, as well as the role of relevant organisations. The chapter also provides a summary of the five REZ locations in New South Wales and outlines the potential economic and social benefits to REZ communities. It concludes by explaining the interim report's purpose, highlighting its focus on the Central-West Orana REZ and its impacts on the local landowners, community and industry.

The New South Wales energy transition

- 1.1 The energy sector is transforming both in New South Wales and nationally. The state's coal-fired stations are ageing and three out of the state's four remaining coal-fired power stations are scheduled to close in the next ten years. The government noted that as these stations reach the end of their operations, they are expensive to operate and maintain, which in turn leads to increasing the price consumers pay for electricity.¹
- 1.2 In 2020 the government released the NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap (Roadmap). The Roadmap sets out the state's plan to transforming the electricity system to 'affordable, clean and reliable energy for everyone'.²
- 1.3 The Roadmap's purpose is to support the delivery of:
 - at least 12 GW (gigawatts) of new renewable energy generation
 - two GW (16 GW hours) of long-duration storage by 2030
 - a further 12 GW hours of long-duration storage by 2034.³
- 1.4 In addition, the Roadmap aims to 'secure long-term jobs in the state, create new apprenticeships, empower businesses, and boost economic opportunities'.⁴ This includes the creation of approximately 6,300 construction jobs and 2,800 ongoing jobs, mostly based in the regions.⁵
- 1.5 A key component of the energy transition is the creation of Renewable Energy Zones (REZs). REZs are geographical areas across New South Wales which are to contain renewable energy

¹ NSW Climate and Energy Action, *Why we are upgrading our electricity system*, NSW Government (24 July 2024), <https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/nsw-plans-and-progress/major-state-projects/electricity-transition/why-we-are-upgrading-our-electricity-system>

² Submission 44, NSW Government, p 5.

³ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 5.

⁴ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 6.

⁵ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 6.

infrastructure, including generators, storage, batteries and pumped hydro, and high voltage transmission infrastructure.⁶ An overview of the REZs and their locations will be discussed later in this chapter.

- 1.6 As part of this transition, the government has also committed to achieving net zero emissions by 2050, and reducing emissions by 50 per cent by 2030 and by 70 per cent by 2035 (compared to 2005 levels).⁷ According to the Net Zero Commission, electricity generation is the single greatest contributor to the state's emissions, and electrification underpins many emission reduction measures.⁸ As such, the Commission stated that 'timely and effective development of REZ is critical to a clean energy future and New South Wales meeting its statutory emissions reduction targets'.⁹
- 1.7 In addition, the NSW Agricultural Commissioner's 2022 report estimated that approximately 54,500 hectares of land area is needed to support the solar and wind energy projects required to achieve the Australian Energy Market Operator's (AEMO) electricity generation targets by 2051. This is equivalent to 0.07 per cent of the total area of land in New South Wales.¹⁰ The role of AEMO in New South Wales's electricity system is outlined in the next section.

The role of Renewable Energy Zones in the New South Wales electricity system

- 1.8 The New South Wales electricity system has four main levels:
- **Generation:** the production and storage of electricity from energy sources such as coal, gas, solar, and wind.
 - **Transmission:** the infrastructure used to transmit electricity from generators to substations. This is done using high-voltage poles and wires, including interconnectors that move energy between states.
 - **Distribution:** the infrastructure which transmit electricity from substations to consumers. This is done using low-voltage poles and wires.
 - **Retail:** the sale of electricity to consumers, including households and businesses.¹¹
- 1.9 New South Wales is a part of the National Electricity Market (NEM), which also covers Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, Tasmania, and South Australia. It is a wholesale market through which generators and retailers trade electricity. The NEM is one of the largest interconnected electricity systems in the world, covering approximately 40,000 km

⁶ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 6.

⁷ *Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Act 2003*, s 9.

⁸ Evidence, Dr Will Rayward-Smith, Executive Director, Net Zero Commission, 13 May 2025, p 25.

⁹ Submission 48, Net Zero Commission, p 2.

¹⁰ Answers to questions on notice, Net Zero Commission, received 19 June 2025, pp 1-2. See also: NSW Agriculture Commissioner, Renewable energy generation and agriculture in New South Wales's rural landscape and economy – growth sectors on a complementary path, 8 November 2022.

¹¹ NSW Government (previously Department of Planning, Industry and Environment), *NSW Electricity Strategy*, November 2019, p 2.

of transmission lines and cables and supplying approximately 10.7 million customers.¹² AEMO is the national agency which administers and operates the gas and electricity markets and power systems within the NEM.¹³

- 1.10** The REZs, in their various geographic locations across New South Wales, will host both new renewable energy generation infrastructure such as solar and wind projects, and transmission infrastructure such as transmission lines, energy hubs and switching stations or 'sub-stations'.¹⁴
- 1.11** According to the NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap, REZs will diversify the state's energy mix and expand transmission capabilities, opening new parts of the NEM for energy generation in locations with 'strong renewable resources'.¹⁵

Key policy and legislative frameworks underpinning the energy transition

- 1.12** There are complex policy and legislative frameworks underpinning the government's transition towards renewable energy. This section will outline the key policies and legislation relevant to this inquiry, specifically the EII Act and the New South Wales's planning framework.

Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020

- 1.13** The *Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020* (EII Act) seeks to facilitate the transition of the state's electricity system towards a more affordable, reliable, secure, and sustainable future.¹⁶
- 1.14** Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability Group, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water advised that the EII Act provides for:
- a framework for establishing electricity generation storage or network infrastructure in a specified geographical area in New South Wales¹⁷
 - an energy security target for New South Wales, which is an amount of firm capacity (guaranteed availability of energy or power, or the capacity of a system, to deliver a certain

¹² *Standing Committee on State Development*, Feasibility of Undergrounding the Transmission Infrastructure for Renewable Energy Projects, 2023, p 1.

¹³ Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO), *Who we are*, (2025), <https://aemo.com.au/about/who-we-are>.

¹⁴ EnergyCo, *Renewable Energy Zones*, NSW Government (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/renewable-energy-zones>.

¹⁵ NSW Government (previously Department of Planning, Industry and Environment), *NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap*, November 2020, p 8.

¹⁶ *Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020* (EII Act), s 3(1)(a).

¹⁷ Evidence, Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability Group, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), 13 May 2025, p 3. See also: EII Act, s 19-22, 23.

level of service under adverse conditions) to help supply consumer demand throughout summer¹⁸

- a renewable energy sector board to help improve local supply chains and employment outcomes out of energy infrastructure¹⁹
- the Minister²⁰ to set guidelines for consultation and negotiation with the local Aboriginal community in relation to relevant projects for the purposes of increasing employment and income opportunities²¹
- an underwriting mechanism to 'de-risk' private sector investment in new wind; solar; other renewable energy sources; long duration storage, which could be batteries or pumped hydro; and related targets for these projects²²
- a cost recovery mechanism to pay for the new network infrastructure, (through Long-Term Energy Service Agreements, as discussed below) including those within of REZs.²³

1.15 The EII Act also sets out the rules for establishing access schemes within a REZ.²⁴ Access schemes help govern the volume and quality of projects that may be granted the right to connect to REZ network infrastructure and establish ongoing requirements.²⁵

1.16 Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability Group, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water highlighted the importance of the access scheme framework. He explained that the access scheme is about creating certainty for renewable energy providers in connecting to network infrastructure through obtaining access for a fee:

It establishes the ability to control who can access that new network infrastructure in that zone. That's important for a couple of reasons: It means that generators can have

¹⁸ Evidence, Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability Group, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), 13 May 2025, p 3.

¹⁹ Evidence, Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability Group, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), 13 May 2025, p 3.

²⁰ As set out in the EII Act 2020, the Minister referred in the act is the Minister for Energy & Climate Change.

²¹ EII Act 2020, s 4(1), See also: Evidence, Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability Group, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), 13 May 2025, p 3.

²² Evidence, Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability Group, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), 13 May 2025, p 3.

²³ Evidence, Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability Group, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), 13 May 2025, p 3.

²⁴ EII Act, s 24-26. See also: Evidence, Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability Group, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), 13 May 2025, p 3.

²⁵ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 6.

confidence that they won't be crowded out from connecting into new infrastructure, but it also establishes the mechanisms for generators to help contribute to the cost of that new network infrastructure. That's the REZ access framework.²⁶

- 1.17** As set out in the EII Act, Long-Term Energy Service Agreements (LTESA), are financial contracts for the construction and operation of generation infrastructure and offer investors an option to access competitively set minimum prices for eligible projects. According to the government, LTESAs provide the following benefits:
- long-term certainty to incentivise investment
 - protection of electricity consumers' financial interest by supporting investment in generation, long-duration storage and firming projects
 - investment, construction and operation of renewable energy generation, long-duration storage, and firming infrastructure in New South Wales.²⁷
- 1.18** Furthermore, LTESAs are conducted in a two-stage process that assess financial value for consumers and benefits for surrounding communities. Projects are first assessed on merit criteria for viability and sustainability, in addition to benefits for local communities and First Nations peoples.²⁸

The New South Wales planning framework

- 1.19** Another key component of the energy transition is the state's planning framework. It includes the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (the EP&A Act), land use zoning, and projects that are considered State Significant Development (SSD) or State Significant Infrastructure (SSI).²⁹ SSDs and SSIs are defined in paragraphs 1.22 and 1.23.
- 1.20** The EP&A Act is the state's primary land use planning legislation. Amongst other things, the EP&A Act sets out the importance of community participation in planning decisions, different types of strategic land use planning including land use zoning, and planning pathways that govern the assessment and approval of development and infrastructure.³⁰
- 1.21** Land use zoning determines the type of development allowed on each plot of land. Energy infrastructure, both renewable and non-renewable, is generally permitted on all land zoned for rural purposes. Land zoned for rural purposes makes up about 78 per cent of the state.³¹
- 1.22** Under the EP&A Act, projects can be declared State Significant Development (SSD) if they are important to the State for economic, environmental or social reasons. A development is

²⁶ Evidence, Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability Group, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), 13 May 2025, p 3.

²⁷ Submission 44, NSW Government, 6. See also: Evidence, Ms Codevelle, 3 May 2025, p 17.

²⁸ Submission 44, NSW Government, 7.

²⁹ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 9.

³⁰ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 9.

³¹ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 9.

considered significant to the state if it is over a specific size, is in an environmentally sensitive area or will exceed capital investment value.³²

- 1.23** State Significant Infrastructure (SSI) includes transport and services developments that extend beyond local areas, for example, road infrastructure and pipelines.³³
- 1.24** Most renewable energy projects are considered as SSD due to their size, economic value or potential impact.³⁴ According to the government, an SSD must undergo a rigorous development assessment process managed by the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) and supported by its Rapid Assessment Framework.³⁵ Additionally, generation, storage, and transmission network developments within each REZ conduct their own impact assessments, which are also subject to assessment and approval by the DPHI.³⁶
- 1.25** According to the government, as part of the assessment process, DPHI conducts early engagement with proponents prior to lodging their applications to help understand the potential scope, permissibility and other elements of a project.³⁷ DPHI will also prepare the Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements, according to which applicants prepare their Environmental Impact Statements (EIS).³⁸
- 1.26** The Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEAR) identify what information needs to be included in the EIS. A request for SEARs must be made for all state significant development projects before a development application can be submitted.³⁹ EISs are required

³² NSW Government, *State Significant Development*, (30 January 2025), <https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/development-and-assessment/state-significant-development>.

³³ NSW Government, *State significant infrastructure*, (2025), <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/assess-and-regulate/development-assessment/planning-approval-pathways/state-significant-infrastructure>.

³⁴ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 9.

³⁵ The Rapid Assessment Framework, developed by the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI), enables a quicker and more efficient assessment for major projects. According to DPHI, the framework streamlines major project assessment, provides clear guidance on environmental impact assessment and introduces the registered environmental assessment practitioners scheme to provide quality assurance for environmental impact statements. Source: DPHI, *Rapid Assessment Framework*, NSW Government (2025), <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/policy-and-legislation/planning-reforms/rapid-assessment-framework>.

³⁶ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 9.

³⁷ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 9.

³⁸ NSW Government, *The SSI Process, Prepare EIS, Assessing the impacts of a project with community engagement*, 14 September 2022, <https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/assessment/state-significant-infrastructure/ssi-process/prepare-eis>.

³⁹ NSW Government, *The SSD process, Request SEARS, Identifying what must go in the environmental impact statement*, 4 October 2023, https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/assessment/state-significant-development/ssd-process/secretarys-environmental-assessment?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

for all SSI applications and provide information on the economic, environmental, and social impacts of the project.⁴⁰

- 1.27 The government advised that the assessment process includes community and local council consultation requirements, comprehensive engagement with government agencies and coordination of their advice, as well as a detailed consideration of any environmental, social and economic impacts.⁴¹

Renewable Energy Planning Framework

- 1.28 In November 2024, the government released a Renewable Energy Planning Framework. This framework explains how the impacts of renewable energy developments are assessed and managed. It includes planning policies and guidelines for wind and solar energy generation and transmission infrastructure. Additionally, it features a Benefit Sharing Guideline to ensure that host communities benefit from renewable energy projects.⁴² The Benefit Sharing Guideline will be discussed later in this chapter.

Key organisations

- 1.29 There are a number of organisations, that are involved in the energy transition. These include both government and non-government organisations with differing roles and responsibilities. As this inquiry focuses on REZs and their impacts, this section will focus on organisations involved in the implementation and management of the state's energy transition relating to REZs.
- 1.30 This section begins with an overview of relevant government agencies. It then outlines independent bodies such as the Net Zero Commission and the Agriculture Commissioner, who provide advice to the government about matters relating to the energy transition. An overview of other relevant agencies such as AEMO Services, the Energy & Water Ombudsman and the role of local councils is then detailed.

Government agencies

Roadmap Steering Committee

- 1.31 Prior to 2023, the key government agency responsible for the Roadmap and the implementation of REZs was the Energy, Climate Change & Sustainability Directorate in NSW Treasury.⁴³ The government later commissioned an independent review of the state's electricity supply and

⁴⁰ NSW Government, *The SSI Process, Prepare EIS, Assessing the impacts of a project with community engagement*, 14 September 2022, <https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/assessment/state-significant-infrastructure/ssi-process/prepare-eis>.

⁴¹ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 9.

⁴² Submission 44, NSW Government, p 10.

⁴³ Evidence, Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability Group, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), 13 May 2025, p 3.

reliability and as part of its key recommendations, it established a whole-of-government steering committee to help coordinate the rollout of REZ and electricity infrastructure.⁴⁴

- 1.32** The Roadmap Steering Committee was established in 2024 and is chaired by the Premier's Department, which coordinates the implementation actions to support the Roadmap delivery across government.⁴⁵

Energy Corporation of NSW

- 1.33** Energy Corporation of NSW (EnergyCo) is the statutory authority responsible for leading the delivery of REZs and Priority Transmission Infrastructure Projects under the Roadmap.⁴⁶

- 1.34** Under the EII Act, EnergyCo is the infrastructure planner for all five REZs and responsibilities include:

- leading the planning, technical design, delivery and coordination of REZs and priority transmission projects
- contracting and overseeing the suppliers delivering the REZ transmission network infrastructure
- leading community and stakeholder engagement activities to support REZ delivery.⁴⁷

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

- 1.35** The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) is the lead portfolio agency responsible for the state's environment and energy priorities⁴⁸

- 1.36** The Minister for Energy is responsible for the delivery of the Roadmap and appointing its key entities, advisory bodies and regulators. The Minister's responsibilities include:

- declaring Renewable Energy Zones,
- establishing access schemes,
- directing network operators to construct projects,
- directing the Consumer Trustee to conduct Long-Term Energy Service Agreements, as discussed in paragraph 1.17.

⁴⁴ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 8.

⁴⁵ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 8.

⁴⁶ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 5.

⁴⁷ NSW Climate and Energy Action, *Roadmap entities and advisory bodies*, NSW Government (1 April 2025), <https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/nsw-plans-and-progress/major-state-projects/electricity-infrastructure-roadmap/roadmap-entities-and>. See also: EII Act, s 23(5); EnergyCo, *Our Purpose*, NSW Government (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/about-us/our-purpose>.

⁴⁸ DCCEEW, *About Us*, NSW Government (2025), <https://www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/dcceew/about-us>. See also: Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI), *DPHI Annual Report 2023–24, Volume 1*, November 2024, p 121.

- preparing statutory reviews of the EII Act every five years.⁴⁹

1.37 A Consumer Trustee is one of the entities that implements the Roadmap. AEMO Services was appointed by the Minister for Energy as the NSW Consumer Trustee. Their role in the energy transition is discussed in paragraph 1.53.

Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure

1.38 The Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) is the lead portfolio agency responsible for the state's land use planning and infrastructure, including housing and state significant projects.⁵⁰

1.39 In addition to the responsibilities outlined in paragraph 1.24, DPHI is responsible for:

- carrying out strategies and programs to enable the transition to renewable energy through planning assessments and policy improvements⁵¹
- optimising the planning system to enable the delivery of infrastructure, open spaces and housing⁵²
- planning assessments, including state significant projects.⁵³

Transport for NSW

1.40 Alongside EnergyCo, Transport for NSW (TfNSW) is responsible for scoping and delivering the required road upgrades for transporting over-sized and over-mass components from ports to REZs. A Memorandum of Understanding is in place between EnergyCo and TfNSW to manage transport related projects and impacts for REZ development.⁵⁴

Net Zero Commission

1.41 The Net Zero Commission was created under the *Climate Change (Net Zero Future) Act 2023* and was formally established in July 2024. It is responsible for providing expert advice to ensure New South Wales is on a clear path towards net zero. The Commission is independent from the Minister of Climate Change and the government and is accountable to NSW Parliament.⁵⁵

1.42 As set out in the *Net Zero Future Act*, the Commissions functions are to:

- monitor and review, and to provide advice and recommendations to the Minister on, progress towards the primary targets and interim targets in New South Wales

⁴⁹ NSW Climate and Energy Action, *Roadmap entities and advisory bodies*, NSW Government (1 April 2025), <https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/nsw-plans-and-progress/major-state-projects/electricity-infrastructure-roadmap/roadmap-entities-and>.

⁵⁰ Planning, *Our work*, NSW Government (2025), <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/about-us/our-work>. See also: DPHI, *DPHI Annual Report 2023–24, Volume 1*, November 2024, pp 7, 121-122.

⁵¹ DPHI, *DPHI Annual Report 2023–24, Volume 1*, November 2024, p 28.

⁵² DPHI, *DPHI Annual Report 2023–24, Volume 1*, November 2024, p 28.

⁵³ DPHI, *DPHI Annual Report 2023–24, Volume 1*, November 2024, p 29.

⁵⁴ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 19.

⁵⁵ Submission 48, Net Zero Commission, p 1.

- monitor and review, and to provide advice and recommendations to the Minister on, progress in relation to the adaptation objective in New South Wales
- monitor and review actions currently being taken in New South Wales to address climate change
- identify and recommend actions that should be taken by the government to address climate change, including strategies, policies and programs that should be implemented by the government
- educate and inform the government, businesses, organisations and individuals to promote action to address climate change.⁵⁶

1.43 In relation to REZs, the Commission advised that it will monitor and assess progress in their roll out as part of its ongoing work and annual reporting responsibilities.⁵⁷

Agriculture Commissioner

1.44 In 2024, the government established a statutory Agriculture Commissioner. The current Commissioner, Alison Stone was appointed on 13 February 2025 to a three-year term. Among the Commissioner's key functions relating to agricultural matters are the following:

- undertaking reviews, providing advice and making recommendations to government
- monitoring issues and identifying opportunities for improvement in the industry
- promoting a coordinated and collaborative approach across government
- preparing and publishing maps of New South Wales.⁵⁸

Independent Planning Commission

1.45 The Independent Planning Commission (IPC) is a statutory authority as set out in the EP& A Act. Its key functions are to:

- determine certain SSD applications
- conduct public hearings for development applications and other planning and development matters
- provide independent advice on any planning-related matter when requested by the Minister of Planning and Public Spaces or the Planning Secretary.⁵⁹

1.46 SSD applications are referred to the IPC when one or more of the following criteria is met:

- there are 50 or more public objections to the SSD application
- the applicant has made a reportable political donation disclosure

⁵⁶ Submission 48, Net Zero Commission, p 1.

⁵⁷ Submission 48, Net Zero Commission, p 3.

⁵⁸ Evidence, Ms Alison Stone, Agriculture Commissioner, 13 May 2025, p 25.

⁵⁹ Independent Planning Commission, *Our role in the planning system*, (2025), <https://www.ipcn.nsw.gov.au/about-us/our-role-in-the-planning-system>.

- a local council has objected to an SSD application within its local government area and has not withdrawn that objection following the exhibition.⁶⁰

1.47 At the time of writing, there are 20 appointed Commissioners in the IPC, including one as Chair of the Commission.⁶¹ The Minister for Planning and Public Spaces appoints Commissioners. However, the Minister does not have the power to direct or control the Commission, except in relation to certain procedural matters.⁶²

Non-government organisations

Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW

1.48 Established in 1998, the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON) is an independent, not-for-profit, industry-based ombudsman which investigates and resolves complaints between individuals and industry members in the energy sector.⁶³

1.49 In July 2024, EWON received a \$1.3 million grant from the government to establish a renewable energy infrastructure function for the financial years 2025 and 2026. This function allows communities affected by renewable energy and transmission infrastructure projects access to EWON's independent complaint handling and dispute resolution services.⁶⁴ At the end of the period, funding for this function will be provided by entities developing and operating renewable energy infrastructure as members of EWON.⁶⁵

1.50 In December 2024, EWON advised that as part of the roll out of their expanded jurisdiction in handling disputes in the renewable energy infrastructure, EWON began taking complaints about the transmission infrastructure.⁶⁶ In the same month, EnergyCo and ACERREZ, the network operator delivering the Central-West Orana REZ transmission project, both became members of EWON.⁶⁷

1.51 According to EWON, dissatisfaction with the community engagement practices of entities involved in transmission and REZ development is the most common issue raised to date.⁶⁸

⁶⁰ Independent Planning Commission, *Our role in the planning system*, (2025), <https://www.ipcn.nsw.gov.au/about-us/our-role-in-the-planning-system>.

⁶¹ Independent Planning Commission, *Commissioners*, (2025), <https://www.ipcn.nsw.gov.au/commissioners>.

⁶² Independent Planning Commission, *Our role in the planning system*, (2025), <https://www.ipcn.nsw.gov.au/about-us/our-role-in-the-planning-system>.

⁶³ Submission 29, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON), p 2.

⁶⁴ Submission 29, EWON, p 2; Submission 44, NSW Government, p 14.

⁶⁵ Submission 29, EWON, p 2.

⁶⁶ Submission 29, EWON, p 2.

⁶⁷ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 14.

⁶⁸ Answers to supplementary questions, Ms Janine Young, Ombudsman, Chief Executive, EWON, 19 June 2025, p 6.

AEMO Services

- 1.52** AEMO Services, was appointed by the Minister for Energy in 2021 as the Consumer Trustee under the EII Act.⁶⁹ Its functions seek to help enable the investment needed to transition New South Wales electricity infrastructure in accordance with the Roadmap and the EII Act.⁷⁰ Ms Nevenka Codevelle, Executive General Manager, AEMO Services advised that although AEMO Services are a subsidiary of AEMO, it has an independent board of directors and are 'separate and distinct' from AEMO.⁷¹
- 1.53** As Consumer Trustee, AEMO Services' key functions include:
- developing the Infrastructure Investment Objectives Report, every two years. This is the central planning document for the Roadmap, outlining a 20-year development pathway for New South Wales electricity infrastructure and 10-year tender plan to meet it.
 - designing and conducting competitive LTESA, as discussed in paragraph 1.17 .
 - conducting independent reviews to decide whether to authorise a network operator to carry out a REZ network infrastructure project, that is recommended by EnergyCo.
 - conducting tenders for access rights to REZ if requested by EnergyCo or the Minister.⁷²

Role of local councils

- 1.54** Local councils play a role in managing local government services and utilities that are impacted through renewable energy projects. Local councils also provide technical input into SSD assessment processes. They also review and update local strategies once projects are approved, for example, housing and employment strategies, and traffic management plans. Local councils also respond to residents' inquiries and complaints relating to new and existing projects.⁷³
- 1.55** In addition, although most renewable energy projects are classified as SSD and transmission lines are classified as SSI, and thereby administered by DPHI, this process also involves community consultation, including with local councils and the consideration of any environmental, social and economic impacts.⁷⁴ The impact of REZs on local councils will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

⁶⁹ EII Act, s 60; EnergyCo, *The Consumer Trustee*, NSW Government (2025) <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/industry/consumer-trustee>

⁷⁰ Evidence, Ms Nevenka Codevelle, Executive General Manager, AEMO Services, 13 May 2025, p 17.

⁷¹ Evidence, Ms Nevenka Codevelle, Executive General Manager, AEMO Services, 13 May 2025, p 17.

⁷² Evidence, Ms Codevelle, 3 May 2025, p 17. See also: NSW Climate and Energy Action, *Roadmap entities and advisory bodies*, NSW Government (1 April 2025), <https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/nsw-plans-and-progress/major-state-projects/electricity-infrastructure-roadmap/roadmap-entities-and>.

⁷³ Submission 125, Local Government NSW, p 8.

⁷⁴ Submission 125, Local Government NSW, p 6.

Overview of Renewable Energy Zones

1.56 As previously mentioned, this inquiry focuses on REZs, a key component of the state's energy transition. This section:

- provides an overview of the five REZs in New South Wales including details of their proposed energy output and associated renewable energy projects
- details the distinction between network capacity and generation capacity
- provides an overview of the financial benefits to host communities.

1.57 In 2018, the REZ locations were identified following a detailed state-wide geospatial mapping exercise, along with coordinated community consultation.⁷⁵ As part of this exercise, the government sought to identify optimal locations to host renewable energy generation around the state, including areas with strong renewable energy resources potential, proximity to the existing electricity network and consideration of potential interactions with existing land uses.⁷⁶

1.58 Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability Group, DCCEEW provided a background behind regarding the decision by the government to create REZs. Mr Ryan spoke about the 2016 Independent Review into the Future Security of the NEM chaired by Dr Alan Finkel AO, then Australia's Chief Scientist,⁷⁷ that found that the lowest cost to meet electricity demand was a mix of renewable energy sources and recommended a plan to identify areas which would allow renewable energy generation:

[T]he concept of renewable energy zones came from the Finkel review, which was an independent review of the [NEM] settings in the wake of the system black event in South Australia in 2016. That review found that the lowest cost mix for meeting consumer demand in the future would be a mixture of wind, solar, gas and batteries. It recommended that the market operator produce an integrated grid plan, which has since become the Integrated System Plan ... to identify renewable energy zones across the NEM. That process started in 2018. The government at the time put in a submission to that process, calling out the potential priority energy zones in the Central West, the South West and New England. Later that year it released a Transmission Infrastructure Strategy, that identified those zones in a geographic boundary, which aren't the exact same as what's been declared but are very similar.⁷⁸

1.59 To date, there are five REZs in New South Wales that are set out in legislation through the EII Act.⁷⁹ These are:

- Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone
- New England Renewable Energy Zone
- Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone

⁷⁵ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 6.

⁷⁶ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 6.

⁷⁷ Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (Commonwealth), *Independent Review into the Future Security of the National Electricity Market*, 22 February 2024, <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/energy/markets/independent-review-future-security-nem>.

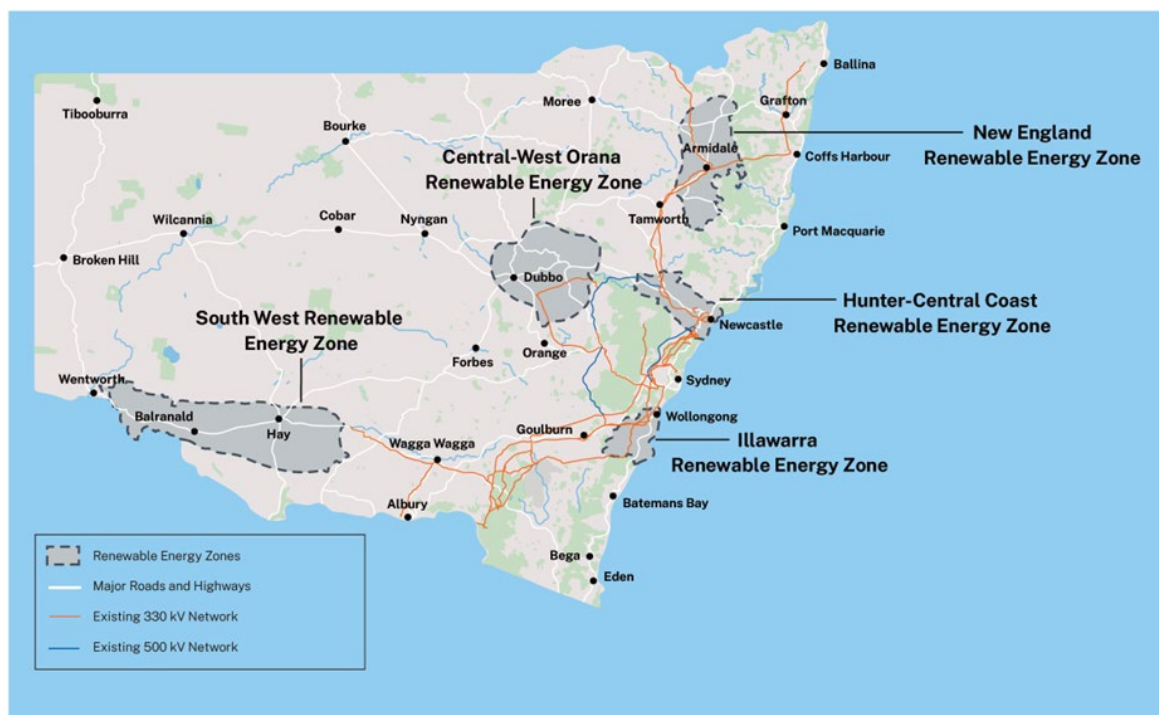
⁷⁸ Evidence, Mr Ryan, 13 May 2025, p 8.

⁷⁹ EII Act, s 19.

- Illawarra Renewable Energy Zone
- South West Renewable Energy Zone.⁸⁰

1.60 The location of each REZ is outlined in the map below.

Figure 1 Renewable Energy Zone locations



Source: Renewable Energy Zone Locations, EnergyCo (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/renewable-energy-zones/renewable-energy-zone-locations>

Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone

1.61 The Central-West Orana (CWO) REZ is the state's first REZ and is in the development phase.⁸¹ The CWO REZ is approximately 20,000 square kilometres, centred by Dubbo and Dunedoo.⁸²

1.62 According to the government, the Central-West Orana REZ:

- will initially unlock at least 4.5 GW of new network capacity by the late-2020s
- will enable generators (such as solar and wind farms) participating in the REZ to export electricity to the rest of the network through new transmission infrastructure
- is expected to bring billions of dollars in private investment in the region by 2030

⁸⁰ EII Act, s 23.

⁸¹ EnergyCo, *Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone*, NSW Government (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo-rez>.

⁸² EnergyCo, *Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone*, NSW Government (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo-rez>.

- is expected to support around 5,000 construction jobs in the region.⁸³

1.63 The CWO REZ was chosen due to its 'enormous potential for the development of solar and wind projects that can contribute to the National Electricity Market, support jobs and drive investment across the regional economy'.⁸⁴

New England Renewable Energy Zone

1.64 The New England REZ is in the early stages of planning, and is centred around Armidale.⁸⁵

1.65 According to the government, the New England REZ is expected to:

- have an intended network capacity of 8 GW
- deliver up to \$24 billion in private sector investment
- support around 2,000 operational jobs and 6,000 construction jobs.⁸⁶

1.66 The government indicated that the New England region was chosen due to its natural energy resources and potential sites for pumped-hydro development.⁸⁷ The region is also close to existing transmission lines that connect to the state's east coast, Upper Hunter and Queensland, 'providing opportunities' to increase the state's energy resilience and to export excess energy to Queensland.⁸⁸

Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone

1.67 The Hunter-Central Coast REZ has an intended network capacity of 1 GW, and involves upgrades to the existing network to connect renewable generation to the grid.⁸⁹ The network updates include:

- two new energy hubs (substations)
- upgrades to 85km of sub-transmission lines

⁸³ EnergyCo, *Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone*, NSW Government (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo-rez>.

⁸⁴ EnergyCo, *Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone*, NSW Government (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo-rez>.

⁸⁵ EnergyCo, *New England Renewable Energy Zone*, NSW Government, (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne-rez>.

⁸⁶ EnergyCo, *New England Renewable Energy Zone*, NSW Government, (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne-rez>. See also: Media release, EnergyCo, 'New England Renewable Energy Zone takes big step forward', 31 July 2024.

⁸⁷ EnergyCo, *New England Renewable Energy Zone*, NSW Government, (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne-rez>.

⁸⁸ EnergyCo, *New England Renewable Energy Zone*, NSW Government, (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/ne-rez>.

⁸⁹ EnergyCo, *Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone*, NSW Government, (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/hcc-rez>.

- augmentations to existing infrastructure.⁹⁰

1.68 According to the government, the Hunter and Central Coast regions have 'unique features' which make them ideal locations for a REZ with 'excellent' renewable energy resources and the ability to utilise existing power stations, rehabilitated mining land, electricity network infrastructure, port and transport infrastructure and a skilled workforce.⁹¹

Illawarra Renewable Energy Zone

1.69 According to the government, the Illawarra REZ is the state's first 'urban REZ', with an intended capacity of 1 GW that could increase over time.⁹² Similar to the Hunter-Central Coast region, this region was identified as a REZ as it already hosts major energy, port and transport infrastructure, has a skilled workforce, has the potential to harness significant offshore wind generation and has strong demand for future hydrogen projects, including for future green steel production.⁹³

South West Renewable Energy Zone

1.70 According to the government, the South West REZ is expected to unlock 3.56 gigawatts of clean energy generation capacity within the next decade.⁹⁴ In addition, the South West REZ will include two new transmission lines and four renewable energy projects, including wind, solar and battery storage infrastructure.⁹⁵

Network capacity vs generation capacity

1.71 During the inquiry, the distinction between 'Network Capacity' and 'Generation Capacity' was discussed. 'Network Capacity' and 'Generation Capacity' are two different measures, both measured in gigawatts, used in the planning and regulation of network infrastructure, including in the EII Act. The terms are not interchangeable.⁹⁶

1.72 'Network Capacity', also known as transfer or transmission capacity, is the maximum instantaneous amount of electricity that can be transmitted from one point of a network to

⁹⁰ EnergyCo, *Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone*, NSW Government, (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/hcc-rez>.

⁹¹ EnergyCo, *Hunter-Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone*, NSW Government, (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/hcc-rez>.

⁹² EnergyCo, *Illawarra Renewable Energy Zone*, NSW Government, (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/ilw-rez>.

⁹³ EnergyCo, *Illawarra Renewable Energy Zone*, NSW Government, (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/ilw-rez>.

⁹⁴ EnergyCo, *South West Renewable Energy Zone*, NSW Government, (23 April 2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/our-projects/south-west-rez>.

⁹⁵ EnergyCo, *South West Renewable Energy Zone*, NSW Government, (23 April 2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/our-projects/south-west-rez>.

⁹⁶ EnergyCo, *NSW Network Infrastructure Strategy*, NSW Government, May 2023, p 20. See also: Evidence, Mr Ryan, 13 May 2025, p 6.

another without exceeding its operating constraints. That amount is determined by a number of factors including the network configuration, generator dispatch configuration, ambient temperature, stability limits – so it may vary with seasons, generation output, loads and power system conditions. The 'Network Capacity' of a REZ is therefore the maximum amount of power that can be transmitted from generators in the REZ within the REZ or to the broader network at any point in time.⁹⁷

- 1.73** 'Generation Capacity' is the amount of 'nameplate' renewable generation that is (or can be) connected to a given section of the network. The nameplate capacity of a solar or wind generator is its maximum in ideal conditions, so actual generation is typically less as sun and wind conditions vary. Because of this, the maximum generation capacity of a REZ is typically higher than its network capacity – otherwise the network would have idle capacity in all but ideal generation conditions. When generation within a REZ exceeds the 'Network Capacity', renewable generation is curtailed. The acceptable level of curtailment within a REZ, is specific to each Access Scheme and is set to deliver efficient utilisation of the network in the long-term financial interest of consumers.⁹⁸

Potential economic and social benefits in Renewable Energy Zones

- 1.74** This section provides an overview of the potential economic and social benefits, either through community benefit schemes, as outlined by the government or private financial arrangements to communities that host new energy infrastructure within REZs.⁹⁹

Economic opportunities in response to environmental challenges

- 1.75** The Nature Conservation Council of NSW gave evidence about the economic, social and other benefits of renewable energy developments:

The build of renewable energy through REZs is a once in a generation opportunity to transform rural and regional communities in [New South Wales] for the better through economic community benefits, the ability to diversify industry and income streams for farmers, and increased nature restoration and protection opportunities. Climate change poses one of the biggest risks to nature, through impacts including drought, bushfires, storms, ocean acidification, sea level rise and global warming. Many plants and animals cannot adapt to the effects of climate change. [New South Wales] has 1000 plant and animal species and ecological communities that are at risk of extinction due primarily to climate change and habitat destruction ... We need to build renewable energy in a timely manner to reach our emissions reductions targets, minimise the impacts of climate change on our environment, provide reliable energy for our state, and bring down energy prices to alleviate cost of living pressures.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ EnergyCo, *NSW Network Infrastructure Strategy*, NSW Government, May 2023, p 20.

⁹⁸ EnergyCo, *NSW Network Infrastructure Strategy*, May 2023, p 20.

⁹⁹ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 15.

¹⁰⁰ Submission 34, The Nature Conservation Council of NSW, p 3.

Benefit Sharing Guideline

- 1.76** As outlined in paragraph 1.28, the Renewable Energy Planning Framework features a Benefit Sharing Guideline (the Guideline), that applies to all new solar, wind and battery energy storage system projects. The Guideline establishes a 'clear and consistent model and principles for the distribution of benefits to host regional communities'.¹⁰¹ A large portion of these benefits are likely to be delivered via voluntary planning agreements.¹⁰²
- 1.77** According to the government, the Guideline is expected to generate an estimated total \$414 million in benefits for REZ communities over 25 years. This is in addition to the hundreds of millions of dollars in funding that will be made available to REZ communities under the REZ Community and Employment Benefit Program.¹⁰³
- 1.78** Under the Guideline, the rates that are to be applied to determine the total funding value for any benefit sharing arrangements entered between developers and the community are:
- \$1,050 per megawatt per annum for wind energy developments
 - \$850 per megawatt per annum for large-scale energy developments
 - \$150 per megawatt hour per annum for battery energy storage systems in rural zones.¹⁰⁴
- 1.79** These rates are expected to be adjusted each year for inflation over the life of a project.¹⁰⁵

Compensation for the acquisition of easement

- 1.80** Landowners hosting transmission lines are entitled to compensation for the acquisition of easements rights by Transgrid¹⁰⁶ or EnergyCo under the *Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991* (Just Terms Act). The Just Terms Act compensation is an upfront, one-off payment that includes the market value of the land being acquired, loss due to severance and disturbance because of the project, and reasonable costs and expenses incurred in seeking independent advice.¹⁰⁷
- 1.81** A government review of the Just Terms Act is currently underway.¹⁰⁸ According to the government, the review aims to provide recommendations which:
- improve the acquisition process and provide increased transparency
 - remove uncertainty or complexity in the legislation
 - promote consistency, and

¹⁰¹ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 10.

¹⁰² Submission 44, NSW Government, p 10.

¹⁰³ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 10.

¹⁰⁴ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 10.

¹⁰⁵ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 10.

¹⁰⁶ Transgrid is the manager and operator of the high voltage electricity transmission network in New South Wales, and is part of the National Electricity Market.

¹⁰⁷ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 15.

¹⁰⁸ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 15.

- clarify the legal rights of landowners and obligations for acquiring authorities.¹⁰⁹

1.82 At the time of writing, recommendations from the review are 'anticipated' to be submitted to government for consideration in 2025.¹¹⁰

Strategic Benefit Payment Scheme

1.83 In 2022, the government established the Strategic Benefit Payments (SBP) Scheme to support the delivery of new major transmission projects and in recognition of the contribution made by landowners in hosting vital infrastructure for the energy transition. The SBP Scheme will pay eligible private landowners hosting new major transmission infrastructure \$200,000 per kilometre, paid out in annual instalments over a 20-year period, beginning once the applicable project is energised (i.e., operational). This is in addition to any compensation paid under the Just Terms Act.¹¹¹

Community and Employment Benefit Program

1.84 In 2024, the Community and Employment Benefit Program was announced by the Minister for Energy and is funded by developer access fees. According to the government, the program will deliver 'millions of dollars of investment in REZ communities to support significant legacy community services and infrastructure projects'.¹¹² These include improvements to mobile phone coverage, housing and accommodation projects, drought resilience projects.¹¹³

1.85 The program commenced in the CWO REZ in July 2024 and will provide an initial \$128.4 million to REZ communities over the next four years.¹¹⁴

Other infrastructure and related government services

1.86 As part of the development and implementation of the REZs, the government provided information and strategies to enable with the local infrastructure and services in REZ communities. These include cumulative impact studies, updates to housing policies, decommissioning and updates to roads. An overview of these details is set out below.

¹⁰⁹ DPHI, *A review of land acquisition in NSW*, discussion paper, March 2024, p 2.

¹¹⁰ DPHI, *Land acquisition review*, NSW Government (2025), <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/policy-and-legislation/under-review-and-new-policy-and-legislation/land-acquisition-review>.

¹¹¹ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 15. See also: EnergyCo, *Strategic Benefit Payments Scheme policy paper*, NSW Government, 25 October 2022, <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/news/strategic-benefit-payments-scheme-policy-paper>.

¹¹² Submission 44, NSW Government, p 16.

¹¹³ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 16.

¹¹⁴ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 16.

Cumulative impact studies

- 1.87** DPHI is currently assisting with the development of cumulative impact studies for the Central-West Orana REZ and South West REZs. EnergyCo will be undertaking a similar cumulative impact study for the New England REZ.¹¹⁵
- 1.88** The government explained that the studies are 'helping to confirm the scale and timing of cumulative impacts of planned infrastructure developments and provide both an evidence base and recommendations for NSW Government agencies'.¹¹⁶ The studies include action plans to help alleviate pressure on local and regional infrastructure and services resulting from the cumulative impacts of REZs, and address issues like traffic and transport, housing and workforce accommodation, social infrastructure and services, water security and waste management.
- 1.89** The government indicated that the outputs of the studies will be provided to the Roadmap Steering Committee throughout 2025, as they are completed.¹¹⁷ At the time of writing, the studies are yet to be complete.

Housing

- 1.90** The government advised that one of the key deliverables of the Housing and Accommodation Subcommittee of the Roadmap Steering Committee is the development of housing strategies for each REZ.¹¹⁸ The primary objective of these housing strategies is 'to identify opportunities for legacy infrastructure and permanent housing, whilst also providing sufficient construction worker accommodation for the workforce required to deliver the REZs'.¹¹⁹
- 1.91** Additionally, the government implemented planning reforms to support the delivery of construction worker accommodation within REZs to alleviate housing pressures resulting from the development of REZ and associated projects.¹²⁰ These reforms include:
- enabling local planning pathways for housing construction workers for renewable energy projects;
 - ensuring the relevant construction, design, and safety standards that apply to manufactured homes and relocatable homes also apply to construction worker accommodation¹²¹.
- 1.92** At the time of writing, the government advised that these strategies are in development.¹²²

¹¹⁵ Submission 44, NSW Government, pp 10-11.

¹¹⁶ Submission 44, NSW Government, pp 11.

¹¹⁷ Submission 44, NSW Government, pp 11.

¹¹⁸ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 11.

¹¹⁹ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 11.

¹²⁰ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 11.

¹²¹ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 11.

¹²² Submission 44, NSW Government, p 11.

Decommissioning

- 1.93** Decommissioning refers to the removal of renewable energy infrastructure from its host site and the rehabilitation of the land that was used. As part of the decommissioning process, renewable energy sites could also be covered and revegetated, to allow the land to return to its former use. Also, some components of a project could be retained, for example, access tracks and fencing.¹²³
- 1.94** The government explained that decommissioning and rehabilitation is considered in the planning framework for large-scale renewable energy proposals. In addition, if a project is approved, DPHI imposes conditions on the development consent to ensure that infrastructure is removed, and the land is returned to its preexisting use.¹²⁴
- 1.95** The government informed the committee that after 'careful consideration', they determined that decommissioning is best managed through commercial negotiations between landowners and industry. In this regard, the government considered that the cost of decommissioning 'heavily depends on what the host landowner is willing to accept at the completion of the project'.¹²⁵
- 1.96** However, the government indicated that to support 'informed negotiations' between landowners and developers, they provide a *Private Agreement Guideline*, a policy document,¹²⁶ and *decommissioning calculators*, an online tool,¹²⁷ to help inform landowners of matters they should consider as part of agreeing to host renewable energy projects and estimate likely project associated expenses.¹²⁸
- 1.97** The government also stated that that they are 'committed to enforcing rehabilitation and decommissioning required tied to approvals for all large-scale solar and wind projects and will continue to monitor the effectiveness of decommissioning calculators overtime'.¹²⁹

Roads

- 1.98** Another component of the broader infrastructure updates in relation to REZs are the updates to the state roads. Both EnergyCo and Transport for NSW (TfNSW) are responsible for managing the required upgrades necessary for transporting the over-sized and over-mass

¹²³ Clean Energy Council, *Recycling in the future: sustainable solutions for renewable energy technologies (Fact Sheet)*, <https://cleanenergycouncil.org.au/getmedia/b009dae0-2964-4da7-807f-09c59ab04052/recycling-and-decommissioning-of-renewable-energy-tech.pdf>.

¹²⁴ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 11.

¹²⁵ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 12.

¹²⁶ Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, *Private Agreement Guideline*, November 2024, p 7.

¹²⁷ See also: Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, *Renewable Energy Planning Framework (Tools)*, (2025), https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/policy-and-legislation/renewable-energy/renewable-energy-planning-framework?utm_source=pdf&utm_medium=print&utm_campaign=renewable-energy-planning-framework.

¹²⁸ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 12. See also: Answers to supplementary questions, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, received 3 July 2025, p 5.

¹²⁹ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 12.

(OSOM) components from ports to REZs along identified sections of the State Road Network and related impacts.¹³⁰ The section below outlines the government's key updates in relation to roads and REZs.

Port to REZ program

- 1.99** Under the Port to REZ (P2R) program, EnergyCo and TfNSW are responsible for upgrading 'pinch-points' or bottle-necks along the State Road Network to enable the passage of OSOM equipment from the Port of Newcastle to the Central-West Orana and New England REZs. The P2R program will include improvements to intersections and additional passing bays, to enable the safe passage of OSOM components and mitigating impacts on other road users¹³¹
- 1.100** EnergyCo received \$128.5 million funding from both state and Australian governments to deliver enabling infrastructure including the critical P2R upgrades. The delivery of P2R upgrades is expected to start from 2025 for completion late 2025.¹³²

Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone upgrades

- 1.101** EnergyCo identified several intersections along the State Road Network from the Port of Newcastle to the CWO REZ which need to be modified to facilitate the transportation of OSOM components.¹³³
- 1.102** The road upgrade project includes upgrades to 19 locations along a 320-kilometre route between the Port of Newcastle and Elong Elong. The works would be undertaken by EnergyCo with the support of TfNSW. The committee was informed that EnergyCo will engage a suitably qualified construction contractor to build the intersection upgrades and construction of the upgrades is expected to take one year.¹³⁴

New England Renewable Energy Zone upgrades

- 1.103** The government advised that upgrades to the road network from the Port of Newcastle to the New England REZ are required to accommodate the transportation of OSOM components. These upgrades will consist primarily of:
- road widening works, sign relocation (and/or adjustments to make signs removable), utility adjustments, road resurfacing and line marking, as well as line of sight improvements and minor clearing and trimming of trees.
 - improvements to intersections and pinch-points and new passing bay enabling the safe passage of OSOM components and reducing impacts on road users.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 19.

¹³¹ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 19.

¹³² Submission 44, NSW Government, p 19.

¹³³ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 19.

¹³⁴ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 19.

¹³⁵ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 19.

South West REZ upgrades

- 1.104** Transport for NSW is investigating options to access the South West REZ from both South Australia and Victoria and is in its early stage of planning.¹³⁶

Committee comment

- 1.105** This introductory chapter outlines the government's ongoing plan for the state's energy transition, leading to the creation of the five Renewable Energy Zones (REZ). It also touched on the key policy and legislative settings, including the involvement of the numerous organisations, as part of the transition and the creation of REZs. While this chapter references the five REZ locations across New South Wales, the rest of this interim report will focus on the Central-West Orana REZ, and the unfolding impacts on the local community, which is the most progressed compared with other REZ.
- 1.106** The committee emphasises the importance of exploring the other REZs and its impact on local communities. These impacts in all the other REZs, along with broader issues will be discussed in a later report.

¹³⁶ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 19.

Chapter 2 Impacts of the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone

This chapter focuses on the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone (CWO REZ) – the first and most progressed REZ in New South Wales. The chapter begins with an overview of the CWO REZ, including a brief timeline of the updates to its network and generation capacity. It then considers key concerns raised by local stakeholders, such as landowners, community groups and local councils, regarding the development, implementation and ongoing management of the CWO REZ and associated renewable energy projects. The chapter also sets out the responses to these concerns from certain renewable energy developers which operate in the region and the NSW Government.

Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone

- 2.1** The Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone (CWO REZ) is the first renewable energy zone in New South Wales. It is approximately 20,000 square metres centred by Dubbo and Dunedoo.¹³⁷ The CWO REZ covers multiple local government areas including Dubbo, Mid-Western, Warrumbungle, Gilgandra and Upper Hunter Shire Local Government Areas.¹³⁸
- 2.2** As mentioned in Chapter 1, the current network capacity of the CWO REZ is 4.5 gigawatts (GW) and the current generation capacity is 7.7 GW.¹³⁹ The network and generation capacity of the CWO REZ has increased since its initial conception in 2018. Figure 2 was provided by the NSW Government and outlines when these increases were announced.

¹³⁷ EnergyCo, *Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone*, NSW Government (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo-rez>.

¹³⁸ Submission 60, Dubbo Regional Council, p 1; Submission 45, Mid-Western Regional Council, p 2; Submission 63, Warrumbungle Shire Council, p 2.

¹³⁹ EnergyCo, *Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone*, NSW Government (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo-rez>.

Figure 2 Timeline of the updates to the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone's transfer and generation capacity

	2018	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Contemplated Transfer capacity (network capacity)	Not noted	3 GW	3 GW	Options including 3 GW, 4.5 GW and 6GW	6 GW (with initial intending network capacity of 4.5 GW)	6 GW (with initial intending network capacity of 4.5 GW)	6 GW (with initial intending network capacity of 4.5 GW)
Hosting/ connecting capacity (how much generation can be hosted by the transfer capacity)	7.3 GW	Not noted	Not noted	5.84 GW	5.84 GW	5.84 GW	7.7 GW
Source	NSW Transmission Infrastructure Strategy https://www.energy.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-08/2018_11_NSW_TransmissionInfrastructureStrategy.pdf	NSW Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap (Overview) www.energy.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-08/NSW%20Electricity%20Roadmap%20-%20Overview_1.pdf And in the EII Act 2020 s23(3)	CWO REZ Declaration www.energy.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-08/central-west-orana-rez-declaration-draft.pdf	CWO REZ Draft Access Scheme Declaration www.energy.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-08/draft-cwo-rez-access-scheme-declaration.pdf And in the final scheme declaration https://gazette.nsw.gov.au/gazette/2024/4/2024-116.pdf Internal: Network options provided to AEMO Services for economic modelling to support the 2023 Network Infrastructure Strategy.	Renewable Energy Zone (CWO) Order 2023 www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-08/cwo-rez-proposed-declaration-amendment-consultation.pdf	Hosting capacity was not changed to match the increase in transfer capacity in amended Access scheme declaration. https://gazette.nsw.gov.au/gazette/2024/4/2024-116.pdf	CWO REZ Headroom assessment - final decision www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-01/20251601_Central-West%20Orana%20Renewable%20Energy%20Zone%20Final%20Headroom%20Decision.pdf Was used to increase the hosting capacity to match the new transfer capacity.

Source: Answers to questions on notice, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, received 3 July 2025, p 9.

2.3 The key elements to the CWO REZ infrastructure are:

- renewable energy generation projects, for example, wind and solar farms
- energy storage projects, such as batteries
- the transmission project.¹⁴⁰

2.4 As discussed in Chapter 1, generation and storage projects that seek to connect to the CWO REZ network infrastructure require access rights via the CWO REZ Access Scheme. Renewable energy project developers must also obtain other approvals to allow for the construction and operation of their projects in accordance with relevant legislation. This process includes submitting a development application to obtain development consent from the Minister for Planning or the Independent Planning Commission.¹⁴¹ It also involves various opportunities for community consultation and engagement.

¹⁴⁰ EnergyCo, *Renewable energy generation projects*, NSW Government, (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo/renewable-energy-generation-projects-central-west-orana-rez>.

¹⁴¹ EnergyCo, *Renewable Energy Projects*, NSW Government (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo/renewable-energy-generation-projects-central-west-orana-rez>.

- 2.5** On 8 May 2025, EnergyCo announced that ten renewable energy and storage projects have been granted access rights in the CWO REZ.¹⁴² EnergyCo, as the infrastructure planner for the CWO REZ, works with developers to connect their projects to the REZ's transmission project.¹⁴³
- 2.6** The transmission project includes the development of new infrastructure, such as transmission lines and energy hubs, which transfer power generated by solar and wind farms to electricity consumers.¹⁴⁴
- 2.7** Following a tender process, EnergyCo entered into a commitment deed with ACERZ, a consortium comprised of ACCIONA,¹⁴⁵ COBRA¹⁴⁶ and Endeavour Energy,¹⁴⁷ as the preferred transmission network operator for the CWO REZ.¹⁴⁸ ACERZ is responsible for:
- the finance and operation of the transmission network infrastructure for 35 years (following this period, the operation of the transmission network will be transferred to EnergyCo)
 - the design and build of the transmission network infrastructure
 - the maintenance of the transmission network throughout the infrastructure lifecycle.¹⁴⁹
- 2.8** According to ACERZ, the transmission infrastructure is expected to be operational by 2028.¹⁵⁰ The project consists of 90 km of 500 kV (kilovolt) overhead transmission lines and 150 km of 330 kV transmission lines for generator connections, from Elong Elong through to Barigan Creek, via an energy hub at Merotherie.¹⁵¹

¹⁴² EnergyCo, *Central-West Orana Access Scheme*, NSW Government (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/industry/access-schemes/central-west-orana-access-scheme>

¹⁴³ EnergyCo, *Renewable Energy Projects*, NSW Government (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo/renewable-energy-generation-projects-central-west-orana-rez>.

¹⁴⁴ NSW Government, EnergyCo, *Central-West Orana Transmission Project* (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo>

¹⁴⁵ ACCIONA is a global group that develops and manages sustainable infrastructure solutions, particularly in renewable energy. The company operates across the entire value chain, from design and construction to operation and maintenance. Source: ACCIONA, *Our purpose*, (2025) <https://www.acciona.com/our-purpose/history>.

¹⁴⁶ COBRA is a historically renowned Group in the development of industrial infrastructure and provision of services, and one of the major players in the renewable energy sector in Spain and Latin America, with extensive experience and presence in the European market. Source: Cobra Group, *About Us*, (2024), <https://www.grupocobra.com/en/about-us/>.

¹⁴⁷ Endeavour Energy is one of Australia's most efficient electricity networks, delivering safe, reliable, sustainable and affordable electricity to 2.7 million people living and working in NSW. Source: Endeavour Energy, *About Us*, (2025) <https://www.endeavourenergy.com.au/about>.

¹⁴⁸ NSW Government, EnergyCo, *Central-West Orana Transmission Project* (2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo>.

¹⁴⁹ ACERZ, *About us*, (2025) <https://www.acerez.com.au/about-us>. See also: Evidence, Mr Steve Masters, CEO, ACERZ, 16 May 2025, p 43.

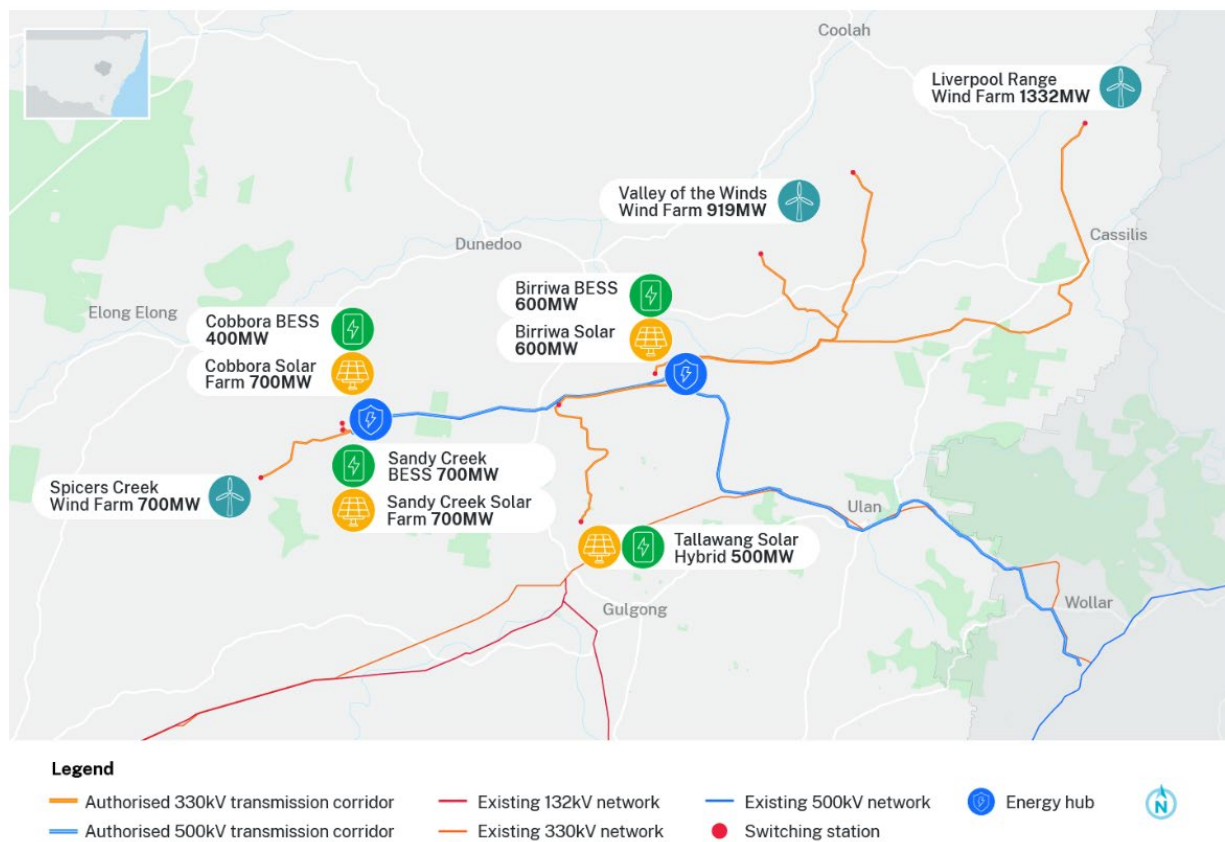
¹⁵⁰ ACERZ, *About the project: overview*, (2025), <https://www.acerez.com.au/the-project>. See also: Evidence, Mr Robert Armstrong, Operations Director, ACERZ, 16 May 2025, p 44.

¹⁵¹ ACERZ, *About the project: overview*, (2025), <https://www.acerez.com.au/the-project>.

- 2.9 Additionally, two temporary workforce accommodation facilities for workers who will construct the transmission project have been approved in Merotherie (with a maximum capacity of 1,200 beds) and Neeleys Lane, Cassilis (with a maximum capacity of 600 beds).¹⁵²
- 2.10 Figure 3 provides a snapshot of the current CWO REZ project map, including approved generator projects and the transmission line corridor.

Figure 3 Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone project map, as of May 2025

Location and maps



Source: EnergyCo, Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone, NSW Government, (May 2025), <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo-rez>.

¹⁵² ACEREZ, *About the project: overview*, (2025), <https://www.acerez.com.au/the-project>.

- 2.11** During the inquiry the committee heard a range of concerns from stakeholders in the CWO region about the development and implementation of the CWO REZ and its associated renewable energy projects. These issues are explored in the following section.

Key concerns raised in the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone

- 2.12** The committee received a great deal of evidence from inquiry participants from the CWO region. In addition to receiving a large number of submissions from this area, the committee conducted site visits in the region and held a public hearing in Dubbo. During this hearing, the committee received evidence from local farmers, landowners, residents and councils. It also heard from Squadron Energy, a renewable energy company with several generator projects in the CWO REZ, and ACERREZ. However, the following renewable energy companies who have a presence in the CWO REZ declined the invitation to appear at a hearing: Lightsource BP, Origin Energy and Pacific Partnerships.
- 2.13** A significant number of landowners, community groups and councils in the region expressed strong concerns about the CWO REZ and its impacts on the region. This section considers the following key issues raised in relation to the CWO REZ:
- growing size and scale of projects and the cumulative impact of this action
 - consultation is inadequate, not meaningful, unfair and unduly secretive
 - erosion of social cohesion
 - impact on farmers and the agricultural industry
 - economic impact
 - environmental impact
 - impact on local councils.
- 2.14** In addition to setting out the responses to these concerns that were provided by Squadron Energy and ACERREZ, this section includes evidence from the NSW Government that was received prior to the hearing in Dubbo. The committee anticipates inviting a number of government departments and agencies, in particular, the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) which includes EnergyCo and the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI), to give further evidence in the future.

Growing size and scale of the renewable energy projects

- 2.15** There was discussion during the inquiry about the expanding size and scale of the CWO REZ and the number of proposed projects in the area.
- 2.16** As previously mentioned, network capacity of the CWO REZ has increased from 3 GW to 4.15 GW and could be upgraded to 6 GW in the future.¹⁵³ Moreover, in May 2025, ten projects were awarded access rights to the REZ.

¹⁵³ See Figure 2.

- 2.17** Inquiry participants told the committee that, in addition to the ten approved projects, there are a large number of proposed projects within the CWO REZ. For example, the committee heard:
- There are over 40 generation projects planned from the major transmission line across the REZ, including a dozen in the Warrumbungle Shire Council area.¹⁵⁴
 - There are 38 state-significant projects at various stages of approval in the Mid-Western Regional Council local government area.¹⁵⁵
 - There are 23 proposed renewable energy projects within the Dubbo Regional Council area; only three of which are connecting to the new transmission line.¹⁵⁶
- 2.18** Mr Grant Piper, Chair, CWO REZist, a community group in the Central West,¹⁵⁷ calculated that there are 53 proposed projects in the CWO REZ, 'totalling 1,000 turbines and nine million solar panels'.¹⁵⁸ Mr Piper argued that the nameplate capacity of these projects, or maximum energy storage capacity, was in excess of 14 GW.¹⁵⁹
- 2.19** Mr Piper said that expanding the size and capacity of CWO REZ has had significant ramifications, including:
- The total cost estimate for the REZ has increased from less than \$1 billion in 2019 to over \$5 billion in 2025.
 - The REZ has the potential to undermine the state government's commitment to reducing emissions.
 - There is ongoing community frustration with the 'constant' consultation, compounded by the numerous 'changing faces' within key organisations.¹⁶⁰ (Concerns about community consultation are examined later in this chapter.)
- 2.20** According to stakeholders, the NSW Government has expanded the CWO REZ without appropriate planning or coordination.¹⁶¹ Moreover, this apparent lack of oversight has been to the detriment of the community. For example, Mr Brad Cam, General Manager, Mid-Western Regional Council, observed that an 'alarming lack of planning, leadership and coordination' for projects in the Mid-Western Regional Council area has led to local services, housing and roads

¹⁵⁴ Evidence, Mr Lindsay Mason, General Manager, Warrumbungle Shire Council, 16 May 2025, p 3.

¹⁵⁵ Evidence, Mr Brad Cam, General Manager, Mid-Western Regional Council, 16 May 2025, p 2. Submission 45 Mid-Western Regional Council, p 11.

¹⁵⁶ Answers to supplementary questions, Dubbo Regional Council, received 3 July 2025, p 8.

¹⁵⁷ CWO REZist, 'Intro', (Facebook, Accessed on 1 July 2025) <https://www.facebook.com/CWOREZist/>.

¹⁵⁸ Evidence, Mr Grant Piper, Chair, CWO REZist, 16 May 2025, p 10.

¹⁵⁹ Evidence, Mr Grant Piper, Chair, CWO REZist, 16 May 2025, p 10.

¹⁶⁰ Evidence, Mr Grant Piper, Chair, CWO REZist, 16 May 2025, p 10.

¹⁶¹ See for example: Evidence, Mr Brad Cam, General Manager, Mid-Western Regional Council, 16 May 2025, p 2; Evidence, Ms Sally Dent, Committee Member, Three Rivers Landcare, 16 May 2025, p 49; Evidence, Ms Sally Edwards, Past Community Representative/Active Rural Community Advocate, 16 May 2025, p 17.

being 'overwhelmed'.¹⁶² Mr Cam further noted that the lack of NSW Government oversight has had significant impacts on the council's workload:

There is no [NSW] Government oversight of overall community impacts. The crushing strain on council and staff has led to complexities, with staff involved in hundreds of repetitive meetings with multiple proponents, with the same issues discussed repeatedly. There is no centralised coordination. Council are forced to negotiate solutions project by project.¹⁶³

- 2.21** Mr Murray Wood, Chief Executive Officer, Dubbo Regional Council, was similarly concerned about the apparent lack of state government oversight. Mr Wood said that as the first project of its kind, the CWO REZ is a 'plane that is being built as we are flying'.¹⁶⁴ He added that Dubbo Regional Council is seeking collaboration with government and other parties to minimise negative impacts on the community and maximise any legacies resulting from the implementation of the CWO REZ.¹⁶⁵ The ramifications of the CWO REZ on local councils in the area are examined later in this chapter.
- 2.22** The NSW Government responded to concerns about the size and capacity of the CWO REZ. DPHI advised that as of 10 June 2025, there are 31 renewable energy generation projects in the CWO REZ.¹⁶⁶ There are approximately 6.3 million solar panels and 428 wind turbines approved in the CWO REZ.¹⁶⁷
- 2.23** DCCEEW informed the committee that the decision to raise the intended network capacity of the CWO REZ from 3 GW to 4.15 GW, with the potential to further increase to 6 GW, was recommended following 'rigorous analysis demonstrating the need for increased capacity including increased consumer benefits'.¹⁶⁸ During his evidence to the committee, Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability Group, DCCEEW, further explained this analysis process:

It was effectively a cost benefit analysis that a larger network would be a more efficient solution in terms of being able to connect more generators. In terms of the cost of the network, it would end up with a higher net present value to New South Wales electricity consumers. ... Basically, the wind and solar resource in [CWO] is good and there was the developer interest to build there. The time frames to develop other renewable zones, like the New England Renewable Energy Zone, were starting to look further away.

¹⁶² Evidence, Mr Brad Cam, General Manager, Mid-Western Regional Council, 16 May 2025, p 2.

¹⁶³ Evidence, Mr Brad Cam, General Manager, Mid-Western Regional Council, 16 May 2025, p 2.

¹⁶⁴ Evidence, Mr Murray Wood, Chief Executive Officer, Dubbo Regional Council, 16 May 2025, p 3.

¹⁶⁵ Evidence, Mr Murray Wood, Chief Executive Officer, Dubbo Regional Council, 16 May 2025, p 3.

¹⁶⁶ Answers to questions on notice, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, received 3 July 2025, p 2.

¹⁶⁷ Answers to questions on notice, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, received 3 July 2025, p 6.

¹⁶⁸ Answers to questions on notice, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), received 3 July 2025, p 3.

There was a balance around how much more generation could we host in [CWO] to meet consumer demand?¹⁶⁹

- 2.24** Following on, Mr Ryan, explained the decision to augment the network capacity of the CWO REZ meant EnergyCo was 'empowered' to recommend a network that had a higher transfer generation capacity while not necessarily changing the footprint of the transmission or the route of the transmission lines.¹⁷⁰ Mr Ryan stated that the key impacts of the change included increasing setbacks required for the higher voltage transmission lines, changing the size of the substations, and facilitating more generators connecting to the lines.¹⁷¹
- 2.25** DCCEEW also noted that the decision to expand the size and capacity of the CWO REZ followed a period of public consultation, in line with the requirements of the *Electricity Infrastructure Investment Act 2020*.¹⁷²

Cumulative impact of projects

- 2.26** Following on from the expansion of the CWO REZ, stakeholders in the region raised concerns about the cumulative impact of numerous renewable energy projects on the community. In particular, inquiry participants mentioned the adverse outcomes on local services such as housing, employment, infrastructure and roads.¹⁷³
- 2.27** For example, Mid-Western Regional Council identified a range of cumulative impacts from renewable energy project developments on its local government area (LGA):
- higher rental prices due to a 'surge' of workers traveling to the region and requiring temporary accommodation
 - increased demand for health services, which is especially challenging as some towns, such as Gulgong, do not have a local doctor
 - intensified demand on local roads, in particular, there are increased oversize vehicle movements on local roads
 - increased waste disposal issues
 - greater pressure of liquid waste facilities

¹⁶⁹ Evidence, Mr Lian Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability Group, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), 13 May 2025, p 8.

¹⁷⁰ Evidence, Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability Group, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), 13 May 2025, p 7.

¹⁷¹ Evidence, Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability Group, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), 13 May 2025, p 7.

¹⁷² Answers to questions on notice, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), received 3 July 2025, p 2.

¹⁷³ See for example: Evidence, Mr Brad Cam, General Manager, Mid-Western Regional Council, 16 May 2025, p 2; Evidence, Mr Murray Wood, Chief Executive Officer, Dubbo Regional Council, 16 May 2025, p 5; Evidence, Mrs Margaret Conn, Landowner, 16 May 2025, p 11; Evidence, Mrs Jane Hegerty, Chair, Cassilis District Development Group, 16 May 2025, p 26.

- intensified demand on water supplies.¹⁷⁴

2.28 Warrumbungle Shire Council provided similar evidence to the committee about the cumulative impact caused by renewable energy project in its LGA. In particular, the council reported these developments increased pressures on local health services, such as ambulance and general practitioners and police.¹⁷⁵

2.29 Many stakeholders expressed concerns that the NSW Government did not initially conduct a cumulative impact study on the CWO REZ.¹⁷⁶ For instance, the committee heard that Warrumbungle Shire Council has advocated for this type of report since the CWO REZ was first announced. During the hearing in Dubbo, Mr Lindsay Mason, General Manager, Warrumbungle Shire Council, explained that a cumulative impact study would identify and mitigate potential adverse outcomes of multiple projects on the community:

Since day one of the REZ declaration, Warrumbungle Shire Council has been advocating for the government, [Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure] and EnergyCo to address the likely REZ-wide strategic cumulative impacts arising from these 40-plus projects and identify the measures to be implemented to mitigate the adverse impacts, and for this assessment be conducted before individual projects are assessed and determined.¹⁷⁷

2.30 As discussed in Chapter 1, DPHI is currently assisting with the development of cumulative impact studies for the CWO REZ.¹⁷⁸ At the time of writing, no set date has been provided for when the CWO REZ cumulative impact study will be complete. Although the government indicated that the outputs of the studies will be provided to the Roadmap Steering Committee throughout 2025.¹⁷⁹

Updates to the Port to REZ program

2.31 In response to concerns about the impact of the CWO REZ on local roads, the NSW Government advised that, as part of the Port to REZ program, it had received \$128 million in funding to update the road network to enable the transport of 'necessary' over-size and/or over-mass (OSOM) equipment. The government confirmed that this funding focuses on the Golden Highway, a key route from the Port of Newcastle to the CWO REZ, with an additional \$12 million committed for overtaking lands along the highway near Merriwa and a further \$10 million funding to investigate the Golden Highway.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁴ Submission 45, Mid-Western Regional Council, pp 2-3. See also: Evidence, Mr Brad Cam, General Manager, Mid-Western Regional Council, 16 May 2025, p 2 and p 6.

¹⁷⁵ Submission 63, Warrumbungle Shire Council, p 5.

¹⁷⁶ See for example: Evidence, Mrs Jane Hegarty, Chair, Cassilis District Development Group, 16 May 2025, pp 26, 30; Evidence, Mr Lindsay Mason, General Manager, Warrumbungle Shire Council, p 3; Evidence, Ms Sally Edwards, Past Community Representative/Active Rural Community Advocate, 16 May 2025, p 17; Submission 45, Mid-Western Regional Council, pp 11-12.

¹⁷⁷ Evidence, Mr Lindsay Mason, General Manager, Warrumbungle Shire Council, 16 May 2025, p 3.

¹⁷⁸ Submission 44, NSW Government, pp 10-11.

¹⁷⁹ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 11.

¹⁸⁰ Evidence, Mr Anthony Hayes, Head of Regional Integration, Transport for NSW, 13 May 2025, p 3.

- 2.32** Mr Anthony Hayes, Head of Regional Integration, TfNSW, told the committee TfNSW has prioritised ensuring that OSOM equipment can get to the CWO REZ while also considering the impact these updates have in local communities:

The focus for us has obviously been very much on the initial challenge, which is [CWO], where the route that has been defined and that we're working on with EnergyCo—there are 19 points along the route requiring various works to make sure that the oversized or over-mass equipment can get to the [CWO] REZ. A clear priority for us is to make sure that works. On top of that, there is a broader conversation regarding social licence and how we take into account the various challenges; how we work with the communities based in the middle of the route to make sure we are supporting those communities through obviously what will be a fairly significant movement of [OSOM] equipment.¹⁸¹

Proposed moratorium on further projects

- 2.33** In response to the growing size and scale of the CWO REZ and concerns about the cumulative impact of the projects, some individuals and local councils called for a moratorium on further generation projects in the CWO REZ.¹⁸²
- 2.34** For example, Warrumbungle Shire Council strongly urged the government to pause further projects until the cumulative impact study on the CWO REZ is complete. At the hearing in Dubbo, Adjunct Professor Warwick Giblin, Environmental Consultant for Warrumbungle Shire Council, argued that without understanding the broader cumulative impact of the CWO REZ, future projects should pause to prevent further impacts on the region:

The [NSW] Government clearly sees there is a need for this strategic cumulative impact assessment because it has announced the same not only for the [CWO] REZ but also for the New England REZ and the [South West REZ]. However the crux is, here, that has not been done yet the government is determining these projects now. In our view, there is a material and significant procedural error in the state government's planning and assessment process, and thus we call on the state government to postpone any further determination on the generation projects until such time as the strategic impact assessment work has been completely, firstly; secondly, the mitigation measures are identified; and thirdly, that they are implemented.¹⁸³

- 2.35** Mrs Jane Hegarty, Chair, Cassilis District Development Group, a community organisation based in Cassilis, agreed that a moratorium on generator projects is needed in the CWO REZ. Mrs Hegarty also considered that without the moratorium, the CWO REZ might continue to grow and cause further uncertainty around the region's future:

¹⁸¹ Evidence, Mr Anthony Hayes, Head of Regional Integration, Transport for NSW, 13 May 2025, p 3.

¹⁸² See for example: Evidence, Mr James Matthews, Executive Committee Member, Merriwa Cassilis Alliance, 16 May 2025, p 28; Evidence, Mrs Jane Hegarty, Chair, Cassilis District Development Group, 16 May 2025, p 28; Evidence, Ms Emma Bowman, Landowner, 16 May 2025, pp 18-19; Evidence, Adjunct Professor Warwick Giblin, FEIANZ, FRSN, Environmental Consultant for Warrumbungle Shire Council, 16 May 2025, pp 3-4; Submission 45, Mid-Western Regional Council, pp 14-15.

¹⁸³ Evidence, Adjunct Professor Warwick Giblin, FEIANZ, FRSN, Environmental Consultant for Warrumbungle Shire Council, 16 May 2025, pp 3-4.

I'd just like to say, too, I think the thing we're forgetting here with the [CWO] REZ is that we're only in stage one. We know there's a stage two and a stage three planned and, if we've already got this many projects for stage one, then what is our area going to look like and what are our communities going to be like in the future?¹⁸⁴

- 2.36** The NSW Government advised that it is unable to stop renewable energy proponents from submitting development applications for projects in the CWO REZ and emphasised its role in assessing these projects on their merits and consulting with the community on possible outcomes. Mr Clay Preshaw, Executive Director, Planning System Reform, DPHI, acknowledged that a project may not be considered in the future if the REZ reaches its capacity.¹⁸⁵

Committee comment

- 2.37** This inquiry was established to investigate the impact of all Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) in New South Wales. Consequently, we have received evidence from across the state about the social, economic and environmental impacts of these initiatives. A significant proportion of the evidence received thus far has focused on the Central-West Orana REZ (CWO REZ). This is understandable as the CWO REZ is the first of its kind and is far more progressed than the others. Indeed, as will be discussed later in this chapter, many landowners in the region are in the midst of negotiating compensation or neighbourhood agreements. As such, the committee produced this interim report to shine a light on the CWO REZ and its unfolding impacts in the community.
- 2.38** The committee is grateful to the large number of CWO community members who took time out of their busy schedules to participate in this inquiry through their submissions, evidence at the public hearing in Dubbo and detailed responses to supplementary questions. In particular, the committee would like to thank the landowners who generously hosted the committee on their properties so we could see the impacts of the CWO REZ firsthand. Indeed, the evidence presented by these stakeholders suggests that the CWO REZ has had widespread negative ramifications for communities in the CWO region.

Finding 1

That a significant proportion of the Central-West Orana community believe the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone has negatively impacted the region.

- 2.39** The committee acknowledges the attendance of Squadron Energy and ACERES at its Dubbo hearing. We are disappointed that other renewable energy developers declined the invitation to appear at a hearing and encourage these organisations to provide oral evidence in the future.
- 2.40** We note the NSW Government's decision to expand the size and scale of the CWO REZ from 3 GW to 4.15 GW, with a possible upgrade to 6 GW. While the footprint of the CWO REZ has not necessarily grown and only ten projects were awarded access rights to the REZ in May

¹⁸⁴ Evidence, Mrs Jane Hegarty, Chair, Cassilis District Development Group, 16 May 2025, p 28.

¹⁸⁵ Evidence, Mr Clay Preshaw, Executive Director, Planning System Reform, Department of Housing, Housing and Infrastructure, 13 May 2025, p 7.

2025, the government confirmed that there are 31 generation projects in the CWO REZ, however, not all projects are guaranteed to proceed. Therefore, there is understandable frustration amongst the community that significantly more renewable energy projects may be approved in the zone.

- 2.41** The committee concurs with the inquiry participants that the NSW Government's lack of central planning for the REZ has left smaller rural and regional communities, like the Central-West Orana, facing significant cumulative impacts on local infrastructure, such as roads, and services, like health services. Moreover, this is coupled with additional pressures, such as rising rents.
- 2.42** The committee notes that the government is currently undertaking a cumulative impact study on the CWO REZ. Nonetheless, the committee considers that this study should be independent and calls for the government to urgently address any identified impacts. To this end, the committee recommends that the NSW Government urgently conduct an independent cumulative impact study on the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone and ensure identified impacts are addressed.

Finding 2

That there are 31 renewable energy projects which have applied to the planning system inside the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone. Cumulative impacts are assessed in the planning system and not all projects are guaranteed to proceed, noting that this uncertainty is causing community concern.

Recommendation 1

That the NSW Government urgently conduct an independent cumulative impact study on the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone and ensure identified impacts are addressed.

Community consultation

- 2.43** Numerous stakeholders from the CWO region told the committee that community consultation regarding projects in the REZ was inadequate, not meaningful, unfair and unduly secretive.¹⁸⁶ However, others such as Mr Grant Piper, Chair of CWO REZist, described constant consultation leading to community fatigue.¹⁸⁷
- 2.44** For reference, the NSW Government advised that up-front land-use planning and coordinated community consultation are central to the establishment and development of all REZs.¹⁸⁸ EnergyCo's community engagement for the CWO REZ included:

¹⁸⁶ See for example: Evidence, Ms Sally Edwards, Past Community Representative, Active Rural Community Advocate, 16 May 2025, p 17; Evidence, Ms Linda Gant, Landowner, 16 May 2025, p 28; Evidence, Mr David Seis, Landowner, 16 May 2025, p 51.

¹⁸⁷ Evidence, Mr Grant Piper, CWO REZist, 16 May 2025, p 10.

¹⁸⁸ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 6.

- Early 2022: EnergyCo invited community feedback on a revised study corridor for the REZ transmission project building on previous consultation carried out by Transgrid, who operate and manage existing transmission lines across New South Wales including the CWO region, on a preliminary study corridor in 2021.¹⁸⁹
- August 2022: EnergyCo established a Community Reference Group for the CWO REZ which provides an open forum for discussion between EnergyCo, the community and key stakeholders about the REZ transmission project and broader REZ issues.¹⁹⁰
- September 2022: EnergyCo submitted a scoping report to the then Department of Planning and Environment¹⁹¹ which included a refined study corridor for the REZ transmission project. Community information sessions in the CWO region were held to 'support the release of the scoping report'.¹⁹²
- Early 2023: EnergyCo conducted community engagement to inform how impacts and benefits will be coordinated in the REZ.¹⁹³
- 28 September to 8 November 2023: the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the CWO REZ transmission project was placed on public exhibition. As part this process, EnergyCo held pop-up events in the region. According to EnergyCo, in response to the EIS submissions and community feedback, it developed a response and an amendment report.¹⁹⁴
- February and March 2024: EnergyCo hosted a series of consultation events across the region to inform on the *Community and Employment Benefit Program* (as discussed in Chapter 1).¹⁹⁵

2.45 Mr Ash Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, EnergyCo, who is based in Dubbo, stated that 'open and genuine engagement' as central to the organisation's work.¹⁹⁶ Mr Albury also advised that EnergyCo's approach to consultation is aligned with the government's

¹⁸⁹ EnergyCo, *Working with the community*, NSW Government, (2025) <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo/working-community>.

¹⁹⁰ EnergyCo, *Working with the community*, NSW Government, (2025) <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo/working-community>.

¹⁹¹ As of January 2024, the Department of Planning and Environment was split into two new departments: the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), and the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure. Source: NSW Government, *About Us*, DCCEEW, (2025), <https://www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/dcceew/about-us#:~:text=As%20announced%20in%20August%202023,of%20Planning%2C%20Housing%20and%20Infrastructure>.

¹⁹² EnergyCo, *Working with the community*, NSW Government, (2025) <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo/working-community>.

¹⁹³ EnergyCo, *Working with the community*, NSW Government, (2025) <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo/working-community>.

¹⁹⁴ EnergyCo, *Working with the community*, NSW Government, (2025) <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo/working-community>.

¹⁹⁵ EnergyCo, *Working with the community*, NSW Government, (2025) <https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/cwo/working-community>.

¹⁹⁶ Evidence, Mr Ash Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, EnergyCo, 13 May 2025, p 2.

Regional Communities Consultation Guide (the guide) which is a best practice approach to community engagement.¹⁹⁷ Released in April 2025, the guide aims to incorporate 'internationally recognised best practice' consultation methodologies into the government's consultation with regional, rural and remote communities.¹⁹⁸

Inadequate and lack of meaningful consultation

2.46 Many individual participants from the CWO REZ emphasised how the consultation process was either inadequate or lacked meaningful engagement. For example, inquiry participants stated:

- 'The consultation with communities has been far from adequate for the development of a REZ ... When the very nature of not just your local community but the whole region is being entirely transformed from rural to industrial ... shouldn't every resident be rightfully informed?'¹⁹⁹
- 'The consultation is one-way. It's not consultation; it's presentation by a company about what they've got in mind. There is no real room for them to consider the community thoughts or inputs ... There's been no value put on—and I don't mean in monetary terms, I just mean in terms of local knowledge value'.²⁰⁰
- 'There's been a huge issue with lack of consultation ... it's all secret squirrel stuff. You don't tell anyone what's going—and they start playing one against the other ... By the time we find out, the community find out, then it's done. It's quite disrespectful ...'²⁰¹
- 'When the REZ was first announced it was after no consultation at all. There were no approaches to landholders that were to be affected to gain any knowledge of the local position ...'²⁰²

2.47 The committee heard that the consultation process has impacted the mental wellbeing of the CWO community. Indeed, Mr James Armstrong, Owner, Cassilis Park Merino Stud, spoke of the profoundly negative impact that unsuitable consultation has had on landholders and families:

The stress imposed on entire communities is profound. Families in these REZ zones are experiencing a deep sense of uncertainty about the future, with the majority of people I've spoken to feeling as though their voices are not being heard in the decision-making process, or that decisions are made before consultation has even begun. The concern surrounding the potential compulsory acquisition of land or the impact on land values because of these projects is creating resentment towards the government and

¹⁹⁷ Evidence, Mr Ash Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, EnergyCo, 13 May 2025, p 2.

¹⁹⁸ Premier's Department, *Regional Communities Consultation Guide*, April 2025, p 3.

¹⁹⁹ Evidence, Ms Sally Edwards, Past Community Representative, Active Rural Community Advocate, 16 May 2025, p 17.

²⁰⁰ Evidence, Ms Linda Gant, Landowner, 16 May 2025, p 28.

²⁰¹ Evidence, Mr David Seis, Landowner, 16 May 2025, p 51.

²⁰² Submission 100, Name Suppressed, p 2.

having a significant impact on the mental health of landholders. The situation is causing real harm to the mental and emotional wellbeing of residents around the REZ.²⁰³

- 2.48** Another inquiry participant, Ms Sally Dent, Three Rivers Landcare, said it is 'physically and mentally exhausting' to engage with the various consultation processes that are associated with the CWO REZ. Ms Dent added this situation is compounded by the fact that the projects' proponents 'keep changing hands'.²⁰⁴
- 2.49** Furthermore, other participants have called for mental health assistance for individuals who deal with renewable energy developers and EnergyCo. One inquiry participant commented that the CWO community feel 'abandoned' by organisations, such as EnergyCo, that have not adequately fulfilled promises of mental health support for individuals impacted by the REZ.²⁰⁵ The stakeholder concluded: 'This brings me great concern, especially when a large number of affected individuals are farmers and their families. Farmers have a high suicide rate in general likely as a result of the high stress of farming and the isolation of the job'.²⁰⁶
- 2.50** The committee heard from some community members that the consultation process has undermined the social licence for renewable energy projects to operate in the CWO REZ. For example, witnesses in Dubbo said that when locals share their knowledge with developers and government as part of the consultation process, their advice is often ignored which leaves the community feeling unheard.²⁰⁷
- 2.51** To illustrate the point, Ms Sally Edwards, local community representative, told the committee that there is a lack of accountability from the government when things have gone wrong in the process, leading to a lack of trust in future project plans. Further, Ms Edwards considered that there is no appetite to build relationships with the community given the constant change of staff and contractors and value given to local knowledge:
- If they [the NSW government] were to acknowledge where they have gone wrong and maintain a consistent team of staff, instead of changing every few months or every contract, then maybe they can apologise and take a back step and go, "How do we work with you? How do we fix this?" But they have not at any time accepted suggestions or local information that could have guided better decisions around planning.²⁰⁸
- 2.52** In response to the concerns that inadequate consultation had fostered a lack of trust with the community, Mr Steve Masters, CEO, ACERERZ acknowledged that there is 'a lot of work for the industry to do' in terms of engagement moving forward.²⁰⁹ To this end, the committee heard that ACERERZ's engagement and consultation strategies, included:

²⁰³ Evidence, Mr James Armstrong, Owner, Cassilis Park Merino Stud, 16 May 2025, p 25.

²⁰⁴ Evidence, Ms Sally Dent, 16 May 2025, p 54.

²⁰⁵ Submission 72, Name Suppressed, p 3.

²⁰⁶ Submission 72, Name Suppressed, p 3.

²⁰⁷ See for example: Evidence, Mrs Annette Piper, Secretary, Uarbry Tongy Lane Alliance, 16 May 2025, p 10; Evidence, Ms Emma Bowman, Landowner, 16 May 2025, p 20.

²⁰⁸ Evidence, Ms Sally Edwards, Past Community Representative/Active Rural Community Advocate, 16 May 2025, pp 20, 22.

²⁰⁹ Evidence, Mr Steven Masters, CEO, ACERERZ, 16 May 2025, p 38.

- appointing a dedicated property advisor to each impacted landholder, this includes negotiating a Property Access Plan to ensure that consideration can be given to each landholder's unique circumstances
- dedicating place managers based in the region to assist landholders and community with enquiries and to attend meetings with community development groups and other stakeholders to provide current updates of the project's progress and milestones
- attending local shows, market days and community events to answer questions and receive feedback
- operating a 24-hour hotline for landowners and community members
- opening a Community Information Centre which is a one-stop shop for information about the REZ.²¹⁰

2.53 Likewise, Mr Bart Sykes, Acting Head of Community and Regional Development, Squadron Energy, commented that Squadron Energy is committed to the CWO region and collaborating with all stakeholders. During his evidence to the committee, Mr Sykes emphasised that Squadron Energy's engagement strategy is threefold as it seeks to:

- partner with the community early
- collaborate with landowners, locals and the government
- deliver long-term economic value for the community.²¹¹

2.54 The NSW Government responded to concerns about inadequate community consultation. Mr Ash Albury, EnergyCo, noted that EnergyCo has conducted 115 community information sessions, 850 direct stakeholder meetings, 10,000 individual stakeholder interactions in the CWO REZ.²¹²

2.55 Moreover, EnergyCo advised that it has taken a number of steps to improve its stakeholder engagement, including:

- asking local communities and councils for feedback on how to best undertake community consultation
- establishing a regular presence at regional events
- increasing its use of printed communication materials
- expanding advertising to include local community newspapers and radio stations in addition to regional media outlets
- developing an online interactive map which includes the locations of proposed generation projects in the REZ

²¹⁰ Answers to supplementary questions, Mr Steven Masters, CEO, ACERREZ, received 19 June 2025, p 1.

²¹¹ Evidence, Mr Bart Sykes, Acting Head of Community and Regional Development, Squadron Energy, 16 May 2025, p 37.

²¹² Evidence, Mr Ash Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, EnergyCo, 13 May 2025, p 15.

- holding targeted briefings at the request of local community groups such as local resident associations and rotary clubs.²¹³

2.56 EnergyCo also told the committee that it had moved towards using a drop-in centre approach to engagement rather than town hall meetings.²¹⁴

2.57 The NSW Government acknowledged that the constant 'churn of applications' for renewable energy projects creates angst in the community. However, Mr Ash Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, EnergyCo, told the committee that the recently confirmed access arrangements in the region should help provide greater certainty in the community:

The Dyer report²¹⁵ pulls out quite clearly that some of the angst around community is because of the constant churn of applications and then the constant "Oh, God, this thing's coming next to me" and the angst that that creates. I think by the fact that we've now got the access arrangements that we've announced, that almost sends a very clear signal that they are the projects that are going to get the access rights. The issue with the other projects is that in some cases it's going to be difficult for them to actually get network access, and that makes it a very difficult proposition for them going forward.²¹⁶

2.58 Beyond the consultation process, the government also advised that through the expanded functions of Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW, communities affected by renewable energy and transmission infrastructure projects can now access independent complaint handling and dispute resolution services.²¹⁷

The inherent power imbalance between developers and individuals

2.59 There was discussion during the inquiry about the power imbalance between developers and individuals who are involved in the planning process.²¹⁸ As mentioned in Chapter 1, the renewable energy planning process includes numerous policy and legislative frameworks. Moreover, often renewable energy developments are categorised as State Significant Developments (SSD) or State Significant Infrastructure (SSI) thus require consultation with the community.

2.60 According to stakeholders, the planning process facilitates a power imbalance between an individual and a renewable energy proponent. Mrs Margaret Conn, a landowner, farmer and lawyer, explained that the complex development application process, compounded by the short

²¹³ Answers to supplementary questions, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, received 3 July 2025, p 18.

²¹⁴ Evidence, Mr Ash Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, EnergyCo, 13 May 2025, p 15.

²¹⁵ Andrew Dyer, Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner, 2023, *Community Engagement Review Report, on behalf of the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water*, Canberra, 2 February 2024.

²¹⁶ Evidence, Mr Ash Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, EnergyCo, 13 May 2025, p 7.

²¹⁷ Submission 44, NSW Government, p 14.

²¹⁸ Evidence, Mr James Matthews, Executive Committee Member, Merriwa Cassilis Alliance, 16 May 2025, p 27; Evidence, Mrs Jane Hegarty, Chair, Cassilis District Development Group, 16 May 2025, p 30; Evidence, Mr James Armstrong, Owner, Cassilis Park Merino Stud, 16 May 2025, p 31.

timeframe for a response, favours developers and prohibits meaningful engagement with individuals:

There is an enormous power imbalance at the moment in terms of impacted individuals dealing with developers. That's where the problem lies. The developers of the projects are commercial operators. Their sole object is to get the project approved for as little cost as possible—cost is really important to them—and as quickly as possible. They are paid well to do a full-time job of getting the job done. The policy framework is entirely behind the developer. The public service has been charged with getting the projects approved. It hasn't got the manpower to be investigating the little things that we raise.²¹⁹

Lack of consideration for neighbours and the use of Non-Disclosure Agreements

2.61 On a separate issue, certain stakeholders argued that the owners of properties that neighbour renewable energy projects are not adequately consulted during the planning process. For example, Mrs Margaret Conn, whose property is 'sandwiched' by four renewable energy projects, argued that there is 'an absence of any real engagement, consultation or negotiation' with neighbouring landowners.²²⁰

2.62 Indeed, Mrs Jane Hegerty, Cassilis District Group told the committee that landowners who are in negotiations with renewable energy developers are unable to discuss plans with their neighbours. Mrs Hegerty advised that this leads to the feeling of isolation of landowners and the inability to include neighbours as part of the planning process:

[Farmers] feel isolated when they're having to negotiate with these multinational companies because they can't sit down with their neighbours and say, "Look, I've been approached about this. What do you think? Have you been approached?" They can't have those discussions and I think, in a rural community, that isolating process is a really disenfranchising aspect of it.²²¹

2.63 Further, the committee heard that this issue was compounded by the use of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs). The committee heard that in some instances where an NDA was signed between a renewable energy developer and landowner, plans for properties could not be discussed outside the two parties. Consequently, neighbours and the broader public are left unaware of future plans for development.²²² Stakeholders said that, at times, this secrecy can lead to a lack of trust permeating in the community.²²³

2.64 In response to concerns regarding non-disclosure agreements and the lack of consideration to neighbouring properties, Squadron Energy clarified that its 'neighbour agreements are fairly industry standard ... [and] does not limit a landowner from raising concerns about breaches of approvals'.²²⁴ Indeed, Mr Sykes highlighted that Squadron Energy has close to 500 landowner

²¹⁹ Evidence, Mrs Margaret Conn, Landowner, 16 May 2025, p 11.

²²⁰ Evidence, Mrs Margaret Conn, Landowner, 16 May 2025, p 11.

²²¹ Evidence, Mrs Jane Hegerty, Chair, Cassilis District Development Group, 16 May 2025, p 28.

²²² See for example: Evidence, Mr Grant Piper, Chair, CWO REZist, 16 May 2025, p 14; Evidence, Mrs Margaret Conn, Landowner, 16 May 2025, p 11.

²²³ Evidence, Mr Nigel Robert, Landowner, 16 May 2025, p 23.

²²⁴ Evidence, Mr Bart Sykes, Acting Head of Community and Regional Development, Squadron Energy, 16 May 2025, p 40.

agreements in place, indicating that they are experienced with these agreements and has 'worked well for their projects'.²²⁵

- 2.65** Mr Sykes explained that non-disclosure clauses are included in their agreements due to personal and commercially sensitive information as well as clauses that limit a landowner's ability to object to a project, if the impacts are outlined in the agreement.²²⁶

Erosion of social cohesion

- 2.66** Following on, stakeholders told the committee that the CWO REZ and its associated projects have eroded social cohesion in the community.²²⁷ For example, one inquiry participant observed that the CWO community is now divided between landowners who agreed to host projects and those who are left to 'carry the burden' of developments:

The creation of division within the community - the "haves" and "have nots" being the hosts and the others that are left to carry the burden of the development with negative results. These include reduced land values – studies have shown that land values are decreased by up to 30 [per cent] - increased road traffic and disruption, increased rates for repairs to rural roads caused by heavy equipment and increased traffic as the majority of the projects are only accessible by rural roads.²²⁸

- 2.67** Indeed, other participants highlighted how relationships between neighbours, friends and families are eroded or 'strained' as a result of CWO REZ. During the hearing, Ms Emma Bowman, a landowner, described how families have been 'torn apart' and that there is no solution for the ongoing situation caused the CWO REZ:

These are generational relationships that have been pulled apart. Sometimes family versus family, sometimes long-term friends, neighbours. There's not an easy fix, and I don't know if there's ever a fix from that. Trust has been eroded. People feel like they have been stabbed in the back, for want of a better word, by people they've trusted their whole lives. As much as we probably all need to move forward there are some people that won't ever get over that.²²⁹

- 2.68** Similarly, Mr James Matthews, Merriwa Cassilis Alliance observed that the CWO REZ has resulted in community division. He described how neighbours are pitted against each other, causing tension in the communities where landowners are forced to sell land or hesitantly agree to host renewable energy developments:

One of the consequences of the REZ development is the division it has created within regional communities. These zones are pitting neighbours against each other, with some

²²⁵ Evidence, Mr Bart Sykes, Acting Head of Community and Regional Development, Squadron Energy, 16 May 2025, p 40.

²²⁶ Evidence, Mr Bart Sykes, Acting Head of Community and Regional Development, Squadron Energy, 16 May 2025, p 40.

²²⁷ See for example: Submission 100, Name Suppressed, p 2; Evidence, Ms Emma Bowman, Landowner, 16 May 2025, p 23; Evidence, Mr James Matthews, Executive Committee Member, Merriwa Cassilis Alliance, 16 May 2025, p 27.

²²⁸ Submission 100, Name Suppressed, p 2.

²²⁹ Evidence, Ms Emma Bowman, Landowner, 16 May 2025, p 23.

landowners being pressured into either selling their land or entering agreements with developers, while others face the threat of compulsory land acquisition. The tension has strained relationships and created an environment where communities are suffering for the sake of infrastructure projects that do not adequately consider local needs and perspectives.²³⁰

Use of Social Impact Assessments

- 2.69** As mentioned in Chapter 1, in accordance with the Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements, Social Impact Assessments (SIAs) are required for all state significant projects, such as most renewable energy projects.²³¹ SIAs identify, predict and evaluate the likely social impacts of a project. These assessment also propose responses that aim to avoid, mitigate or reduce negative impacts and enhance positive impacts.²³²
- 2.70** Dr Richard Parsons, a social research practitioner specialising in SIAs and community engagement,²³³ explained that a SIA is an applied social research exercise.²³⁴ Moreover, when used effectively, SIAs lead to locals feeling 'empowered' to shape changes in their community and could lead to support for projects such as REZs.²³⁵
- 2.71** However, Dr Parsons noted that based on his experience of reviewing the state's SIA guidelines, there are 'shortcomings' around how the state's planning system uses these assessments. According to Dr Parsons, these limitations include inadequate engagement and lack of attention to intangible impacts, for example noise and dust, and ignoring social cohesion impacts.²³⁶
- 2.72** Following on, Dr Parsons reflected that to improve the consultation process in rural and regional communities, such as the CWO REZ, there should be more resourcing within the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) directed to SIA specialists who can adequately oversee and scrutinise the social impacts of state significant projects.²³⁷

²³⁰ Evidence, Mr James Matthews, Executive Committee Member, Merriwa Cassilis Alliance, 16 May 2025, p 27.

²³¹ Evidence, Dr Richard Parsons, Social researcher, 13 May 2025, p 33; NSW Government, *Social impacts – Assessment of social impacts*, 24 July 2025, <https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/assessment/policies-and-guidelines/key-guidance/social>.

²³² Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, *Social Impact Assessment Guideline For State significant projects*, July 2025, p 5.

²³³ Dr Richard Parsons, is a social research practitioner, specialising in social impact assessment (SIA) and community engagement. He was previously employed as an internal SIA specialist for the then Department of Planning and Environment from 2016 to 2022. Dr Parson provided evidence at the hearing on 13 May 2025 in a personal professional capacity and not representing any organisation. See also: Evidence, Dr Richard Parson, Social Researcher, 13 May 2025, p 32.

²³⁴ Evidence, Dr Richard Parsons, Social Researcher, 13 May 2025, p 33.

²³⁵ Evidence, Dr Richard Parsons, Social Researcher, 13 May 2025, p 34.

Evidence, Dr Richard Parsons, Social Researcher, 13 May 2025, p 34.

²³⁶ Evidence, Dr Richard Parsons, Social Researcher, 13 May 2025, p 34.

²³⁷ Evidence, Dr Richard Parsons, Social Researcher, 13 May 2025, p 34.

Committee comment

- 2.73** The committee is concerned by the overwhelming evidence that there have been cases of inadequate consultation between the NSW Government, renewable energy developers and the CWO REZ community. In particular, we acknowledge that these issues are multi-faceted, where communities face over-consultation, power-imbalance and ambiguity in discussions with neighbours regarding non-disclosure agreements.
- 2.74** We note the evidence from the government and renewable energy developers regarding the steps taken on community consultation. However, the committee considers that these approaches are insufficient as there is continued angst and lack of trust from the individuals, families and the wider community regarding any their engagement process. A lack of trust can undermine the social licence of renewable energy developers to effectively develop, implement and operate projects in the CWO REZ.
- 2.75** It is disappointing to hear that some community members are experiencing poor mental health following their engagement with the NSW Government and renewable energy developers. This is especially concerning given certain factors, such as physical isolation, already increase the risk of mental health concerns for individuals in regional and rural communities, such as those in the CWO REZ. As will be discussed in later in the chapter, the mental health of CWO REZ community members can also be undermined by the stress associated with the land acquisition process. The committee therefore recommends that EnergyCo provide mental health support to landowners who are affected the by CWO REZ.

Finding 3

That there has been inadequate consultation between the NSW Government, renewable energy developers and the Central-West Orana community. This has had significant repercussions, including, but not limited to, impacting the mental health of community members, eroding social cohesion and undermining the social licence of renewable energy operators in the region.

Recommendation 2

That EnergyCo provide mental health support to landowners who are affected by the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone.

- 2.76** The committee acknowledges the importance of Social Impact Assessments (SIAs). These tools both identify, predict and evaluate the likely social impacts of state significant projects, and propose responses that avoid, mitigate or reduce negative impacts and enhance positive outcomes. Additionally, when done well, SIAs provide robust community involvement which leads to more local buy-in and support for projects.
- 2.77** The committee considers that the current use of SIAs is ineffective, and recommend that the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) review the use of SIAs. Amongst other issues, this review should consider:
- opportunities to enhance engagement with affected communities

- opportunities to identify, measure and mitigate intangible impacts, such as noise and dust
- opportunities to identify, measure and mitigate social cohesion impacts
- whether the DPHI has adequate resourcing to assess SIAs.

Recommendation 3

That the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) review the use of Social Impact Assessments (SIA). Amongst other issues, this review should consider:

- opportunities to enhance engagement with affected communities
 - opportunities to identify, measure and mitigate intangible impacts, such as noise and dust
 - opportunities to identify, measure and mitigate social cohesion impacts
 - whether the DPHI has adequate resourcing to assess SIAs.
-

Impact on farmers and the agricultural industry

2.78 Stakeholders raised concerns about increasing use of agricultural land for renewable energy development.²³⁸ Indeed, NSW Farmers argued that the construction and operation of REZ infrastructure has 'profoundly' and 'dramatically' transformed rural and regional communities. Further, NSW Farmers observed that land traditionally used for agriculture is transforming as 'large swathes of land are used for industrial-scale renewable energy projects'.²³⁹

2.79 These concerns were shared by many landowners and farming communities in the CWO REZ. Inquiry participants considered that the increasing number of renewable energy projects on agricultural land could lead to:

- decreased agricultural farming practices in the region and potentially impact on future food production
- increased concerns about agrivoltaics practice, or the compatibility of renewable energy infrastructure with farming
- increased business costs to farmers who neighbour solar and wind farms in light of an increase in public liability insurance.²⁴⁰

2.80 For example, Mr Nigel Roberts, a landowner and farmer in the CWO region, expressed strong concerns about the impact of the REZ on the local agricultural industry. Mr Roberts questioned how food production requirements could be met when arable land in the region is being used for renewable energy projects:

Whilst the requirements to meet energy demands are vital, food production must take precedence. We need to remember we do have the option to develop many of these

²³⁸ See for example: Submission 50, NSW Farmers, p 3; Submission 45, Mid-Western Regional Council, pp 4-5; Evidence, Mr Nigel Roberts, landowner, 16 May 2025, p 19.

²³⁹ Submission 50, NSW Farmers, p 3.

²⁴⁰ See for example: Evidence, Mr Nigel Roberts, Landowner, 16 May 2025, p 19; Evidence, Mr James Matthews, Executive Committee Member, Merriwa Cassilis Alliance, 16 May 2025 p 27; Evidence, Ms Emma Bowman, Landowner, 16 May 2025, p 18.

projects on areas that do not produce any food. According to the [Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations], we need to produce 70 per cent more food by 2050. As you all witnessed yesterday as you drove around our family property, these solar projects are intended to be developed on highly productive agricultural areas. Why is this? And who is allowing this to happen? Are we going to be addressing the same energy issues in the future with regard to food supply? It certainly looks like it.²⁴¹

2.81 Mr Roberts contended that agrivoltaics practices could not co-exist. He argued that recent studies show 'elevated lead and cadmium levels leaching from panels into soils and grasses' where livestock live and graze. Mr Roberts questioned whether consumers would be happy to consume or wear by-products from livestock raised in agrivoltaics farms, stating that: 'I, unfortunately, cannot see our consumers happy to consume this lamb [that is raised on land hosting a renewable energy project], or even wear this fibre!'.²⁴²

2.82 Mr James Matthews, Executive Committee Member, Merriwa Cassilis Alliance, and a third-generation farmer, shared similar views about the potential negative impacts of the CWO REZ on farming businesses. Mr Matthews cautioned that the renewable energy projects in the region create uncertainty around long-term business planning on farms:

The multiple developments being proposed in these REZ zones mean that landholders are no longer able to plan for the future with any level of certainty, resulting in reduced investment in on-farm infrastructure or long-term business plans. This is impacting the ability to maintain profitability, plan for droughts or invest in environmental projects.²⁴³

2.83 Renewable energy developers responded to these concerns. According to Squadron Energy, its renewable energy projects are developed in close collaboration with landowners and neighbours to minimise disruption to farming operations. For example, the committee heard that Squadron Energy has taken a number of steps to address this including:

- conducting detailed agricultural impact assessments
- adapting turbine layouts
- adjusting designs based on environmental and land use findings
- ensuring its design process is supported by the host landowner and voids productive agriculture
- relocating turbines to avoid sensitive habitats and enhance erosion control measures
- using biodiversity offset strategies to prioritise the regeneration of degraded or marginal land.²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ Evidence, Mr Nigel Roberts, landowner, 16 May 2025, p 19.

²⁴² Evidence, Mr Nigel Roberts, landowner, 16 May 2025, p 19.

²⁴³ Evidence, Mr James Matthews, Executive Committee Member, Merriwa Cassilis Alliance, 16 May 2025, p 27.

²⁴⁴ Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions, Squadron Energy, received 19 June 2025, p 3.

- 2.84** ACERREZ told the committee that its infrastructure is consistent in design, scale and impact as similar infrastructure already built elsewhere on productive agricultural land in New South Wales, as well as throughout other states including South Australia, Victoria and Queensland.²⁴⁵
- 2.85** The NSW Government responded to concerns regarding land-use conflicts between renewable energy infrastructure and agriculture. The government advised that the NSW Agriculture Commissioner has found that 'renewable energy development is not in conflict with agricultural land use at a sufficiently large scale to materially affect the [state's] agricultural base and that the policy and assessment framework is capable of dealing localised land use conflicts and impacts'.²⁴⁶
- 2.86** Nonetheless, the government highlighted the importance of managing potential land use conflicts between REZ infrastructure and high-value agricultural land. The government stated that these considerations are addressed through the following mechanisms:
- planning and site selection: the development of REZs and associated infrastructure is informed by strategic planning processes that consider environmental, social and economic factors, including existing land uses.
 - assessment under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act): including the environment impact assessment process. Under this Act, developers of infrastructure projects, including transmission projects in REZs are required to identify and assess potential impacts on agricultural land.
 - mitigation and management measures: where impacts on agricultural land are unavoidable, developers (including the government) are typically required to implement measures to mitigate or manage these impacts, for example developers may be required to undertake steps to manage bio-security risks to land directly impacted or adjacent to REZ transmission infrastructure.²⁴⁷

Public liability insurance

- 2.87** There was discussion during the inquiry about the relationship between renewable energy projects and the potential impost of increased public liability insurance on landowners.²⁴⁸
- 2.88** The Law Society of NSW explained that the installation of renewable energy infrastructure may result in the reclassification of land use from agriculture to industrial, with associated changes to various outgoings including council rates and insurance. This includes 'prohibitive increases

²⁴⁵ Answers to supplementary questions, Mr Steven Masters, CEO, ACERREZ, received 19 June 2025, p 5.

²⁴⁶ Answers to supplementary questions, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, received 3 July 2025, p 7.

²⁴⁷ Answers to supplementary questions, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, received 3 July 2025, p 18.

²⁴⁸ See for example: Evidence, Mrs Jane Hegarty, Chair, Cassilis District Development Group, 16 May 2025, p 28; Evidence, Mr James Armstrong, Owner, Cassilis Park Merino Stud, 16 May 2025, p 29; Evidence, Mr Nigel Roberts, landowner, 16 May 2025, p 19; Evidence, Mr Grant Piper, Chair, CWO REZist, 16 May 2025, p 12.

in public liability premiums ... and limited availability of appropriate insurance cover'.²⁴⁹ The Law Society of NSW also noted that costs can be affected by the risk of fire damage from a landowner's property, both when the landowner is host to, or adjoining renewable energy insurance.²⁵⁰

- 2.89** During the hearing in Dubbo, Ms Jane Hegarty, Cassilis District Development Group, spoke about the lack of insurance options for farmers that neighbour renewable energy developments. Ms Hegarty observed that there is uncertainty in the community around who is liable should a fire damage a neighbouring renewable energy project, especially if farmers can only access \$20 million of liability insurance:

[Issues] has been raised a number of times in our local community meetings about the lack of insurance options for farmers near neighbouring developments ... It is a real concern around farmers because, if they can only access \$20 million of liability insurance, there's no way that is going to cover the damage incurred in a bushfire in our region if it burns a renewable energy development.²⁵¹

- 2.90** Mrs Hegarty concluded: 'Now I think if the renewable energy company is going to put that development on agricultural land, they should insure it themselves, irrespective of how that fire is started'.²⁵²

- 2.91** Mr Nigel Roberts expressed similar concerns, noting that his property adjoins multiple proposed renewable energy projects which include in excess of \$4 billion worth of solar panels. However, his maximum public liability insurance is \$20 million.²⁵³ Mr Roberts explained that he faced significant financial risk if he, or a contractor in his property, is deemed liable for damaging the neighbouring project due to a fire:

If I or an employee here in our business starts a fire and is deemed liable for starting that fire that burns these solar farms down who or where is the difference coming from? We also need to consider the loss of income from the proposed solar farms. Further to this all businesses surrounding these projects will be heavily affected as contractors will avoid the risk of damages to these projects as they too will only have \$20 million [public liability] cover. Our current business contracts out harvest and hay contracting (both quite fire prone). Who is going to perform these jobs for our business with the added risks associated with the infrastructure losses from these projects? This issue is common to all mixed farming businesses in the area.²⁵⁴

- 2.92** In response to these concerns, Squadron Energy told the committee that its renewable energy projects are insured, and that if there are any increases in premiums for hosts of its infrastructure, the organisation covers these costs.²⁵⁵

²⁴⁹ Submission 70, The Law Society of NSW, p 2.

²⁵⁰ Submission 70, The Law Society of NSW, p 2. See also: NSW Agriculture Commissioner, *Renewable energy generation and agriculture in New South Wales's rural landscape and economy – growth sectors on a complementary path*, 8 November 2022, 71-73.

²⁵¹ Evidence, Ms Jane Hegarty, Chair, Cassilis District Development Group, 16 May 2025, pp 28-29.

²⁵² Evidence, Ms Jane Hegarty, Chair, Cassilis District Development Group, 16 May 2025, pp 28-29.

²⁵³ Submission 80, Mr Nigel Roberts, p 5.

²⁵⁴ Submission 80, Mr Nigel Roberts, p 5.

²⁵⁵ Evidence, Mr Bart Sykes, Acting Head of Community and Regional Development, Squadron Energy, 16 May 2025, p 44.

- 2.93** Squadron Energy also noted statements from the Insurance Council that 'insurers generally do not have specific concerns related to a property hosting transmission lines or neighbouring energy infrastructure'.²⁵⁶
- 2.94** The NSW Government acknowledged concerns from landowners about the uncertainty of insurance coverage on properties that neighbour renewable energy projects. The government advised that EnergyCo has met with the Insurance Council of Australia (Insurance Council) and is 'working collaboratively with key stakeholders to explore and monitor the issue'.²⁵⁷
- 2.95** The government stated it had been advised by the Insurance Council that insurers have not raised any specific concerns about neighbouring renewable energy infrastructure. Moreover, it is not aware of instances where its members have been unable to provide insurance or have increased premiums as a result of a farm or neighbouring property hosting renewable energy infrastructure.²⁵⁸
- 2.96** Furthermore, the government advised that the Clean Energy Council,²⁵⁹ the Insurance Council or EnergyCo have not been presented with any cases where a farmer had had their premiums impacted or has been unable to access insurance due to their location near a renewable energy project.²⁶⁰
- 2.97** Finally, the government informed the committee that it is standard practice for public liability insurance to be approximately \$20 million across many different sectors, as confirmed by the Insurance Council and the Clean Energy Council.²⁶¹

Economic impact

- 2.98** The committee heard concerns that renewable energy projects in the CWO REZ may cause detrimental financial outcomes for landowners and communities. In particular, this section examines the issues raised around the land acquisition process, devaluation of land and the economic benefits to the community.

²⁵⁶ Evidence, Mr Bart Sykes, Acting Head of Community and Regional Development, Squadron Energy, 16 May 2025, p 44. See also: Tendered document, *Farm Insurance and Energy Infrastructure, Insurance Council of Australia, 14 May 2024*, p 1.

²⁵⁷ Answers to supplementary questions, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, received 3 July 2025, p 6.

²⁵⁸ Answers to supplementary questions, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, received 3 July 2025, p 6.

²⁵⁹ The Clean Energy Council is the peak body for the clean energy industry in Australia. Source: Clean Energy Council, *About us*, (2025), <https://cleanenergycouncil.org.au/about-us>.

²⁶⁰ Answers to supplementary questions, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, received 3 July 2025, p 6.

²⁶¹ Answers to supplementary questions, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, received 3 July 2025, p 6.

Concerns regarding acquisition of land and compensation to landowners

- 2.99** As mentioned in Chapter 1, in accordance with the *Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991* (Just Terms Act), landowners hosting transmission lines are entitled to compensation for the acquisition of easements rights by Transgrid or EnergyCo. As part of the CWO transmission project, stakeholders observed that in some circumstances, private land was acquired for the construction of new transmission infrastructure or leased from landowners to host transmission lines.²⁶²
- 2.100** The committee heard about some landowners' negative experiences of the land acquisition process and concerns about the tax implication of these agreements.²⁶³ These issues are explored in the following case study which details the experience of Mr Stuart Hackney, a farmer in the Central West–Orana Renewable Energy Zone.

Case study: Mr Stuart Hackney²⁶⁴

Mr Stuart Hackney is a farmer whose property is located in the CWO REZ. His family acquired the property in 1979. Amongst other work, the land has been contoured to prevent soil degradation, and an area of soil conservation regeneration has been established near a major creek.

Mr Hackney was initially advised by Transgrid that his property was not in the preferred corridor and would not be acquired to host transmission infrastructure. Sometime later, Mr Hackney received a map from EnergyCo showing the transmission easement going over his land and farming infrastructure.

While the proposed location of the easement has since been moved approximately 60 metres by EnergyCo, it will still have substantial impacts, involving the construction of three high-voltage powerlines. Construction is estimated to take two to four years.

Consultation was lacking and stressful

No-one from EnergyCo consulted Mr Hackney or visited the property prior to the notification, to check the proposed location of the easement. In a subsequent meeting with EnergyCo, the company asserted it had the right to 'go wherever they wanted'. Mr Hackney found it difficult to establish who he should be liaising with about the proposed site and potential impacts and felt that he was continually left waiting for answers. Further, he felt commitments were made that were then dishonoured, while new developments continue to be added to the plans. He also felt subject to immense pressure to sign over access to his land, which he has resisted while endeavouring to negotiate a more suitable alignment with fairer terms. Threats of compulsory acquisition have also been immensely stressful, as has the sense that the project is proceeding apace regardless.

Lack of compensation

A further stressor was that EnergyCo's initial valuation was half that prepared by Mr Hackney's valuer. The 250m easement occupies 36 hectares, or 16 per cent of total arable land which will affect the farm's income. Mr Hackney has been advised that he cannot be compensated for loss of income during the two-to-four-year construction period. However, the most egregious aspect of 'compensation' is that

²⁶² See for example: Evidence, Mr Stuart Hackney, Farmer/Contractor, 16 May 2025, p 47; Evidence, Mr David Seis, Landowner and Vice-Chair, Three Rivers Landcare, 16 May 2025, p 48.

²⁶³ See for example: Evidence, Mr Stuart Hackney, Farmer/Contractor, 16 May 2025, p 47; Evidence, Mr David Seis, Landowner and Vice-Chair, Three Rivers Landcare, 16 May 2025, p 47.

²⁶⁴ This case study is drawn from Evidence, Mr Stuart Hackney, Farmer/Contractor, 16 May 2025, pp 47-48, 50.

any payout is classed as 'off-farm' income and will therefore be taxed at 48 cents in the dollar. This seems patently unfair to Mr Hackney and undermines the entire purpose of compensation.

Widespread impacts

The whole experience has taken its toll on Mr Hackney's family and has caused him 'constant stress and anxiety'. 'No help was provided; it was something we had to cope with.'

The loss of arable land will reduce the farm's income and, as so many paddocks will be affected, the property may have to destock or seek agistment elsewhere. The contoured land will be flattened to create an eight-metre gravel road through the middle of the property, and Mr Hackney says managing cropping and grazing will also be very difficult.

In spite of attempting to negotiate directly as well as through his solicitors, plus representations to members of parliament and a meeting with the relevant state minister regarding the process, Mr Hackney feels the whole process has been rushed, and 'a complete nightmare that no-one should have to go through.'

- 2.101** In response to questions about the adequacy of the current compensation offered to landowners hosting transmission lines, the NSW Government advised that it is committed to the acquisition process being fair, easy to understand and transparent. The government indicated that the objectives of Just Terms Act are to acquire land on just terms for the owner and to encourage acquisitions by agreement and that accordingly, it is its intention to ensure landowners receive their full entitlement to compensation while ensuring the delivery of essential public infrastructure.²⁶⁵

Devaluation of land

- 2.102** Some landholders affected by the CWO REZ were concerned that the construction of renewable energy projects may affect the value of their properties.
- 2.103** For example, Mr Stephen Johnston, who is based in the CWO region, claimed real estate agents have told him that his property which is near a property that hosts wind turbines could be devalued by 30 to 40 per cent. Mr Johnston suggested that compensation to properties near renewable energy projects should be considered.²⁶⁶ Other stakeholders expressed similar sentiments.²⁶⁷
- 2.104** Separately, CWO REZist asserted that the visual impact of renewable energy infrastructure decreased the value of both host properties and neighbouring land: 'The compensation they offered was paltry in comparison to the loss of visual amenity and loss of property value by being forced to host the infrastructure.'²⁶⁸
- 2.105** Uarbry Tongy Alliance argued the importance of land valuations in regional communities and the agricultural sector. According to the alliance, land valuations are a key component of the

²⁶⁵ Answers to supplementary questions, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, received 3 July 2025, p 6.

²⁶⁶ Submission 95, Mr Stephen Johnston, p 1.

²⁶⁷ See for example: Submission 95, Mr Stephen Johnston, p 1; Submission 111, Mr Stan Moore, p 1.

²⁶⁸ Submission 30, CWO REZist, p 8.

agricultural business as it allows landowners to borrow funds. The alliance argued that devalued land can hamper a landowner's ability to borrow funds thus impacts their business.²⁶⁹

Adequacy of economic benefits to the community

- 2.106** As discussed in Chapter 1, the NSW Government provides economic benefits to REZ communities through several funding schemes. However, there was discussion during the inquiry about how grants are allocated and whether they meet the needs of the community.
- 2.107** The committee heard that smaller communities may miss out on grants due to capacity and resourcing constraints. Ms Sally Dent, Committee Member, Three Rivers Landcare, a community environmental group based in the CWO region, said that, despite being unduly affected by the CWO REZ, small communities, like Mendooran, Dunedoo, Coolah and Cassilis, often miss out on grants which are awarded to larger towns, such as Mudgee and Dubbo. Ms Dent explained that organisations in larger towns have access to more resources, including funding for grant writers.²⁷⁰
- 2.108** Inquiry participants suggested that grants may not meet the needs of the community. Mr Pete Rothwell, VRA Rescue, a non-government emergency rescue service based in the CWO region, expressed the view that funding to certain projects, such as road upgrades and training facilities, are often presented as benefiting the community but instead suit the needs of renewable energy companies.²⁷¹ Mr Rothwell described the grants process as 'rushed' and said 'the level of resourcing and where it's been pointed to has been misplaced'.²⁷²
- 2.109** Separately, Mr Rothwell advocated for direct funding to VRA Rescue, noting the organisation's small budget, limited funding options and likely increased workload due to the potential for increased road accidents in the CWO region.²⁷³

Committee comment

- 2.110** The committee acknowledges the concerns about the potential negative impacts of renewable energy developments in the CWO REZ on farmers and agricultural land, particularly in areas where land is increasingly being used for renewable energy developments. This has significant implications for agricultural production, including food supply. We note the NSW Government advised that renewable energy development is not in conflict with agricultural land. However, the committee believes this situation should be monitored.

²⁶⁹ Submission 42, Uarbry Tongy Lane Alliance, p 2.

²⁷⁰ Evidence, Ms Sally Dent, Committee Member, Three Rivers Landcare, 16 May 2025, p 51.

²⁷¹ Evidence, Mr Pete Rothwell, Director, VRA Rescue, 16 May 2025, p 36.

²⁷² Evidence, Mr Pete Rothwell, Director, VRA Rescue, 16 May 2025, p 36.

²⁷³ Evidence, Mr Pete Rothwell, Director, VRA Rescue, 16 May 2025, pp 32, 34.

Finding 4

That there are concerns within the Central-West Orana community about the impact on its agricultural industry. The NSW Government should continue to monitor any impacts.

- 2.111** On a related note, the committee shares landowners' concerns around the uncertainty of public liability insurance on their farming businesses. Despite assurances from the government and renewable energy developers, the committee remains uncertain whether landowners would be appropriately covered should actions on their properties damage neighbouring renewable energy developments. The crux of our concern is that standard public liability insurance is \$20 million but the value of renewable energy assets is often upwards of this amount.
- 2.112** On this basis, the committee finds that there is still uncertainty around whether landowners will be able secure sufficient public liability insurance if their properties neighbour renewable energy projects.
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Finding 5

That despite assurances from the NSW Government and renewable energy proponents, landowners who neighbour renewable energy developments maintain concerns around access to, and suitability of, public liability insurance for their properties.

- 2.113** The committee was particularly moved by evidence from individuals who shared their negative experiences of land acquisition by the government. We understand that revisiting the process would not have been easy and we appreciate the openness and candour in sharing their stories.
- 2.114** We were concerned to hear that these individuals received inadequate compensation despite assurances from the government that the *Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991* is a fair process. Moreover, the committee notes the tax implications of these purchases caused further stress for landowners. The committee recommends that the NSW Government investigate options to ensure payments for land acquisition are not taxed. As part of this process, the government could work with the Australian Government to examine whether changes to federal legislation are required.
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Recommendation 4

That the NSW Government investigate options to ensure payments for land acquisition are not taxed. As part of this process, the government could work with the Australian Government to examine whether changes to federal legislation are required.

Environmental impact

- 2.115** The environmental impacts of the CWO REZ were discussed throughout the inquiry, particularly concerns around fire risks, decommissioning and land-clearing. This section explores these concerns.
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Fire risks

- 2.116** During the hearing in Dubbo, inquiry participants raised concerns about fire risks in the region. In particular, it was noted that the community faced 'devastating' bushfires in 2017 which burnt through 55,000 hectares of mostly farmland.²⁷⁴
- 2.117** There were two key issues for many inquiry participants: the risk of bushfires starting and the impact on firefighting efforts. For example, Mid-Western Regional Council noted that many renewable energy projects in the CWO REZ will be located in fire-prone areas.²⁷⁵ In its submission, the council highlighted the areas of community concern around fire risks, including:
- the proximity of renewable energy projects to agriculture and grazing land, increasing the risk of fire spreading to neighbouring properties
 - the lack of on-site firefighting equipment at renewable energy sites, increasing the risk of fires escalating before assistance can arrive
 - energy projects may be in remote or difficult-to-access locations of renewable, making fire-fighting efforts more challenging, increasing the risk of fire spreading to other properties.²⁷⁶
- 2.118** Ms Emma Bowman raised similar concerns and highlighted community sentiment about the risk of fires and the lack of planning for future bushfires in the region. During her evidence to the committee, Ms Bowman reflected on the 2017 bushfires in the region and its impact on the locals' angst about future bushfires: 'Memories of the immediate threat and clean-up of the Sir Ivan bushfire are still very vivid for this region, making locals sceptical and nervous about the lack of planning for future bushfire catastrophes'.²⁷⁷
- 2.119** The committee heard that the fire risk was compounded by the limited local fire-fighting services within certain LGAs. Mr Lindsay Mason, General Manager, Warrumbungle Shire Council, noted that renewable energy projects heightened the fire risk on small communities given their limited firefighting services and called for increased firefighting capabilities within the renewable energy project sites:
- For sure, they've [fire-fighting capabilities] got to be locally based, near those facilities. You've got towns like Coolah and Dunedoo that have retained firefighters—they don't have permanent firefighters, that's New South Wales fire brigade. You've got the various Rural Fire Service brigades and limited other emergency services.²⁷⁸
- 2.120** In support of this view, Adjunct Professor Warwick Giblin, Environmental Consultant for Warrumbungle Shire Council, advocated that each renewable energy development be required

²⁷⁴ Submission 94, Ms Emma Bowman, pp 139-140. See also: Evidence, Mr Grant Piper, AASM, DFSM, Chair, CWO REZist, 16 May 2025, p 10; Evidence, Ms Sally Edwards, Past Community Representative/Active Rural Community Advocate, 16 May 2025, p 17.

²⁷⁵ Submission 45, Mid-Western Regional Council, p 6.

²⁷⁶ Submission 45, Mid-Western Regional Council, pp 6-7.

²⁷⁷ Evidence, Ms Emma Bowman, Landowner, 16 May 2025, p 18.

²⁷⁸ Evidence, Mr Lindsay Mason, General Manager, Warrumbungle Shire Council, 16 May 2025, p 7.

to have onsite firefighting, with water and tanks.²⁷⁹ Professor Giblin asserted that the sites should not rely on the local Rural Fire Service (RFS), stating that 'it's incumbent that they have that resource there immediately and are not relying on the local [RFS] to come and put out a fire'.²⁸⁰

- 2.121** ACERENZ and Squadron Energy provided evidence about their fire mitigation measures and provided details regarding their fire management plans. According to ACERENZ, its infrastructure projects, including the Merotherie Road workers accommodation and transmission lines projects, have 'robust' risk management plans. Moreover, the committee heard that ACERENZ regularly works with local emergency services, including RFS, to address any potential fire risks and emergencies at its sites.²⁸¹ For example, Mr Steve Masters, ACERENZ, outlined its operational measures at their sites to mitigate bushfire risks:

The design of the accommodation at Merotherie has gone through extensive planning that's taken particular account in terms of fire risk in relation to that, either starting from the facility or any other fire that might be in the area. The RFS is a great example of a lot of consultation that's gone in place there.

If I speak more generally around transmission lines, again, there's a very robust risk management plan that's required around any transmission—that said, that would be the same for Transgrid or what we are intending to build—which goes into a lot of detail in relation to mitigants that we put in place, processes that we are required to deal within around things like vegetation management, structures that might be near transmission lines that could potentially cause a fire to start.²⁸²

- 2.122** Along similar lines, Squadron Energy informed the committee that its project sites have permanent operational teams which outline specific measures to address bushfires. Squadron Energy briefly outlined the mitigation measures designed to withstand extreme weather at its windfarms:

Our wind farms are engineered to withstand extreme weather. Mitigation measures include:

- reinforced turbine foundations
- lightning protection systems and real-time condition monitoring
- firebreaks and on-site fire response equipment
- joint training exercises and coordination with the RFS, including site-specific emergency response plans.²⁸³

²⁷⁹ Evidence, Adjunct Professor Warwick Giblin, FEIANZ, FRSN, Environmental Consultant for Warrumbungle Shire Council, 16 May 2025, p 7.

²⁸⁰ Evidence, Adjunct Professor Warwick Giblin, FEIANZ, FRSN, Environmental Consultant for Warrumbungle Shire Council, 16 May 2025, p 7.

²⁸¹ Evidence, Mr Steve Masters, CEO, ACERENZ, 16 May 2025, p 44. See also: Mr Robert Armstrong, Operations Director, ACERENZ, 16 May 2025, p 42; See also: Answers to supplementary questions, Mr Steven Masters, CEO, ACERENZ, received 19 June 2025, p 5.

²⁸² Evidence, Mr Steve Masters, CEO, ACERENZ, 16 May 2025, p 44. See also: Answers to supplementary questions, Mr Steven Masters, CEO, ACERENZ, received 19 June 2025, p 5.

²⁸³ Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions, Squadron Energy, received 19 June 2025, p 3. See also: Evidence, Mr Bart Sykes, Acting Head of Community and Regional Development, Squadron Energy, 16 May 2025, p 44.

- 2.123** DPHI advised that it engages with the RFS, Fire and Rescue NSW and other emergency services, at multiple stages of the planning and assessment process to address potential fire risks from REZ developments.²⁸⁴ DPHI stated that any access and mobility issues at renewable energy project sites must be addressed by the developers prior to receiving development consent.²⁸⁵
- 2.124** In addition, development consent conditions for renewable energy projects that are state significant developments are required to prepare and implement an emergency plan.²⁸⁶ For projects based in a rural setting, the RFS must be consulted on the project and provide advice on measures to minimise bushfire risk.²⁸⁷
- 2.125** The government suggested that further information could be sought from Fire and Rescue NSW and the RFS regarding fire risk and renewable energy projects.²⁸⁸ At this stage, the committee is yet to invite these two agencies to give evidence to this inquiry.

Uncertainty regarding decommissioning

- 2.126** Some stakeholders raised issues about the decommissioning process of renewable energy projects. At the hearing in Dubbo, Ms Jane Hegarty, Cassilis Development Group, suggested that landowners may face significant costs when projects are decommissioned. Mrs Hegarty expressed concern that some landowners might not have considered this financial impost:

The flaws I see at the moment are that a lot of these developers are leasing land, so the cost of the decommissioning actually still sits with the landowner unless they've negotiated something with that developer. A lot of people, when they're negotiating those agreements, aren't thinking about 20 or 30 years down the track so haven't really thought about that, unless they've had very good advice. Some people say, "Well, they'll never be removed, because we'll keep just upgrading the technology and replacing it," but if it's leased land, who's to say that's not going to be sold on to someone else, who won't be interested in that? Then who decommissions something? Is it going to be that landowner, who still technically owns the land? The costs of decommissioning are huge.²⁸⁹

- 2.127** When asked about his views on decommissioning, Mr James Matthews, Executive Committee Member, Merriwa Cassilis Alliance, a community group made up of local landowners in Merriwa and Cassilis, agreed with that decommissioning bonds should be as part of renewable energy agreements between landowners and developers. Mr Matthews considered that similar to mining companies, renewable energy projects should be held to the same standard:

²⁸⁴ Answers to supplementary questions, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, received 3 July 2025, pp 3-4.

²⁸⁵ Answers to supplementary questions, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, received 3 July 2025, p 4.

²⁸⁶ Answers to supplementary questions, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, received 3 July 2025, p 4.

²⁸⁷ Answers to supplementary questions, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, received 3 July 2025, p 5.

²⁸⁸ Answers to supplementary questions, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, received 3 July 2025, pp 3-5.

²⁸⁹ Evidence, Mrs Jane Hegarty, Chair, Cassilis Development Group, 16 May 2025, p 30.

We don't let mining companies start operations in this country without a plan for what they're going to do when they've completed their mining and the money set aside to enable the regeneration of the land to happen. Renewable energy companies should be held to the same standard.²⁹⁰

- 2.128** During the inquiry, Squadron Energy confirmed that each of its projects includes decommissioning commitments as part of its project approvals and landowner agreements. Squadron Energy noted that the terms of the decommissioning agreements between Squadron Energy and landowners are confidential.²⁹¹
- 2.129** Squadron Energy added that they are part of an industry working group that is developing an action framework for government and industry to ensure host landowners have certainty on wind farm decommissioning, which includes security arrangements and set aside funds solely for decommissioning activities.²⁹²
- 2.130** As discussed in Chapter 1, the NSW Government's position on decommissioning renewable energy projects is that such matters should be managed between the landowner and developer. The government advised that it had considered a 'range of models', including a system of bonds, before determining this stance.²⁹³ Ultimately, it was explained that many factors, such as the difference between how mining and renewable energy projects impact the environment and the distinctive regulatory systems for each sector, led the government to its position.²⁹⁴

Land clearing and impact on wildlife corridors

- 2.131** A range of inquiry participants raised concerns around the impact of land clearing as part of renewable energy development on wildlife corridors.²⁹⁵ Rainforest Reserves Australia noted that renewable energy infrastructure extended over hundreds of kilometres, and was usually erected on large tracts of land, often resulting 'in the clearing of remnant vegetation (and) disruption of wildlife corridors'.²⁹⁶ The organisation observed that the construction of transmission lines was destroying ecosystems and fragmenting habitats.²⁹⁷
- 2.132** Further, Rainforest Reserves Australia noted that renewable energy infrastructure can have profound impacts on wildlife: '(N)octurnal species such as owls and bats experience reduced

²⁹⁰ Evidence, Mr James Matthews, Executive Committee Member, Merriwa Cassilis Alliance, 16 May 2025, p 31.

²⁹¹ Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions, Squadron Energy, received 19 June 2025, p 3.

²⁹² Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions, Squadron Energy, received 19 June 2025, p 3.

²⁹³ Evidence, Mr Matt Riley, Director, Energy and Resources Policy, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, 13 May 2025, p 13; Evidence, Mr Clay Preshaw, Executive Director, Planning System and Reform, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, 13 May 2025, p 13.

²⁹⁴ Evidence, Mr Clay Preshaw, Executive Director, Planning System Reform, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, 13 May 2025, pp 12-13.

²⁹⁵ Submission 20, Rainforest Reserves Australia, p 2; Submission 30, CWO REZist Inc., p 4; Submission 142, Peter Reardon, p 3.

²⁹⁶ Submission 20, Rainforest Reserves Australia, p 2.

²⁹⁷ Submission 20, Rainforest Reserves Australia, p 5.

foraging success due to artificial lighting near solar farms. Wind turbines pose direct threats to avian species, with hundreds of bird and bat fatalities reported annually in areas with high turbine densities'.²⁹⁸

2.133 Rainforest Reserves Australia also cited the Australian Koala Foundation's claim that, 'in the Central-West Orana REZ, over 500 hectares of koala habitat have been cleared to make way for infrastructure, displacing local populations and reducing access to food and shelter'.²⁹⁹

2.134 Ms Sally Dent, Committee Member, Three Rivers Landcare, highlighted the conflict between biodiversity protections and the approach of renewable energy developers. Ms Dent claimed that renewable energy developers use biodiversity offset schemes to enable land-clearing as part of their developments:

I think there is a real disconnect between the proponents and the environment, and I think just from where the Committee went yesterday, you'll see that. You've got really beautiful old trees along Merotherie Road where it could be a perfect wildlife corridor. You've got BCT, or the Biodiversity Conservation Trust, giving out grants for people to try and lock up country and try to save some of the vegetation, and then on the other hand you've got proponents who are just saying, "We're going to offset it," and by offsetting it they say, "We will just buy someone's degraded land down the road. We're not replanting, we're not re-establishing anything."³⁰⁰

2.135 Mr Clay Preshaw, DPHI, informed the committee that wildlife corridors were considered in the assessment of all projects through application of the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* (BC Act).³⁰¹ Mr Preshaw advised that the department routinely seeks expert advice from the relevant government agencies regarding vegetation clearing for solar and wind farm projects, including bird and bat strike in regard to wind farms.³⁰²

2.136 In addition, the government advised that the BC Act includes requirements for renewable energy developers to assess direct impacts on biodiversity, like impacts to native grasses, groundcover, creeks and habitat, and indirect impacts, such as to wildlife corridors and connectivity, and take reasonable measures to avoid, minimise and then offset these impacts.³⁰³

2.137 In response to concerns regarding wildlife corridors, the Nature Conservation Council of NSW gave evidence that developing regional conservation priorities for each REZ would be an effective way to ensure wildlife corridors are protected:

It's a really strong impetus to develop regional conservation priorities for each REZ. If those priorities are identified, it means that developers can take them into account when they're choosing where to site their projects, which is when you can have the biggest nature impacts, reducing community impacts and so on by choosing the right site. But

²⁹⁸ Submission 20, Rainforest Reserves Australia, p 5.

²⁹⁹ Submission 20, Rainforest Reserves Australia, p 5.

³⁰⁰ Evidence, Ms Sally Dent, Committee Member, Three Rivers Landcare, 16 May 2025, p 54.

³⁰¹ Evidence, Mr Clay Preshaw, Executive Director, Planning System Reform, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, 13 May 2025, p 9.

³⁰² Evidence, Mr Clay Preshaw, Executive Director, Planning System Reform, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, 13 May 2025, p 9.

³⁰³ Answers to supplementary questions, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, received 3 July 2025, p 4.

to choose that right site you have to know what those regional conservation priorities are, and so you have to identify where are places that would make good wildlife corridors. We strongly think that those regional conservation priorities should be identified. We think local community groups should be involved in identifying those priorities because they know their local area.³⁰⁴

- 2.138** The Nature Conservation Council of NSW further gave evidence that the best way to protect the environment is to ensure New South Wales has robust nature laws across the board:

There is always a risk that any form of development can negatively impact the environment. The best way to ensure our environment is properly protected is to strengthen [New South Wales'] nature laws and reform the planning system to increase nature positive developments, as recommended in the Independent Review of the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016. [Nature Conservation Council] has welcomed the important first step taken by the NSW Government in reforming our nature laws through the passage of the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Biodiversity Offsets Scheme) Bill 2024, though there is still a lot more work to be done.³⁰⁵

Impact on local councils

- 2.139** As mentioned in Chapter 1, local councils are not the approving authority for renewable energy projects. However, these organisations play a crucial role in providing input in the development assessment process for these developments and provide support to the community.³⁰⁶
- 2.140** During the inquiry, the committee heard from local councils within the CWO REZ, specifically, Dubbo Regional Council, Warrumbungle Shire Council and Mid-Western Regional Council. These councils told the committee that the CWO REZ had adversely affected workloads, staffing and resourcing.
- 2.141** Mr Murray Wood, Chief Executive Officer, Dubbo Regional Council, explained that despite not being a consent authority for renewable energy projects within the CWO REZ, the council facilitates and supports community engagement in the planning and implementation of projects. Moreover, Mr Wood noted that the council is also responsible for protecting community assets and infrastructure.³⁰⁷
- 2.142** As previously mentioned, the committee received evidence that the CWO REZ was placing undue strain of the workloads of councils in the region, particularly smaller organisations. Mr Brad Cam, General Manager, Mid-Western Regional Council, shared how the increasing number of renewable energy projects in the region has significantly intensified the workload to its staff, in particular when it came to meetings with renewable energy developers:

³⁰⁴ Evidence, Dr Brad Smith, Policy and Advocacy Director, Nature Conservation Council of NSW, 13 May 2025, p 53.

³⁰⁵ Submission 34, The Nature Conservation Council of NSW, p 6.

³⁰⁶ Evidence, Mr Murray Wood, Chief Executive Officer, Dubbo Regional Council, 16 May 2025, p 5; Evidence, Mr Brad Cam, General Manager, Mid-Western Regional Council, 16 May 2025, p 2; Evidence, Mr Lindsay Mason, General Manager, Warrumbungle Shire Council, 16 May 2025, p 3.

³⁰⁷ Evidence, Mr Murray Wood, Chief Executive Officer, Dubbo Regional Council, 16 May 2025, p 5.

Putting it into perspective, last year I attended 270 meetings in the 12 months with proponents, all to do with REZ. We can't ever seem to get the proponents to all sit at the table and talk together. It would be great if three councils could sit together with the proponents and talk, but they are not willing to do that. They are not interested in doing that, but they are all competing for a project to get approval.³⁰⁸

- 2.143** The committee heard that current support for councils includes funding for additional staff and an allocation of \$11.25 million per council.³⁰⁹
- 2.144** Mr Cam added that EnergyCo had contributed funding to assist all three CWO local councils manage the Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements and EIS application process.³¹⁰ According to Mr Cam, the funding helped pay for development engineering and planning expertise. Nonetheless, he maintained that the funding is 'not enough' as existing staff continue to deal with the large number of submissions and continued engagement with developers.³¹¹
- 2.145** In addition, while Dubbo Regional Council acknowledged that as a larger council, it does not have the same resourcing issues as smaller councils, it faces other challenges when it comes to the CWO REZ.³¹² Mr Steven Jennings, Director, Development and Environment, Dubbo Regional Council, emphasised that the council is focused on ensuring it has the right policy settings in place so that the benefits of the REZ flows in the 'short, medium and long term'.³¹³

Committee comment

- 2.146** The committee acknowledges that the CWO REZ has caused significant challenges for local councils within the CWO region, particularly Mid-Western Regional Council, Warrumbungle Shire and Dubbo Regional Council. In particular, these councils have played a crucial role in the supporting their stakeholders to navigate the complex development approval process associated with the REZ. Moreover, councils have been inundated by the large volume of work generated by the almost constant engagement with renewable energy developers.
- 2.147** The committee acknowledges that local councils, especially smaller local councils, have done more than their fair share in managing the significant changes to their communities resulting from the CWO REZ. Additionally, the NSW Government's attempts to assist councils, such as providing funding to assist with planning processes, has been insufficient. To this end, the committee anticipates that opportunities for the NSW Government to enhance such measures will be explored in the final report.

³⁰⁸ Evidence, Mr Brad Cam, General Manager, Mid-Western Regional Council, 16 May 2025, p 2.

³⁰⁹ Evidence, Mr Ash Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, Energy Corporation of NSW, 13 May 2025, p 4.

³¹⁰ Evidence, Mr Brad Cam, General Manager, Mid-Western Regional Council, 16 May 2025, p 2.

³¹¹ Evidence, Mr Brad Cam, General Manager, Mid-Western Regional Council, 16 May 2025, p 8.

³¹² Evidence, Mr Murray Wood, Chief Executive Officer, Dubbo Regional Council, 16 May 2025, pp 2-3.

³¹³ Evidence, Mr Steven Jennings, Director, Development and Environment, Dubbo Regional Council, 16 May 2025, p 3.

Finding 6

That the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone has caused significant challenges for local councils in the region.

- 2.148** The committee acknowledges concerns about fire risk arising from projects in the CWO REZ. We heard that this risk is especially pressing as development sites are often in remote or difficult to access locations which make fire-fighting efforts more challenging, increasing the risk of fire spreading to other properties. We will continue to investigate this issue and intend to invite the Rural Fire Service and NSW Fire and Rescue at a future hearing to obtain further advice.
- 2.149** The committee notes the government's position that decommissioning bonds are not necessary for renewable energy projects and that the responsibility of decommissioning should be managed between the landowner and the developer. However, we recognise that concerns remain in the community that landowners may face significant costs when projects are decommissioned. Following on, we anticipate that this issue will be further investigated in the final report.
- 2.150** The committee also notes that the government's advice that wildlife corridors were considered in the assessment of all projects through application of the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*. Despite assurances from the government, we acknowledge ongoing community concerns about the about the impact of land clearing as part of renewable energy development on wildlife corridors.
- 2.151** In order to ensure key wildlife corridors and biodiversity are protected, the committee recommends that the NSW Government identify ecological protection and restoration priorities for each REZ and encourage developers to contribute to nature positive environmental regional outcomes.
-

Recommendation 5

That the NSW Government identify ecological protection and restoration priorities for each Renewable Energy Zone and encourage developers to contribute to nature positive environmental regional outcomes.

Appendix 1 Submissions

No.	Author
1	Confidential
2	Name suppressed
3	Name suppressed
4	Mrs Julia James
5	Mr Malcolm Ritter
6	Name suppressed
7	Mr Ian McDonald
8	Dungog Shire Council
8a	Dungog Shire Council
9	Name suppressed
10	Mr Graeme Tychsen
11	Ms Ifeanna Tooth
12	Mr Matthew Hasemore
13	Mr Patrick Li
14	Mr Brian Mason
15	Mr Robert Richardson AO
16	Mr Peter Coughlan
17	Mr David Bowman
18	Merriwa-Cassilis Alliance Incorporated
19	Confidential
20	Rainforest Reserves Australia
21	Mr John Kelly
22	Ms Emily Edwards
23	Doctors for the Environment Australia
24	Hi Neighbour
25	Rainforest Reserves Australia
26	Cassilis District Development Group
27	Save Our Surroundings (SOS)
28	Justice and Equity Centre
29	Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW
30	CWO REZist Inc.
31	Lithgow Environment Group Inc

No.	Author
32	National Rational Energy Network Inc.
33	The Centre for Independent Studies
34	The Nature Conservation Council NSW
35	Central NSW Joint Organisation
36	Ausgrid
37	The Australian Workers' Union
38	AMEC
39	Hunter Jobs Alliance
40	Singleton Council
41	Shellharbour City Council
42	Uarbry Tongy Lane Alliance Inc
43	Responsible Future (Illawarra Chapter) Inc
44	NSW Government DCCEEW
45	Mid-Western Regional Council
46	ReD4NE
47	Sydney Knitting Nannas
48	Net Zero Commission
49	Burrendong SOS - Community Group
50	NSW Farmers Association
51	Temora Shire Council
52	Community Power Agency
53	Blueprint Institute
54	Country Mayors Association of NSW
55	The Next Economy
56	Voice for Walcha
57	Climate Action and REEACH groups of Sustainable Living Armidale
58	Friends of the Earth Australia
59	Renew, Hunter region branch
60	Dubbo Regional Council
61	Yass Landscape Guardians Inc
62	Armidale Regional Council
63	Warrumbungle Shire Council
64	Charles Abela
65	Unions NSW
66	Uralla Shire Council

No.	Author
67	RE-Alliance
68	Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation
69	Tamworth Regional Council
70	The Law Society of New South Wales
71	Mr John Benjamin
72	Name suppressed
73	Melissa and Leo Collins
74	Name suppressed
75	NSW Minerals Council Ltd
76	Name suppressed
77	Mr Martin Mansfield
78	Name suppressed
79	Name suppressed
80	Mr Nigel Roberts
81	Mr Rick Campbell
82	Dr Ken Wilson
83	Ms Ruby Hardie
84	Name suppressed
85	Mrs Jenny Bailey
86	Dr Martin Scurrah
87	Hay Shire Council
88	Confidential
89	Mrs Phebe Fidge
90	Mr Brian Bowman
91	Mrs Anne Bowman
92	Maritime Union of Australia (MUA)
93	Noel Hicks
94	Miss Emma Bowman
95	Mr Stephen Johnston
96	Name suppressed
97	Colleen Wysser - Martin
98	Mrs Rosemary Miller
99	Name suppressed
100	Name suppressed
101	Confidential

No.	Author
102	Name suppressed
103	Name suppressed
104	Name suppressed
105	Ms Kim Gambrill
106	Name suppressed
107	Mrs Myree Russell
108	Mrs Sally Edwards
109	Lake Macquarie City Council
110	Clean Energy Investor Group Ltd
111	Mr Stan Moore
112	Mr Peter Dawson
113	Name suppressed
114	Ms Julie Marlow
115	Nature Conservation Council of NSW, Community Power Agency, Hunter Jobs Alliance et al
116	Ms Annie Marlow
117	Mr Jason Harrop
118	Mr Anthony Morrison
119	Name suppressed
120	Name suppressed
121	Murrumbidgee Council
122	Margaret Armstrong
123	Mr Ian Barry
124	Mr Colin Smith
125	Local Government NSW (LGNSW)
126	Business NSW
127	Edward River Council
128	Cotton Australia
129	Name suppressed
130	Name suppressed
131	Confidential
132	New England Greens
133	Name suppressed
134	Wild Rivers Engineering
135	Ms Anita O'Neil

No.	Author
136	Mr Tim White
137	Good for the Gong
138	Lynette Lablack
139	Murray River Council
140	Mr Michael Holz
141	Lyndal McRae
142	Peter Reardon
143	Mary Noglik and Les Dwyer-Gray
144	Renee Harrison
145	Confidential
146	Robyn and Bill Hicks
147	Farmers for Climate Action
148	Arleen Packer
149	Stuart Grills
150	Sally Denyer
151	Tony Menkens
152	Bundure District Landholders Group (BUNDL)
153	Dungowan Creek Alliance

Appendix 2 Witnesses at hearings

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
Tuesday 13 May 2024 Macquarie Room Parliament House, Sydney	Mr Liam Ryan	Advising Executive Director, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
	Mr Ash Albury	Executive Director, Planning and Communities, Energy Corporation of NSW
	Mr Clay Preshaw	Executive Director, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
	Mr Matt Riley	Director, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
	Mr Anthony Hayes	Head of Regional Integration, Planning, Integration and Passenger, Transport for NSW
	Ms Suzie Matthews	Executive Director, Skills and Workforce Programs, NSW Department of Education
	Mr James Bolton	Deputy Secretary, Regional Development and Delivery, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
	Ms Nevenka Codevelle	Executive General Manager, AEMO Services
	Ms Melanie Koerner	General Manager – System Planning, Reporting & REZ Authorisation, AEMO Services
	Ms Janine Young (via videoconference)	Ombudsman, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW
	Ms Stephanie Saill (via videoconference)	Head of Energy Transition, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW
	Ms Meg McDonald	Interim Chair, Net Zero Commission
	Dr Will Rayward-Smith	Executive Director, Net Zero Commission
	Ms Alison Stone	NSW Agriculture Commissioner
	Dr Richard Parsons	Social Researcher
	Mr Ian Barry	Landowner
	Ms Kathy Morris	Landowner
	Mr Ben Turner	Landowner
	Cr Claire Pontin (via videoconference)	Vice President Regional/Rural, Local Government NSW
	Mr David Reynolds (via videoconference)	Chief Executive, Local Government NSW

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
	Ms Marilyne Crestias	Head of Policy and Advocacy, Clean Energy Investor Group
	Dr Brad Smith	Policy and Advocacy Director, Nature Conservation Council NSW
	Ms Eve Altman	Clean Energy Campaigner, Nature Conservation Council NSW
	Ms Lu Allan	Advocacy Director, RE-Alliance
	Mr Xavier Martin	President NSW Farmers
	Ms Rhiannon Heath	Policy Adviser, Environment, NSW Farmers
	Ms Leah Tucker	Senior Policy Manager, Energy and Infrastructure, Business NSW
	Mr Bob Hawes	CEO, Business Hunter, Business NSW
	Mr Andrew Abbey	Policy Director, NSW Minerals Council
Friday 16 May 2025 Dubbo Regional Council Chambers, Dubbo NSW	Mr Murray Wood	Chief Executive Officer, Dubbo Regional Council
	Mr Steven Jennings	Development and Environment, Dubbo Regional Council
	Mr Brad Cam	General Manager, Midwestern Regional Council
	Mr Lindsay Mason	General Manager, Warrumbungle Council
	Adjunct Prof Warwick Giblin FEIANZ, FRSN	Environmental Consultant to Warrumbungle Council
	Mr Grant Piper, AASM, DFSM	CWO REZist
	Mrs Annette Piper	Uarbry Tongy Lane Alliance
	Mr Terry Conn	Landowner
	Mrs Margaret Conn	Landowner
	Ms Emma Bowman	Landowner
	Ms Sally Edwards	Landowner
	Mr Nigel Roberts	Landowner
	Mrs Jane Hegarty	Chair, Cassilis District Development Group
	Mrs Linda Gant	Committee member, Cassilis District Development Group
	Mr James Matthews	Executive Committee, Merriwa Cassilis Alliance
	Mr James Armstrong	Owner, Cassilis Park Merino Stud
	Mr Peter Rothwell Director	VRA Rescue

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
	Mr Steve Masters	CEO, ACERERZ
	Mr Robert Armstrong	Operations Director, ACERERZ
	Mr Bart Sykes	Acting Head of Community and Regional Development, Squadron Energy
	Mr Stuart Hackney	Landowner
	Ms Sally Dent	Member, Three Rivers Landcare
	Mr David Seis	Landowner and Member, Three Rivers Landcare
Thursday 17 July 2025	Cr Sam Coupland	Mayor, Armidale Regional Council
Armidale Bowling Club,	Mr Stephen Wood	Senior Strategic Planner, Armidale Regional Council
Auditorium, Armidale NSW	Mr James Pryor	Senior Strategic Planner, Armidale Regional Council
	Cr Robert Bell	Mayor, Uralla Shire Council
	Ms Emily Sims	Planning Officer – Strategic, Uralla Shire Council
	Mr Jordan Kirk	Renewable Energy Project Co-ordinator, Tamworth Regional Council
	Mr Sam Lobsey	Manager, Development Division, Liveable Communities, Tamworth Regional Council
	Cr Eric Noakes	Mayor, Walcha Council
	Mr Alan Butler	Acting General Manager, Walcha Council
	The Hon Barnaby Joyce MP	Member for New England, Parliament of Australia
	Ms Annette Kilarr	Convenor, Climate Action Armidale of Sustainable Living Armidale
	Dr Sanaz Alian	Renewable Energy, Education, Advocacy and Community Health (REEACH) group of Sustainable Living Armidale
	Mr Cameron Greig	Member, Voice for Walcha
	Mr Damien Timbs	Member, Voice for Walcha
	Mr Tim White	President, Valley Alliance
	Mr Peter Dawson	Property owner, Salisbury Plains
	Mrs Karen Zirkler	Regenerative Agriculture Grazier, Kentucky district
	Mrs Selena Sylvester	Hills of Gold Preservation Inc.
	Mr Mark Fogarty	Director, Bushtricity – ReD4NE
	Ms Susan Newey	Chair, ReD4NE
	Mr Antony (Tony) Menkens	Beef cattle producer, Chair, Batting for Booroolong Community Group
	Mr Stuart Grills	Property owner

Appendix 3 Minutes

Minutes no. 23

Tuesday 30 July 2024

Portfolio Committee no. 4

Room 1034, NSW Parliament House, 4.03 pm

1. Members present

Mr Banasiak, *Chair* (via videoconference)

Ms Hurst, *Deputy Chair* (via videoconference)

Mr Donnelly

M Fang (substituting for Mrs Mitchell for the POCTAA inquiry) (via videoconference, until 4.14 pm)

Mrs MacDonald

Mrs Mitchell (via videoconference)

Mr Murphy (via videoconference)

Mr Primrose

2. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That draft minutes no. 22 be confirmed.

3. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received:

- 18 July 2024 – Email from Witness H to the secretariat providing a clarification to evidence before the committee on 18 July 2024, for the inquiry into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979)*
- 19 July 2024 – Email from Witness D to the secretariat providing a clarification to evidence she gave before the committee on 18 July 2024, for the inquiry into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979)*
- 21 July 2024 – Email from Witness H to the secretariat providing further observations to the committee, for the inquiry into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979)*
- 22 July 2024 – Email from Ms Abigail Wiley to the secretariat querying a committee comment in the report of the inquiry into the veterinary workforce
- 23 July 2024 – Email from Mr Stephen Albin acknowledging receipt of the Chair's letter regarding the Turner allegations, for the inquiry into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979)*
- 23 July 2024 – Email from Ms Amanda Gray to the secretariat requesting further information about the Turner allegations, for the inquiry into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979)*
- 23 July 2024 – Letter from the Hon Sarah Mitchell, MLC, the Hon Mark Banasiak MLC and the Hon Aileen McDonald MLC requesting a meeting of Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW to consider a proposed self-reference into the impact of the phaseout of Australian live sheep exports by sea on New South Wales
- 23 July 2024 – Letter from the Hon Mark Banasiak MLC, Hon Sarah Mitchell, MLC, and the Hon Aileen McDonald MLC requesting a meeting of Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW to consider a proposed self-reference into Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ's) on Rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales
- 24 July 2024 – Email from Mr Michael Sheehy, Detective Chief Superintendent – Chief of Staff, NSW Police, to the secretariat, requesting further information regarding the Turner allegations, for the inquiry

into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979)*

- 24 July 2024 – Email from Ms Amanda Gray, Chief Inspector, Animal Welfare League with report of inspection of property belonging to Ms Suzette Turner, for the inquiry into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979)*.

Sent:

- 11 July 2024 – Email from the secretariat to Ms Suzette Turner regarding whether she would provide a written response to adverse mention of her at the hearing on 27 May 2024, for the inquiry into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979)*
- 23 July 2024 – Letter from the Chair to Ms Karen Webb, NSW Police Commissioner regarding allegations made about Ms Suzette Turner during the POCTAA hearing on 27 May 2024, for the inquiry into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979)*
- 23 July 2024 – Letter from the Chair to Mr Stephen Albin, CEO, Animal Welfare League regarding allegations made about Ms Suzette Turner during the POCTAA hearing on 27 May 2024, for the inquiry into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979)*
- 23 July 2024 – Email from the secretariat to Ms Amanda Grey, Chief Inspector, AWL regarding the Turner allegations, for the inquiry into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979)*.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Murphy: That the committee keep confidential the following items of correspondence due to identifying/sensitive information of *in camera* witnesses:

- Emails from Witness H received 18 July 2024 and 21 July 2024
- Email from Witness D received 19 July 2024.

4. Inquiry into the operations of the approved charitable organisations under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1979)*

4.1 Correspondence from NSW Police

The committee considered the request by the NSW Police for more information about the allegations the committee had referred to NSW Police.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Hurst: That the secretariat contact the *in camera* witness who provided the information to see if they would be willing for the secretariat to provide their contact details to the NSW Police.

4.2 Inquiry next steps

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: that the secretariat canvass potential dates for a half day hearing after 15 August, and that the Chair report to the House an extension of the reporting date for the inquiry until 30 November 2024.

5. Consideration of terms of reference - Impact of the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports by sea on New South Wales

The Chair tabled a letter proposing the following self-reference:

That Portfolio Committee No. 4 - Regional NSW inquire into and report on the impact of the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports by sea on New South Wales, considering the economic and social implications of such a phase-out on regional New South Wales communities, and in particular:

- (a) evaluate the economic impact of phasing out live sheep exports on New South Wales sheep producers and related supply chains in regional towns, including:
 - (i) transport operators
 - (ii) fodder and grain producers
 - (iii) other associated industries

- (b) evaluate the impact on the sheep industry in New South Wales if farmers are unable to restock with animals from Western Australia (WA)
- (c) evaluate the price implications on New South Wales sheep and lamb producers of having stock from WA regularly sold at our sales
- (d) examine whether the phase-out of live sheep exports by sea will have any impact on NSW Government revenue and bottom line
- (e) examine potential implications in demand for New South Wales mutton after the phase out of the live sheep trade
- (f) examine reasons used by the Federal Government for the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports by sea and whether the Federal Government should provide compensation to New South Wales sheep producers
- (g) examine animal welfare standards relating to live sheep export including any information used in the determination to cease live sheep export by sea by the Federal Government
- (h) examine the impact to local meat processors
- (i) examine proven alternative markets and opportunities for New South Wales sheep producers
- (j) explore the social and community impacts of income loss for New South Wales sheep producers, including the evaluation of support mechanisms for affected communities and workers
- (k) analysis of potential economic losses from the phase-out and the impact on employment across regional New South Wales, including but not limited to transport, contract musters and veterinary suppliers
- (l) identify case studies of graziers in other regions or countries that have successfully transitioned from live exports, and
- (m) examine alternative income streams for New South Wales sheep producers
- (n) any other related matters.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Hurst: That the committee adopt the terms of reference with the following amendments:

- in the first paragraph, insert 'and the animal welfare considerations relevant to the phase-out' after 'regional New South Wales communities'
- in paragraph (g), omit 'standards relating to live sheep export including any information used in' and insert instead 'concerns relevant to'
- insert after paragraph (m) the following new paragraph: 'examine community views in New South Wales of the live export industry'.

6. Conduct of the inquiry into the impact of the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports by sea on New South Wales

6.1 Proposed timeline

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee adopt the following timeline for the administration of the inquiry:

- Submission closing date – Friday 20 September 2024
- Hearing(s) – One hearing and one reserve hearing date in October/November 2024
- Report tabling – February 2025.

6.2 Stakeholder list

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That:

- the secretariat circulate to members the Chair's proposed list of stakeholders to be invited to make a submission

- members have two days from when the Chair's proposed list is circulated to make amendments or nominate additional stakeholders
- the committee agree to the stakeholder list by email, unless a meeting of the committee is required to resolve any disagreement.

6.3 Approach to submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That, to enable significant efficiencies for members and the secretariat while maintaining the integrity of how submissions are treated, in the event that 50 or more individual submissions are received, the committee may adopt the following approach to processing short submissions:

- All submissions from individuals 250 words or less in length will:
 - have an individual submission number, and be published with the author's name or as name suppressed, or kept confidential, according to the author's request
 - be reviewed by the secretariat for adverse mention and sensitive/identifying information, in accordance with practice
 - be channelled into one single document to be published on the inquiry website
- All other submissions will be processed and published as normal.

6.4 Online questionnaire

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee use an online questionnaire to capture individuals' views, and that the draft questions be circulated to the committee for comment, with a meeting on request from any committee member if there is disagreement on the questions.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That:

- the committee not accept proformas
- the media release announcing the establishment of the inquiry and emails to stakeholders note that there will be an online questionnaire to capture individuals' views
- the closing date for the online questionnaire be [date]
- the following wording be included on the committee's website:

○ Online questionnaire

Contributions to the inquiry may be made via the submissions tab below. The closing date for submissions is [date].

Individual contributors may prefer to complete an online questionnaire rather than make a submission [insert link to online questionnaire]. The closing date for the online questionnaire is [date].

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the secretariat prepare a summary report of responses to the online questionnaire for publication on the website and use in the report, and that:

- the committee agree to publication of the report via email, unless a member raises any concerns
- individual responses be kept confidential on tabling.

7. Consideration of terms of reference - Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) on Rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

The Chair tabled a letter proposing the following self-reference:

That Portfolio Committee No. 4 - Regional NSW inquire into and report on the impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales, and in particular:

- (a) the current and projected socioeconomic, cultural, agricultural and environmental impacts of projects within renewable energy zones in New South Wales including the cumulative impacts

- (b) current and projected considerations needed with regards to fire risk, management and containment and potential implications on insurance for land holders and/or project proponents in and around Renewable Energy Zones (REZs)
- (c) the historical, current and projected future financial costs associated with construction and maintenance of large scale projects within Renewable Energy Zones
- (d) proposed compensation to regional New South Wales residents impacted by Renewable Energy Zone transmission lines
 - (i) adequacy of compensation currently being offered for hosting transmission lines
 - (ii) adequacy of the shared benefits being offered to neighbours of large scale renewable projects
 - (iii) financial impact of compensation on the state's economy
 - (iv) tax implications resulting from compensation received by impacted residents.
- (e) adequacy, and management of voluntary planning agreements and payments made to the LGAs impacted by Renewable Energy Zones
- (f) current and projected supply and demand levels of manufactured products, raw materials, and human resources required for completion of Renewable Energy Zones and their source
- (g) projected impact on visitation to regional areas with renewable energy zones resulting from changes to land use
- (h) suitable alternatives to traditional renewable energy sources such as large-scale wind and solar
- (i) adequacy of community consultation and engagement in the development of Renewable Energy Zones, and associated projects
- (j) how decommissioning bonds are currently managed and should be managed as part of large scale renewable projects
- (k) the role and responsibility of the Net Zero Commission and Commissioner in addressing matters set out above
- (l) any other related matters.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That the committee adopt the terms of reference.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs McDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Noes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

8. Conduct of the inquiry into the impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ's) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

8.1 Proposed timeline

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee adopt the following timeline for the administration of the inquiry:

- Submission closing date – 31 January 2025
- Hearing(s) – That the timeline for hearings be considered by the committee following the receipt of submissions.

8.2 Stakeholder list

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That:

- the secretariat circulate to members the Chair's proposed list of stakeholders to be invited to make a submission
- members have two days from when the Chair's proposed list is circulated to make amendments or nominate additional stakeholders
- the committee agree to the stakeholder list by email, unless a meeting of the committee is required to resolve any disagreement.

8.3 Approach to submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: Suggested resolution: That, to enable significant efficiencies for members and the secretariat while maintaining the integrity of how submissions are treated, in the event that 50 or more individual submissions are received, the committee may adopt the following approach to processing short submissions:

- All submissions from individuals 250 words or less in length will:
 - have an individual submission number, and be published with the author's name or as name suppressed, or kept confidential, according to the author's request
 - be reviewed by the secretariat for adverse mention and sensitive/identifying information, in accordance with practice
 - be channelled into one single document to be published on the inquiry website
- All other submissions will be processed and published as normal.

8.4 Online questionnaire

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee use an online questionnaire to capture individuals' views, and that the draft questions be circulated to the committee for comment, with a meeting on request from any committee member if there is disagreement on the questions.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That:

- the committee not accept proformas
- the media release announcing the establishment of the inquiry and emails to stakeholders note that there will be an online questionnaire to capture individuals' views
- the closing date for the online questionnaire be [date]
- the following wording be included on the committee's website:

- **Online questionnaire**

Contributions to the inquiry may be made via the submissions tab below. The closing date for submissions is [date].

Individual contributors may prefer to complete an online questionnaire rather than make a submission [insert link to online questionnaire]. The closing date for the online questionnaire is [date].

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the secretariat prepare a summary report of responses to the online questionnaire for publication on the website and use in the report, and that:

- the committee agree to publication of the report via email, unless a member raises any concerns
- individual responses be kept confidential on tabling.

9. Adjournment

Adjourned at 4.27 pm, *sine die*.

Peta Leemen
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 24

Tuesday 27 August 2024

Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW

Jubilee Room, Parliament House, Sydney, 9.00 am

1. Members presentMr Banasiak, *Chair* (until 10.00 am, from 10.43 am)Ms Hurst, *Deputy Chair*

Mr Donnelly

Ms Faehrmann (participating) (from 11.17 am until 12.48 pm, from 3.45 pm until 4.28 pm)

Mr Fang (substituting for Mrs MacDonald)

Mr Faraway (substituting for Mrs Mitchell) (until 4.36 pm)

Ms Higginson (participating)

Mr Lawrence (substituting for Mr Primrose)

Mr Murphy

2. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Hurst: That draft minutes no. 21 be confirmed.

3. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 2 August 2024 – Email from Tina Flakas, office of Hon. Stephen Kamper MP, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Lands and Property, Minister for Multiculturalism and Minister for Sport providing Minister Kamper's proposed amendments to the witness list for PC4 Budget Estimates hearing for his portfolios, 28 August 2024
- 2 August 2024 – Further email from Tina Flakas, office of Hon. Stephen Kamper MP, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Lands and Property, Minister for Multiculturalism and Minister for Sport providing further detail about Minister Kamper's proposed amendments to the witness list for PC4 Budget Estimates hearing for his portfolios, 28 August 2024
- 7 August 2024 – Letter from the Hon Sam Faraway MLC, to Chair, requesting that the committee hold hearings in Wellington and Mudgee as part of the inquiry into Renewable Energy Zones
- 9 August 2024 – Email from Jessica Malnersic, office of Hon. Tara Moriarty MLC, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional New South Wales, Minister for Western New South Wales providing the Minister's proposed amendments to the witness list for the PC4 Budget Estimates hearing for her portfolios, 27 August 2024
- 12 August 2024 – Email from Phillipa Gately, Office of the Secretary, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) advising that Ms Kiersten Fishburn, Secretary, DPHI seeks leave from Budget Estimates hearing for Minister Kamper's portfolios on 28 August 2024 from 3.20 pm to 4.45 pm
- 15 August 2024 – Email from Jessica Malnersic, office of Hon. Tara Moriarty MLC, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional New South Wales, Minister for Western New South Wales providing a further proposed amendment of the Minister to the witness list for the PC4 Budget Estimates hearing for her portfolios, 27 August 2024
- 20 August 2024 – Email from Jessica Malnersic, office of Hon. Tara Moriarty MLC, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional New South Wales, Minister for Western New South Wales providing the Minister's further feedback on the witness list for the PC4 Budget Estimates hearing for her portfolios, 27 August 2024.

Sent

- 2 August 2024 – Email to Hon Tara Moriarty MLC, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional New South Wales, Minister for Western New South Wales inviting her to appear at PC4 Budget Estimates hearing for the Minister's portfolios and attaching witness list agreed to by the committee

- 2 August 2024 – Email to Hon Stephen Kamper MP, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Lands and Property, Minister for Multiculturalism and Minister for Sport, inviting him to appear at PC4 Budget Estimates hearings for the Minister's portfolios, 28 August 2024, and attaching witness list agreed to by the committee
- 19 August 2024 – Email to Hon. Tara Moriarty MLC, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional New South Wales, Minister for Western New South Wales advising that committee would like to insist on the appearance of Dr Jacqueline Tracey and Ms Harriet Whyte before PC4 Budget Estimates hearing for Minister Moriarty's portfolios, 27 August 2024.

4. Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2024-2025

4.1 Order of examination of portfolios

The committee noted that under the Budget Estimates 2024-2025 resolution:

- (a) each portfolio, except The Legislature is to be examined concurrently by opposition and crossbench members only from 9.15 am to 10.45 am, 11.15 am to 12.45 pm, 2.00 pm to 3.30 pm and 3.45 pm to 5.15 pm, and, if required, by Government members only from 10.45 am to 11.00 am, 12.45 pm to 1.00 pm, and 5.15 pm to 5.30 pm.

4.2 Sequence of questions

The committee noted that under the Budget Estimates 2024-2025 resolution, unless the committee decides otherwise, the sequence of questions to be asked at the hearing for the portfolios of Agriculture, Regional New South Wales, Western New South Wales is to alternate between crossbench and opposition members, in that order, with equal time allocated to each.

4.3 Public hearing - Agriculture, Regional New South Wales, Western New South Wales (Moriarty)

Witnesses, the public and the media were admitted.

The Hon Tara Moriarty MLC, Minister for Agriculture, Regional New South Wales, Western New South Wales was admitted.

The Chair made an opening statement regarding parliamentary privilege and other matters. The Chair noted that Members of Parliament swear an oath to their office, and therefore do not need to be sworn prior to giving evidence before a committee.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Steve Orr, Secretary, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Mr James Bolton, Deputy Secretary Regional Development & Delivery, Chief Executive Regional Growth NSW Development Corporation, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Ms Rachel Connell, Deputy Secretary, Agriculture and Biosecurity, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Mr Sean Sloan, Deputy Secretary, Fisheries and Forestry, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Mr Rob Kelly, Executive Director Regional Delivery, Local Land Services, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Dr Adam Tyndall, Executive Director, Strategy, Media and Ministerial Services, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Dr Lisa Szabo, Acting Executive Director, Biosecurity and Food Safety, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Mr David McPherson, Executive Director, Forestry and Land Reform, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Dr Kim Filmer, Chief Animal Welfare Officer, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Mr Anshul Chaudhary, Chief Executive Officer, Forestry Corporation of NSW

- Ms Kate Lorimer-Ward, Chief Executive Officer, Local Land Services, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

The Chair declared the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Agriculture, Regional New South Wales, Western New South Wales open for examination.

Mr Faraway tabled the following documents:

- Media article by James O'Doherty entitled "Border position under scrutiny: Top Not given plum role", undated, together with X (formerly Twitter) posts of the Hon Tara Moriarty MLC, dated 5 August 2023
- LinkedIn experience extraction for Dr Marion Healy PSM, undated.

The Chair left the meeting.

In the absence of the Chair, the Deputy Chair took the Chair for the purposes of the meeting.

Ms Hurst tabled the following document:

- Eight photographs of dogs in captivity.

The Chair re-joined the meeting and took the Chair.

The Minister withdrew at 12.48 pm.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined (2.00 pm):

- Mr Peter Turnell, Acting Executive Director, Fisheries, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Ms Kate Meagher, Deputy Secretary Community Engagement Group, Premier's Department
- Dr Jacqueline Tracey, Executive Director Policy, Local Land Services, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (*via videoconference*)
- Ms Harriet Whyte, Executive Director, Regional Programs and Partnerships, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The public hearing concluded at 5.24 pm. The public and the media withdrew.

4.4 Tabled documents

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That the committee accept and publish the following documents tabled during the public hearing:

- Media article by James O'Doherty entitled "Border position under scrutiny: Top Not given plum role", undated, together with X (formerly Twitter) posts of the Hon Tara Moriarty MLC, dated 5 August 2023, tabled by Mr Faraway
- LinkedIn experience extraction for Dr Marion Healy PSM, undated, tabled by Mr Faraway
- Eight photographs of dogs in captivity, tabled by Ms Hurst.

5. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 5.26 pm, until Wednesday 28 August 2024, 9.00 am, Jubilee Room, Parliament House, Budget Estimates 2024-2025 – Small Business, Lands and Property, Multiculturalism, Sport (public hearing).

Emma Rogerson
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 33

Friday 21 March 2025

Portfolio Committee 4 – Regional NSW

Room 1136, Parliament House, Sydney, 9.32 am

1. Members present

Mr Banasiak, *Chair*

Ms Hurst, *Deputy Chair*

Mr Barrett (via videoconference)

Mr Donnelly

Mrs MacDonald (from 9.37 am until 9.40 am and from 9.41 am)

Mr Murphy

Mr Primrose

2. Apologies

Ms Boyd (participating)

3. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That draft minutes no. 30 be confirmed.

4. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 18 December 2024 – Letter from Mr Adam Dawes, General Manager, Wool Producers Australia, to the committee, clarifying his evidence from the public hearing on 18 December 2025 for the inquiry into the impact of the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports on New South Wales
- 27 January 2025 – Correspondence from Mr Nick Grant via the submission portal, inquiring about local wind turbines applications for the inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional New South Wales
- 14 February 2025 – Email from Ms Ewa Meyer, Convenor, Hunter Region Branch, Renew, requesting to redact parts of their submission for the inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional New South Wales.

The committee noted that it resolved via email to:

- publish the letter from Mr Adam Dawes, General Manager, Wool Producers Australia, to the committee, clarifying his evidence from the public hearing on 18 December 2025 for the inquiry into the impact of the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports on New South Wales, received 18 December 2024
- insert footnotes at the relevant points in the transcript noting that correspondence clarifying the evidence had been received and providing a hyperlink to the published correspondence.

5. Inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional New South Wales**5.1 Public submissions**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Murphy: That the committee authorise the publication of submission nos. 4-5, 7-8a, 10-18, 20-50, 52-58, 60-71, 73, 75, 77, 80-83, 85-87, 89-93, 95, 97-98, 105, 107-112, 114-118, 121-128, 132, 134-139.

5.2 Partially confidential submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That the committee keep the following information confidential, as per the request of the author: names and/or identifying and sensitive information in submissions nos. 2-3, 6, 9, 72, 74, 76, 78-79, 84, 96, 99, 100, 102-104, 106, 113, 119-120, 129-130, 133.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly:

- That the committee authorise the publication of submission nos. 51 and 59, with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information which are to remain confidential, as per the request of the author.
- That the committee authorise the publication of submission no. 94, with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information which are to remain confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat.

5.3 Confidential submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Murphy: That the committee keep submission nos. 1, 19, 88, 101 and 131 confidential, as per the request of the author.

6. Inquiry into the impact of the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports by sea on New South Wales

6.1 Public submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Murphy: That the committee authorise the publication of submission nos. 97 and 133.

6.2 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The committee noted that the following answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee:

- answers to supplementary questions from Dr Lynn Simpson, retired live export veterinarian, received 27 January 2025
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Mr Samuel Miller, Principal Economist, NSW Farmers, received 28 January 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Mr Scott Kompo-Harms, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, ALEC, received 28 January 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Ms Bonnie Skinner, Chief Executive Officer, Sheep Producers Australia, received 28 January 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Dr Suzanne Fowler, Chief Science Officer, RSPCA Australia, received 28 January 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Dr Jed Goodfellow, Director, Policy and Government Relations, on behalf of Australian Alliance for Animals, and Mr Ben Pearson, World Animal Protection, received 28 January 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Mr Dougal Gordon, Group Director, Livestock Systems, NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, received 28 January 2025
- answers to questions on notice from Dr Jed Goodfellow, Director, Policy and Government Relations, Australian Alliance for Animals received 29 January 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Mr Adam Dawes, General Manager, Wool Producers Australia received 30 January 2025.

6.3 Consideration of Chair's draft report

The Chair submitted his draft report entitled '*Inquiry into the impact of the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports by sea on New South Wales*', which, having been previously circulated, was taken as being read.

Chapter 1

Ms Hurst moved: That paragraph 1.1 be amended by omitting 'The Australian sheep industry is a major contributor to Australia's economy and an essential component of the regional landscape comprising of' and inserting instead 'The Australian sheep industry comprises of'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Barrett, Mr Donnelly, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs MacDonald left the meeting.

Ms Hurst moved: That:

- a) paragraph 1.9 be amended by omitting 'sheep turn off' and inserting instead 'the number of sheep exported'
- b) paragraph 1.13 be amended by omitting 'turned off or' and inserting instead 'slaughtered'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Barrett, Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That:

- a) paragraph 1.14 be amended by omitting 'Once wool sheep reach the end of their productive life producing wool, they are of greater value exported to a country that prefers mutton or hogget for meat consumption' and inserting instead 'Once sheep are no longer considered to be profitable for their wool, they are often exported overseas for mutton or hogget consumption'
- b) paragraph 1.15 be omitted: 'The live sheep exports market provides a channel for semi-finished stock (such as mature-aged sheep) that do not meet ideal specifications for slaughter for either domestic meat markets or packaged meat exports', and the following new paragraph be inserted instead:

'The live sheep exports market has historically been used as a channel for animals (such as mature age sheep) that the industry does not consider suitable for slaughter for either domestic meat markets or packaged meat exports.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Barrett, Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs MacDonald re-joined the meeting.

Ms Hurst moved: That:

- a) the following new paragraph be inserted before paragraph 1.25:

'Following the airing of footage in 2011 of the slaughter of Australian cattle in Indonesia, there was strong public outcry about the handling and treatment of animals in that market. In response, the Australian Government created the ESCAS framework, initially for cattle exports to Indonesia. Later, ESCAS was expanded to other live animal exports and markets.' [FOOTNOTE: Independent Panel Report, Phase out of live sheep exports by sea, October 2023, p 155.]

- b) the following new paragraph be inserted before paragraph 1.35:

'In April 2018, public footage was broadcast showing the suffering of Australian sheep in severe heat stress while being transported to the Middle East on 5 consecutive voyages on the Awassi Express. Following public outcry, the Australian Government commissioned an 'Independent Review of Conditions for the Export of Sheep to the Middle East during the Northern Hemisphere Summer.' [FOOTNOTE: Independent Panel Report, Phase out of live sheep exports by sea, October 2023, p 155; Pegasus Economics, Submission to the inquiry on the impact of the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports on New South Wales, p 5, cited in Submission 40, Animals Australia Federation; Submission 118, People Against Cruelty in Animal Transport (Trading as Stop Live Exports), p 2.]

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Barrett, Mr Donnelly, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That the following new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 1.52:

'Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional New South Wales, and Minister for Western New South Wales, the Hon. Tara Moriarty MLC, was questioned about her 'advocacy and discussions with the Federal Labor Government' around the decision to phase out live sheep export at NSW Budget Estimates hearings in February and August 2024. In response to questioning at Budget Estimates in August 2024, the Minister stated:

[T]he live export ban for Western Australia is a matter for Western Australia and the Federal Government. We don't do live export from New South Wales. It wouldn't be appropriate for the New South Wales Government to intervene in that decision by the Federal Government.'
[FOOTNOTE: Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW, Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2024-25, 27 August 2025, p 21.]

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Barrett, Mr Donnelly, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Chapter 2

Ms Hurst moved: That the following new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 2.5:

'Dr Lynn Simpson, a former veterinarian in the live export industry, gave evidence about her concerns around the 'unmanageable' animal welfare risks associated with live export:

This industry has many unmanageable risks to animal welfare that cannot be avoided with more regulation or further imposed standards/legislation. Inherent risks such as heat stress, mechanical breakdowns (loss of steering, propulsion, fresh-water production, feed delivery systems, blackouts and ventilation failures), fires, capsizing, and disease spread are no more outlier events than are bushfires in Australia. They cannot be predicted, mitigated against or addressed sufficiently to ensure the protection of animals at sea during a voyage.

Independent Observer reports show ongoing issues that have not been sufficiently overcome with recent modifications to trade such as single tier decks, increased ventilation rates and reduced stocking density. The risks still exist, any further modifications will make the trade increasingly unviable whilst still fraught with risk, and still on a terminal trade decline.' [FOOTNOTE: Submission 86, Dr Lynn Simpson, pp 1-2.]

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Barrett, Mr Donnelly, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That paragraph 2.6 be amended by inserting 'that were unfixable' after 'trade'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Barrett, Mr Donnelly, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That the following new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 2.6:

'The Australian Alliance for Animals highlighted the high level of community support for phasing out live sheep export:

Social research has consistently found high levels of support within the community for phasing out the live sheep export trade. Periodic research commissioned by RSPCA Australia has found that this support has increased over time. In 2015, 63% of Australians supported the phase out if affected farmers were provided with assistance to transition. While in 2018, that support rose to 77%, and in 2022, it was 78%. Notably, this support was largely consistent across states, including WA, where 71% of West Australians expressed support for phasing out the trade in the most recent research. This support was also reflected in submissions to recent inquiries on the phase out. Of the 800 submissions and 3,300 survey responses received by the Independent Panel on the Phase Out of Live Sheep Exports in 2023, over 80% supported the phase out. And of the 13,000 submissions and items of correspondence received by the House Agriculture Committee Inquiry into the Ending Live Sheep Exports by Sea Bill 2024, over 85% expressed support for the Bill.' [FOOTNOTE: Submission 39, Australian Alliance for Animals, p 7.]

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Barrett, Mr Donnelly, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That paragraph 2.10 be amended by inserting 'they believe' after 'also emphasised that'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Barrett, Mr Donnelly, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That paragraph 2.13 be amended by omitting 'industry stakeholders thus argued strongly that the various updates to the policy and regulatory framework that preceded that announcement of the ban were sufficient' and inserting instead 'industry stakeholders argued that the various updates to the policy and regulatory framework that preceded that announcement of the ban were sufficient'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Barrett, Mr Donnelly, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That the following new paragraphs be inserted after paragraph 2.13:

'By contrast, animal welfare stakeholders such as the Australian Alliance for Animals were highly critical of the use of mortality rates as an indicator of animal welfare:

Mortality rates only record the number of sheep that die, which is of limited utility to welfare assessment and not consistent with contemporary animal welfare science, nor community expectations. The reality is Australian sheep continue to endure hot, humid conditions during the 2-3 week long sea voyages to the Middle East where they are forced to stand, lie and sleep in their own faeces. They are exposed to multiple and cumulative stressors, including inanition (failure to eat), lameness, salmonellosis, infection, and respiratory diseases due to the high ammonia levels on board. In many cases, sheep may suffer on board a vessel but still survive the voyage. This is why one of the central recommendations of the 2018 McCarthy Review was for industry to move away from using mortality rates as a measure of the trade's performance:

It is time for the industry to come together as a whole, and place a much stronger emphasis on animal welfare and move away from measures that use mortality as a benchmark.

The continued reliance on mortality rates six years on from this seminal review of the trade simply provides further evidence of industry's inability to progress and to change.' [FOOTNOTE: Submission 39, Australian Alliance for Animals, p 4.]

Dr Lynn Simpson agreed, commenting that 'it's really important not to be bogged down on mortality rates and to think about morbidity. Morbidity is illness, suffering – just things going badly – and that happens on every voyage. They might not die, but they don't have to die to suffer.' [Evidence, Dr Lynn Simpson, Retired ex live export veterinarian, 18 December 2024, p 24.]

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Barrett, Mr Donnelly, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That the following new paragraphs be inserted after paragraph 2.19:

'The Pegasus Economics report highlighted what appear to be 'contradictory concerns' in relation to the potential impact of the phase out, observing that:

On the one hand there appears to be concern that WA sheep may not be available for NSW farmers to restock, and on the other hand there appears to be concern that WA sheep could be transported east and 'dumped' on NSW livestock auctions. These concerns could be summarised as relating to both potential scarcity as well as overabundance as to the availability of WA sheep in NSW. [FOOTNOTE: Pegasus Economics, Submission to the inquiry on the impact of the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports on New South Wales, p 12, cited in Submission 40, Animals Australia Federation]

Pegasus Economics ultimately concluded that 'the impact of the Commonwealth Government's phasing-out of the trade on NSW sheep farmers is largely mute', explaining that:

Given that WA sheep farmers still have over three years to decide what the next best option available to them will be with the phase-out of the live sheep export trade, this should provide a sufficient period for them to facilitate an orderly transition. In turn, this should ensure there are no undue market disruptions imposed on NSW sheep farmers.' [FOOTNOTE: Pegasus Economics, Submission to the inquiry on the impact of the phase-out of Australian live sheep exports on New South Wales, p 14, cited in Submission 40, Animals Australia Federation.]

The Australian Alliance for Animals noted that the findings of the Pegasus Economics report were consistent with the Independent Panel on the Phase out of Live Sheep Exports report:

Pegasus Economics' conclusion is also consistent with the Independent Panel on the Phase Out of Live Sheep Exports' extensive report which did not identify any impacts on the sheep industry outside of Western Australia. In fact, the Panel's 225-page report, which systematically addresses every possible impact of the phase out, only refers to NSW five times and none of these references are in relation to impacts upon the state or the NSW sheep industry.' [FOOTNOTE: Submission 39, Australian Alliance for Animals, p 9.]

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Barrett, Mr Donnelly, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That the following new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 2.37:

'By contrast, the Australian Alliance for Animals was critical of the financial support package proposed by NSW Farmers, noting that \$53 million is 'close to half of what the Federal Government is proposing for assisting the WA industry' and 'a very long bow to draw in the absence of quite strong, tangible evidence showing a causal relationship between the phase-out of live sheep exports in WA and impacts on the New South Wales industry' [FOOTNOTE: Evidence, Dr Jed Goodfellow, Director, Policy and Government Relations, Australian Alliance for Animals, 18 December 2024, p 31.]

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Barrett, Mr Donnelly, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That paragraph 2.40 be amended by omitting: 'When questioned by the committee, Mr Gordon reiterated that DPIRD expects there will be an impact to New South Wales. However, it expects that this will be minor and will only last for the duration of time that the industry transitions' and inserting instead 'When questioned by the committee, Mr Gordon reiterated that DPIRD expects there will be only a minor impact to New South Wales that will only last for the duration of time that the industry transitions.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Barrett, Mr Donnelly, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That paragraph 2.50 be amended by omitting: 'While live sheep exports by sea do not occur from New South Wales, the key object of this inquiry was to nevertheless consider the impact of the Australian Government's phase-out for the state' and inserting instead 'While live sheep exports by sea do not occur from New South Wales, the key object of this inquiry was to nevertheless consider if there was an impact of the Australian Government's phase-out in New South Wales.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Barrett, Mr Donnelly, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That the following new paragraph and finding be inserted after paragraph 2.51:

"The committee notes that there have been multiple exposes of the live sheep export industry, which has garnered enormous community support to phase out this industry. The committee recognises the importance of the decision made by the Australian Labor Government to phase out live sheep exports by sea and congratulates them on taking this action.

Finding x

'That the Australian Labor Government's decision to phase out live sheep exports by sea was important, and should be congratulated.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Barrett, Mr Donnelly, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That the following new paragraph and finding be inserted after paragraph 2.51:

'Further, the committee finds that the NSW Minister for Agriculture's response, in regards to the Australian Government's decision to phase out live sheep export by sea, was entirely appropriate in the circumstances given New South Wales does not have any direct involvement in the live sheep export industry and the committee has not received any evidence to suggest there will be any significant impacts in New South Wales.

Finding x

'That the NSW Minister for Agriculture's response in regards to the Australian Government's decision to phase out live sheep export by sea was entirely appropriate in the circumstances.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Barrett, Mr Donnelly, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That paragraph 2.52 be amended by:

- a) omitting 'the committee acknowledges industry concerns that the phase-out of the live exports trade will significantly impact farmers and regional communities' and inserting instead 'the committee acknowledges that industry participants had a different view and had concerns that the phase-out of the live exports trade will significantly impact farmers and regional communities'
- b) omitting 'We also acknowledge the substantial regulatory enhancements that industry itself initiated and implemented since 2018 to lift animal welfare standards.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Barrett, Mr Donnelly, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That paragraph 2.53 be amended by omitting: 'Noting the divergent views of inquiry participants, the committee takes at face value DPIRD's conclusions – which appear to be measured and based on historical data – that the phase-out will have a small but short lived impact on New South Wales' and inserting instead 'The committee takes at face value DPIRD's conclusions that the phase-out may have a very small and short lived impact on New South Wales.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Barrett, Mr Donnelly, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That paragraph 2.54 be amended by omitting 'the impacts' and inserting instead 'any impacts'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Barrett, Mr Donnelly, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That paragraph 2.55 be amended by omitting: 'Therefore the committee recommends that DPIRD actively monitor industry trends for any impact of the phase-out of live sheep exports by sea on New South Wales, to and beyond 2028. Noting that DPIRD advised that it conducts annual reviews of trends across all sectors, the committee considers that the department should explicitly outline the impact of the phase-out of live sheep exports as part of its public reporting. This process should identify potential measures to respond to any observed impacts from the phase-out. In turn, this may involve the Minister for Agriculture raising the matter with her Australian Government counterpart' and inserting instead:

'Therefore the committee recommends that DPIRD continues to monitor industry trends for any impact of the phase-out of live sheep exports by sea on New South Wales, to and beyond 2028, noting that DPIRD advised that it conducts annual reviews of trends across all sectors.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Barrett, Mr Donnelly, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That Recommendation 1 be omitted: 'That the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development actively monitor industry trends to identify any impacts of the phase-out of the live sheep exports by sea on New South Wales, to and beyond 2028. In reporting its observations, the department should also identify potential measures to respond to any impacts' and the following new recommendation be inserted instead:

'That the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development should continue to monitor industry trends to identify any impacts of the phase-out of the live sheep exports by sea on New South Wales, to and beyond 2028'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Barrett, Mr Donnelly, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That:

The draft report be the report of the committee and that the committee present the report to the House;

The transcripts of evidence, tabled documents, submissions, correspondence, proformas, responses and summary report to the online questionnaire, and answers to questions taken on notice and supplementary questions relating to the inquiry be tabled in the House with the report;

Upon tabling, all unpublished attachments to submissions and individual responses to the online questionnaire be kept confidential by the committee;

Upon tabling, all unpublished transcripts of evidence, tabled documents, submissions, correspondence, proformas, responses and summary report to the online questionnaire, and answers to questions taken on notice and supplementary questions related to the inquiry be published by the committee, except for those documents kept confidential by resolution of the committee;

The committee secretariat correct any typographical, grammatical and formatting errors prior to tabling;

The committee secretariat be authorised to update any committee comments where necessary to reflect changes to recommendations or new recommendations resolved by the committee;

Dissenting statements be provided to the secretariat within 24 hours after receipt of the draft minutes of the meeting;

The secretariat is tabling the report on Wednesday 26 March 2025.

7. Next meeting

The committee adjourned at 10.02 am, until Tuesday 13 May 2025.

Frances Arguelles
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 34

Tuesday 13 May 2025

Portfolio Committee 4 – Regional NSW

Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney, 8:53 am

1. Members present

Mr Banasiak, *Chair*

Ms Hurst, *Deputy Chair* (via videoconference)

Ms Boyd (participating) (via videoconference)

Mr Lawrence substituting for Mr Primrose from 9.00 am to 10.30 am

Mrs MacDonald

Mrs Mitchell from 8.57 am

Mr Murphy

Mr Primrose from 11.30 am

2. Apologies

Mr Donnelly

3. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Murphy: That draft minutes no. 33 be confirmed.

4. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 8 August 2024 – Email from the Office of Ms Abigail Boyd nominating Ms Abigail Boyd as a participating member on the inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales
- August 2024 (with additional batches received in October and November 2024) – postal letters from various individuals addressed to the Hon. Paul Scully, Minister for Planning and Public Spaces regarding their objection to the New England REZ Transmission Project
- 27 March 2025 – Email from Mr Michael Holz, on behalf of the Singleton Solar Standoff Group, to the Chair offering their assistance if the committee visits the Hunter region for the inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales
- 31 March 2025 – Email from Vicki and Rene Wouters to the Chair, various government organisations and the media, stating that Ausgrid's submission to the inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales was incorrect and misleading
- 4 April 2025 – Email from Vicki and Rene Wouters to the committee requesting to meet to discuss the Hunter Central Coast REZ upgrades
- 29 April 2025 – Email from Ms Lisa Penson, Economic Development Coordinator, Mid-Western Regional Council declining the invitation to appear at the Dubbo hearing
- 30 April 2025 – Email from Mr Adam Kay, Chief Executive Officer, Cotton Australia declining the invitation to appear at the hearing on 13 May 2025 as key staff are on leave, and requesting to appear at a later hearing
- 1 May 2025 – Email from Ms Lisa Penson, Economic Development Coordinator, Mid-Western Regional Council accepting the invitation to appear at the Dubbo hearing
- 5 May 2025 – Email from Mr Peter Flowers, Head of Communications and External Affairs, APAC, Lightsource BP, declining the invitation to appear at the regional hearing in Dubbo on 16 May 2025
- 6 May 2025 – Email from Ms Anne Jones, landowner, declining the invitation to appear at the regional hearing in Dubbo on 16 May 2025
- 7 May 2025 – Email from Mr Adam Marshall, Senior Government Relations, Origin Energy declining the invitation to appear at the regional hearing in Dubbo on 16 May 2025.

Sent

- 30 April 2025 – Email from the secretariat to Ms Lisa Penson, Economic Development Coordinator, Mid-Western Regional Council requesting Council to reconsider their decision to attend the Dubbo hearing.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs MacDonald:

- That Ms Boyd as a participating member for the duration of the inquiry into the impact of REZ on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales be provided with copies of all committee papers and that all costs associated with her participation in the inquiry be covered by the committee.
- That the committee authorise the publication of correspondence from various individuals addressed to the Hon. Paul Scully, Minister for Planning and Public Spaces regarding their objection to the New England REZ Transmission Project as one document, dated August 2024, with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information.

5. Inquiry into the impact of REZ on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

5.1 Public submissions

The committee noted that the following submission was published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submission no. 140.

5.2 Inquiry timeline

The committee noted that, following the receipt of submissions, the committee has so far agreed via email to hold the following committee activities:

- 13 May – Sydney hearing
- 15 and 16 May – Regional visit to the Central West Orana region including site visits and a regional hearing
- 16 and 17 July – regional visit (location tbc).

5.3 Questionnaire summary

The committee noted that a summary report of the online questionnaire was published on the website under the authorisation of the resolution establishing the inquiry.

5.4 Supplementary questions

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs MacDonald: That members lodge supplementary questions with the committee clerk within five business days after receiving the transcript of 13 May hearing.

5.5 Public hearing

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs MacDonald: that the allocation of question to be asked at the hearing be left in the hands of the chair.

Witnesses, the public and the media were admitted at 9.03 am.

The Chair made an opening statement regarding the broadcasting of proceedings and other matters.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
- Mr Ash Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, Energy Corporation of NSW
- Mr Clay Preshaw, Executive Director, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
- Mr Matt Riley, Director, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
- Mr Anthony Hayes, Head of Regional Integration, Planning, Integration and Passenger, Transport for NSW
- Ms Suzie Matthews, Executive Director, Skills and Workforce Programs, NSW Department of Education
- Mr James Bolton, Deputy Secretary, Regional Development and Delivery, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Ms Nevenka Codevelle, Executive General Manager, AEMO Services
- Ms Melanie Koerner, General Manager – System Planning, Reporting & REZ Authorisation, AEMO Services
- Ms Janine Young, Ombudsman, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (via videoconference)
- Ms Stephanie Saill, Head of Energy Transition, Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW (via videoconference).

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Ms Meg McDonald, Interim Chair, Net Zero Commission
- Dr Will Rayward-Smith, Executive Director, Net Zero Commission
- Ms Alison Stone, NSW Agriculture Commissioner.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined:

- Dr Richard Parsons, Social Researcher.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Ian Barry, Landowner
- Ms Kathy Morris, Landowner
- Mr Ben Turner, Landowner.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Cr Claire Pontin, Vice President Regional/Rural, Local Government NSW (via videoconference)
- Mr David Reynolds, Chief Executive, Local Government NSW (via videoconference).

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Ms Marilyne Crestias, Head of Policy and Advocacy, Clean Energy Investor Group
- Dr Brad Smith, Policy and Advocacy Director, Nature Conservation Council NSW
- Ms Eve Altman, Clean Energy Campaigner, Nature Conservation Council NSW
- Ms Lu Allan, Advocacy Director, RE-Alliance.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Xavier Martin, President NSW Farmers
- Ms Rhiannon Heath, Policy Adviser, Environment, NSW Farmers.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Ms Leah Tucker, Senior Policy Manager, Energy and Infrastructure, Business NSW
- Mr Bob Hawes, CEO, Business Hunter, Business NSW
- Mr Andrew Abbey, Policy Director, NSW Minerals Council.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The public hearing concluded at 5.32 pm. The public and the media withdrew.

6. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 5.33 pm, until Thursday 15 May, 2025, 7.35am, Sydney Domestic Airport departure gate.

Frances Arguelles
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 35

Thursday, 15 May 2025

Portfolio Committee 4 – Regional NSW

Sydney Domestic Airport, 7.35 am, Thursday 15 May 2025

1. Members present

Mr Banasiak

Mrs MacDonald
Mrs Mitchell
Mr Primrose

2. Apologies

Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr, Murphy, Ms Boyd (participating)

3. Inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones in rural and regional industries and communities in New South Wales

3.1 Site visits – Central West Orana region

The committee attended Nigel Robert's property and was met by:

- Nigel & Emma Roberts, landowner.

Mr and Mrs Roberts gave a presentation on their property.

The committee conducted a tour of Mr and Mrs Robert's property, accompanied by Mr and Mrs Roberts.

The committee attended James and Amanda Bowman's property and was met by:

- James Bowman, landowner.
- Amanda Bowman, landowner.
- Kate Bowman, landowner.
- Jim Berry, farm manager.
- Emma Bowman, relative.

Mrs Amanda Bowman gave a presentation on their property.

The committee attended ACEREZ's site near Merotherie Road and was met by:

- Steve Masters, CEO, ACEREZ
- Robert Armstrong, Operations Director, ACEREZ
- Miranda Wood, Director Communications and Stakeholder Engagement, ACEREZ
- Grant Andersen, ACJV D&C Project Director, ACEREZ
- Tim Smith, ACJV D&C Project Manager, ACEREZ
- Brett Macauley, ACJV D&C Superintendent, ACEREZ
- Amer Hussein, Central-West Orana REZ Community and Place Director, EnergyCo

Mr Smith gave a presentation on the ACEREZ site.

The committee conducted a tour of the ACEREZ site, accompanied by Mr Masters, Mr Armstrong, Ms Wood, Mr Andersen, Mr Smith, Mr McCauley and Mr Hussein.

4. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 5.30 pm until Friday, 16 May 2025.

Frances Arguelles
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 36

Friday, 16 May 2025

Portfolio Committee 4 – Regional NSW

Dubbo Regional Council Chambers, corner of Church and Darling Streets, Dubbo, 9.15 am

1. Members present

Mr Banasiak, *Chair*
Ms Hurst, *Deputy Chair* (via videoconference)
Mrs MacDonald
Mrs Mitchell
Mr Murphy (via videoconference)
Mr Primrose

2. Apologies

Mr Donnelly, Ms Boyd (participating)

3. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 8 May 2025 – Email from Mr Peter Flowers, Head of Communication and External Affairs, APAC, Lightsource BP to secretariat, declining to host a site visit as part of the committee's visit in the Central West Orana region
- 9 May 2025 – Email from Ms Lily Habib, Project Director, Pacific Partnerships Pty Ltd, declining the invitation to appear at the regional hearing in Dubbo on 16 May 2025.

4. Inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones in rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

4.1 Public hearing

Sequence of questions

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the allocation of questions to be asked at the hearing be left in the hands of the Chair.

Witnesses, the public and the media were admitted at 9.29 am.

The Chair made an opening statement regarding the broadcasting of proceedings and other matters.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Murray Wood Chief Executive Officer, Dubbo Regional Council
- Mr Steven Jennings Director, Development and Environment, Dubbo Regional Council
- Mr Brad Cam General Manager, Midwestern Regional Council
- Mr Lindsay Mason General Manager, Warrumbungle Council
- Adjunct Prof Warwick Giblin FEIANZ, FRSN, Environmental Consultant to Warrumbungle Council.

Mr Cam tendered the following documents:

- Golden Highway Road Corridor Business Case, Connecting Orana – Hunter and Beyond, March 2024
- Map of Proposed State Significant Development prepared by Mid-Western Regional Council, March 2025
- Document titled 'EnergyCo Community and Employment Benefit Program'.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Grant Piper, AASM, DFSM, CWO REZist
- Mrs Annette Piper, Uarbry Tongy Lane Alliance
- Mr Terry Conn, Landowner
- Mrs Margaret Conn, Landowner.

Mrs Conn tendered the following document:

- Transcript of Meeting, re Valley of the Winds Wind Farm (SSD-10461) - EnergyCo & DPHI (Department of Planning, Housing & Infrastructure) Meeting, Independent Planning Commission, 16 April 2025.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Ms Emma Bowman, Landowner
- Ms Sally Edwards, Landowner
- Mr Nigel Roberts, Landowner.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mrs Jane Hegarty Chair, Cassilis District Development Group
- Mrs Linda Gant, Committee member, Cassilis District Development Group
- Mr James Matthews, Executive Committee, Merriwa Cassilis Alliance
- Mr James Armstrong, Owner, Cassilis Park Merino Stud.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined:

- Mr Peter Rothwell Director, VRA Rescue.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Steve Masters CEO, ACERERZ
- Mr Robert Armstrong, Operations Director, ACERERZ
- Mr Bart Sykes, Acting Head of Community and Regional Development, Squadron Energy.

Mr Sykes tendered the following document:

- Farm Insurance and Energy Infrastructure, Insurance Council of Australia, 14 May 2024.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Stuart Hackney, Landowner
- Ms Sally Dent, Member, Three Rivers Landcare -
- Mr David Seis, Landowner and Member, Three Rivers Landcare.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The public hearing concluded at 4.08 pm. The public and the media withdrew.

Tendered documents

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee accept the following documents tendered during the public hearing:

- Golden Highway Road Corridor Business Case, Connecting Orana – Hunter and Beyond, March 2024
- Map of Proposed State Significant Development prepared by Mid-Western Regional Council, March 2025
- Document titled 'EnergyCo Community and Employment Benefit Program'
- Transcript of Meeting, re Valley of the Winds Wind Farm (SSD-10461) - EnergyCo & DPHI (Department of Planning, Housing & Infrastructure) Meeting, Independent Planning Commission, 16 April 2025

- Farm Insurance and Energy Infrastructure, Insurance Council of Australia, 14 May 2024.

5. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 4.09 pm until Wednesday, 16 July 2025.

Frances Arguelles

Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 38

Tuesday 15 July 2025

Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW

Via videoconference at 9.35 am

1. Members present

Mr Banasiak, *Chair*

Ms Hurst, *Deputy Chair*

Mr Donnelly

Ms Merton (substituting for Mrs MacDonald)

Mrs Mitchell

Mr Murphy

2. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That draft minutes no. 37 be confirmed.

3. Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2025-2026 – procedural resolutions

The committee noted that the Budget Estimates timetable for 2025-2026 was agreed to by the House on 26 June 2025 with hearings generally commencing at 9.15 am and concluding by 5.30 pm. Below is a table of Portfolio Committee No. 4 hearings:

Date	Portfolio
Wednesday 20 August 2025	Lands and Property, Multiculturalism, Sport, Jobs and Tourism (Kamper)
Monday 1 September 2025	Agriculture, Regional New South Wales, Western New South Wales (Moriarty)

3.1 Allocation of question time and total hearing time

The committee noted that under the Budget Estimates 2025-2026 resolution:

- (b) each portfolio, except The Legislature is to be examined concurrently by opposition and crossbench members only from 9.15 am to 10.45 am, 11.15 am to 12.45 pm, 2.00 pm to 3.30 pm and 3.45 pm to 5.15 pm, and, if required, by Government members only from 10.45 am to 11.00 am, 12.45 pm to 1.00 pm, and 5.15 pm to 5.30 pm, and
- (c) the portfolio of The Legislature is to be examined by opposition, crossbench and Government members from 9.15 am to 11.00 am, and from 11.15 am to 1.00 pm.

3.2 Sequence of questions

The committee noted that under the Budget Estimates 2025-2026 resolution, unless the committee decides otherwise, the sequence of questions to be asked at the hearings for the following portfolios is to alternate between *crossbench and opposition members, in that order*, with equal time allocated to each:

- Lands and Property, Multiculturalism, Sport, Jobs and Tourism
- Agriculture, Regional New South Wales, Western New South Wales.

3.3 Witness requests

The committee considered a list of witnesses who appeared at the Budget Estimates 2024-2025 additional hearings for the portfolios relevant to Portfolio Committee No. 4 and agreed on the following initial witness lists.

The committee noted that as a result of changes to the Cabinet and the Ministry of the NSW Government, the portfolio for Small Business moved to Portfolio Committee No. 8 – Customer Service and the portfolio of Jobs and Tourism moved to Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW on 19 March 2025.

Lands and Property, Multiculturalism, Sport, Jobs and Tourism (Kamper)

Witness	
Ms Kiersten Fishburn	Secretary, Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
Mr Leon Walker	Deputy Secretary, Property and Development NSW
Ms Jennifer Hickey	Chief Executive Officer, Cemeteries and Crematoria NSW
Mr Stewart McLachlan	Chief Executive Officer, Valuation NSW
Mr Tom Gellibrand	Chief Executive, Infrastructure NSW
Mr Joseph La Posta	Chief Executive Officer, Multicultural NSW
Mr Adam Berry	Acting Chief Executive, Office of Sport
Ms Kerrie Mather	Chief Executive Officer, Venues NSW
Ms Kate Boyd PSM	Secretary, The Cabinet Office
Ms Elizabeth Mildwater	Secretary, Department of Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport
Mr Tarek Barakat	Deputy Secretary, Hospitality and Racing, Department of Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport
Mr Michael Rodrigues	24-Hour Economy Commissioner and Acting Deputy Secretary, 24-Hour, Screen and Sound, Department of Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport
Ms Liza Noonan	Acting Chief Executive, Create NSW, Department of Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport
Ms Karen Jones	Acting Chief Executive Officer, Destination NSW

Agriculture, Regional New South Wales, Western New South Wales (Moriarty)

Witness	
Mr Steve Orr	Secretary, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
Mr James Bolton	Deputy Secretary, Regional Development & Delivery, Chief Executive, Regional Growth NSW Development Corporation, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

Ms Rachel Connell	Deputy Secretary, Agriculture and Biosecurity, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
Mr Sean Sloan	Deputy Secretary, Fisheries and Forestry, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
Mr Anshul Chaudhary	Chief Executive Officer, Forestry Corporation of NSW
Ms Kate Lorimer-Ward	Chief Executive Officer, Local Land Services, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
Mr Rob Kelly	Executive Director, Regional Delivery, Local Land Services, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
Dr Adam Tyndall	Executive Director, Strategy, Media and Ministerial Services, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
Dr Lisa Szabo	Acting Executive Director, Biosecurity and Food Safety, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
Dr Kim Filmer	Chief Animal Welfare Officer, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
Ms Kate Meagher	Deputy Secretary, Community Engagement Group, Premier's Department
Dr Jacqueline Tracey	Executive Director, Policy, Local Land Services, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
Ms Harriet Whyte	Executive Director, Regional Programs and Partnerships, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That:

- members be given 48 hours to consider the agreed initial list of witnesses and propose amendments or nominate additional witnesses by email (noting that where a witness no longer occupies a position their proposed inclusion in the witness list is taken to be a reference to their position)
- the committee agree to the witness list by email, unless a meeting of the committee is required to resolve any disagreement
- once the witness list is agreed, the secretariat write to the ministers of portfolios being examined by the committee to communicate the witness list and invite the nomination of any additional witnesses, for the committee's consideration, prior to it settling on a final witness list.

3.4 Witness appearance time

The committee noted that under the Budget Estimates 2025-2026 resolution Ministers are invited to appear for the morning sessions only, 9.15 am to 1.00 pm, unless requested by the committee to also appear for the afternoon session.

4. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 9.38 am, until Wednesday 16 July 2025, REZ inquiry, site visit.

Amanda Assoum
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 39

Wednesday, 16 July 2025

Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW

T3 Departure Lounge, Sydney Domestic Airport, 11.00 am

1. Members present

Mr Banasiak, *Chair*

Mrs Mitchell (from 2.50 pm)

Mr Murphy

Ms Munro (substituting for Mrs MacDonald)

Mr Primrose

2. Apologies

Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Ms Boyd (participating)

3. Inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones in rural and regional industries and communities in New South Wales**3.1 Site visits – New England region**

The committee attended ACEN Australia's New England Solar Farm in Uralla and was met by:

- Mr Killian Wentrup, Head of Development
- Ms Sarah Donnan, NES Project Director in Construction and Engineering
- Mr Richard de Bruin, Site Manager – New England Solar
- Ms Robyn Doyle, WHS Advisor, Heritage and Grazing Liaison
- Mr Scott Green, Community Engagement and Communications Specialist – New England.

The committee conducted a tour of the ACEN site, accompanied by Mr Wentrup, Ms Donnan, Mr de Bruin, Ms Doyle and Mr Green.

The committee attended the properties of Dr John Peatfield and Mr Peter Dawson, off Thunderbolts Way, Uralla and was met by:

- Dr John Peatfield
- Mr Peter Dawson
- Mr Graham Heagney
- and Ms Kim Heagney.

Dr Peatfield and Mr Dawson gave a presentation on their property.

4. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 5.45 pm until Thursday, 17 July 2025.

Frances Arguelles

Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 40

Thursday, 17 July 2025

Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW

Auditorium, Armidale Bowling Club, 92-96 Dumaesq Street Armidale, 8.50 am

1. Members present

Mr Banasiak, *Chair*

Mrs Mitchell

Ms Munro (substituting for Mrs MacDonald)
Mr Murphy
Mr Primrose

2. Apologies

Mr Donnelly, Ms Boyd (participating)

3. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Murphy: That draft minutes no. 34, 35, 36 be confirmed.

4. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 11 May 2025 – Email from Mr Aaron Smith, advising that they can provide their negative experience with a renewable energy project to the committee
- 14 May 2025 – Email from Mr Michael Holz, on behalf of the Singleton Solar Standoff Group, to the Chair offering their assistance if the committee visits the Hunter region
- 17 May 2025 – Email from Mrs Amanda Bowman to the committee attaching her presentation to the committee during their site visit at her property
- 19 May 2025 – Email from Ms Kathy Morris to Mr Chris Dorahy, Research Advisor to the Hon. Mark Banasiak regarding her opening statement at the hearing on 13 May 2025
- 20 May 2025 – Email from Ms Sally Dent, Committee Member, Three Rivers Landcare, to the committee with photographs of the Solartop solar farm near Wellington
- 22 May 2025 – Email from Deyi Wu, Whip's Adviser, Office of the Hon. Chris Rath MLC, advising that the Hon. Jacqui Munro will substitute for Mrs MacDonald during 16 – 17 July regional visits
- 22 May 2025 – Letter from Mr Damien Timbs, Voice for Walcha, to the Chair offering their assistance to the committee's visit in the New England region
- 30 May 2025 – Letter from Mr Steve Masters, ACEREZ, CEO to the Chair responding to the Chair's letter regarding the committee's site visit at Merotherie Road and thanking the committee for the opportunity to appear at the public hearing on 16 May 2025
- 3 June 2025 – Email from Mr Mark Fogarty, ReD4NE, offering their assistance to the committee's visit in the New England region
- 8 June 2025 – Email from Mrs Margaret Conn, landowner, providing information supplementary to her appearance at the hearing on 16 May 2025
- 8 June 2025 – Email from Mr Terry Conn, landowner, providing information supplementary to his appearance at the hearing on 16 May 2025
- 12 June 2025 – Email from Ms Claudia Hodge, Community Power Agency, to the secretariat advising that they are unable to attend the hearing on 17 July 2025 and requests to attend a future hearing
- 16 June 2025 – Email from Ms Lara Lavers, Corporate Affairs and Stakeholder Functions, ACEN Australia, declining the invitation to appear at the hearing on 17 July 2025 and agreeing to host a site visit for the committee on Wednesday 16 July 2025
- 17 June 2025 – Letter from Mr Anthony Hayes, Head of Regional Integration, Transport for NSW to the committee, clarifying his evidence from the public hearing on 13 May 2025
- 19 June 2025 – Email from Mr Chris Betts, General Manager, Betts Transport to the secretariat advising that they are unable to attend the hearing on 17 July 2025 and requesting to attend a future hearing
- 24 June 2025 – Email from Mr Ryan Burton-Rae, Electorate Officer, Office of the Hon. Barnaby Joyce MP, advising that Mr Joyce will attend the Armidale hearing alongside Mr Aidan Morrison, Director, Energy Program, Centre for Independent Studies
- 25 June 2025 – Email from Mr Jamie Chivers, Managing Director, Someva Renewables to the secretariat advising that they are unable to attend the hearing on 17 July 2025 and requests to attend a future hearing

- 26 June 2025 – Email from Ms Caitlin Horan, Business & Operations Support, ACE Power declining the invitation to appear at the hearing on 17 July 2025
- 26 June 2025 – Letter from Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, clarifying his evidence from the public hearing on 13 May 2025
- 2 July 2025 – Email from Mr John Peatfield to the secretariat, declining the invitation to appear at the hearing on 17 July
- 4 July 2025 – Email from Mr Aidan Morrison, Director, Energy Program, Centre for Independent Studies, declining the invitation to appear at the hearing on 17 July 2025 and requesting to appear at a future Sydney hearing
- 4 July 2025 – Email from Dr Siri Gamage, Regional transport advocate to secretariat presenting a preliminary business case for the reinstatement of the Great Northern Railway Line: Armidale to Queensland Border.

Sent

- 22 May 2025 – Letter from the Chair to Mr and Mrs Roberts thanking them for hosting the committee at their property during the site visit on 16 May 2025
- 22 May 2025 – Letter from the Chair to Mrs Amanda Bowman thanking them for hosting the committee at their property during the site visit on 16 May 2025
- 22 May 2025 – Letter from the Chair to Mr Steve Masters, CEO, ACERESZ thanking them for hosting the committee at ACERESZ Merothorie Road site during the site visit on 16 May 2025.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Primrose: That the committee:

- authorise the publication of the following correspondence:
 - Ms Kathy Morris to Mr Chris Dorahy, Research Advisor to the Hon. Mark Banasiak regarding her opening statement, dated 19 May 2025
 - Mrs Margaret Conn, landowner, providing information supplementary to her appearance at the hearing on 16 May 2025, dated 8 June 2025
 - Mr Terry Conn, landowner, providing information supplementary to his appearance at the hearing on 16 May 2025, dated 8 June 2025.
- authorise the publication of the following correspondence with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information:
 - Mrs Amanda Bowman in relation to the committee's site visit at her property on 15 May 2025, dated 9 June 2025.
- authorise the publication of the following correspondence and insert footnotes at the relevant points in the transcript noting that correspondence clarifying the evidence had been received and providing a hyperlink to the published correspondence:
 - Mr Anthony Hayes, Head of Regional Integration, Transport for NSW to the committee, clarifying his evidence from the public hearing on 13 May 2025, dated 17 June 2025
 - Mr Liam Ryan, Advising Executive Director, Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water to the committee, clarifying his evidence from the public hearing on 13 May 2025, dated 26 June 2025.
- keep the email from Mr John Peatfield of 2 July 2025 declining to appear as a witness confidential as it contains sensitive information.

5. Inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

5.1 Submissions

The committee noted that the following submission was published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submission no. 141, 142, 143, 144, 146, 147.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell, that the committee authorise the publication of submission no. 149 and 151.

5.2 Confidential submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Primrose, that submission no. 145 be kept confidential.

5.3 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The following answers to questions on notice were published under the resolution appointing the committee:

- Answers to supplementary questions from Mr Ian Barry, landowner, received on 8 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Ms Jane Hegarty, Chair, Cassilis District Development Group, received on 26 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Ms Kathy Morris, landowner, received on 16 June 2025
- Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Mr Lindsay Mason, General Manager, Warrumbungle Shire Council, received on 13 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Mr Brad Cam, General Manager, Mid-Western Regional Council, received on 16 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Ms Marilyn Crestias, Head of Policy and Advocacy, Clean Energy Investor Group, received on 17 June 2025
- Answers to questions on notice and answers to supplementary questions from Dr Will Rayward-Smith, Executive Director, Net Zero Commission, received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to questions on notice and answers to supplementary questions from Mayor Phyllis Miller OAM, President, Local Government NSW, received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Ms Janine Young, Ombudsman & Chief Executive Officer, Energy & Water Ombudsman received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Mr Nigel Roberts, landowner, received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Mr James Matthews, Executive Committee Member, Merriwa Cassilis Alliance, received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Ms Rhiannon Heath, Environmental Policy Officer, NSW Farmers received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Ms Sally Edwards, Past community representative/community development coordinator received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to question on notice and supplementary questions from Mr Daniel Newlan, EGM Corporate Relations and Community, for and behalf of Squadron Energy received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Ms Alison Stone, Agriculture Commissioner, received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to question on notice and supplementary questions from Mr Steve Masters, CEO ACEREZ received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Ms Emma Bowman, landowner received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to question on notice from Mr Pete Rothwell, Director, VRA Rescue, received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Mrs Annette Piper, Secretary, Uarbry Tongy Lane Alliance received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Mr Grant Piper, Secretary, Chair, CWO REZist, received on 19 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Ms Suzie Matthews, Executive Director Skills and Workforce Programs, NSW Department of Education, received 27 June 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Mr Andrew Abbey, Policy Director, NSW Minerals Council received on 2 July 2025
- Answers to supplementary questions from Ms Eve Altman, Clean Energy Campaigner, Nature Conservation Council, received on 3 July 2025
- Answers to questions taken on notice and responses to supplementary questions, from NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water and Energy Corporation of NSW received on 3 July 2025

- Answers to supplementary questions from Mr Steven Jennings, Director Development and Environment, Dubbo Regional Council, received on 3 July 2025
- Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure received 3 July 2025.

The committee noted that some post-hearing responses provided extensive attachments and that the secretariat has yet to properly reviewed the attachments for sensitive or identifying material, or adverse mention. As agreed to by the committee by email, the attachments remain confidential until the secretariat has reviewed them. The secretariat will advise the committee once they are ready for publication in due course. The attachments are available for members upon request.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee authorise the publication of the following correspondence with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information:

- Answers to supplementary questions from Mr Grant Piper, Secretary, Chair, CWO REZist, received on 19 June 2025.

5.4 Public hearing

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the allocation of questions to be asked at the hearing be left in the hands of the Chair.

Witnesses, the public and the media were admitted at 9.00 am.

The Chair made an opening statement regarding the broadcasting of proceedings and other matters.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Cr Sam Coupland, Mayor, Armidale Regional Council
- Mr Stephen Wood, Senior Strategic Planner, Armidale Regional Council
- Mr James Pryor, Senior Strategic Planner, Armidale Regional Council
- Cr Robert Bell, Mayor, Uralla Shire Council
- Ms Emily Sims, Planning Officer – Strategic, Uralla Shire Council.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Jordan Kirk, Renewable Energy Project Co-ordinator, Tamworth Regional Council
- Mr Sam Lobsey, Manager, Development Division, Liveable Communities, Tamworth Regional Council
- Cr Eric Noakes, Mayor, Walcha Council
- Mr Alan Butler, Acting General Manager, Walcha Council.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness were sworn and examined:

- The Hon Barnaby Joyce MP, Member for New England, Parliament of Australia.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Ms Annette Kilarr, Convenor, Climate Action Armidale of Sustainable Living Armidale
- Dr Sanaz Alian, Renewable Energy, Education, Advocacy and Community Health (REEACH) group of Sustainable Living Armidale.

Dr Alian tendered the following document:

- 'Renewable Energy Zones and Engagement', research project proposal as funded by the University of New England Internal Funding Scheme for Early Career Researchers.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Cameron Greig, Member, Voice for Walcha
- Mr Damien Timbs, Member, Voice for Walcha
- Mr Tim White, President, Valley Alliance.

Mr White tendered the following document:

- 'Submission notes from the presentations made by Cameron Greig and Damien Timbs – Voice for Walcha', Armidale, dated 17 July 2025.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Peter Dawson, Property owner, Salisbury Plains
- Mrs Karen Zirkler, Regenerative Agriculture Grazier, Kentucky district
- Mrs Selena Sylvester, Hills of Gold Preservation Inc.

Mrs Sylvester tendered the following document:

- Hills of Gold Preservation Inc supporting document, dated 17 July 2025.

Mrs Zirkler tendered the following documents:

- Presentation titled 'Living in an EIS environment', dated 31 August 2022
- Presentation to the NSW IPC Thunderbolt Wind Farm proposal by Neoen, dated March 2024
- Submission to the Independent Planning Commission on Thunderbold Wind Farm SSD-10807896, dated 12 April 2024.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Mark Fogarty, Director, Bushtricity – ReD4NE
- Ms Susan Newey, Chair, ReD4NE
- Mr Antony (Tony) Menkens
- Mr Stuart Grills, Property owner.

Mr Fogarty tendered the following documents:

- Document titled 'The Cumulative Effect', including a map of the New England region and a list of in progress and proposed renewable projects in the region as at 16 July 2025
- Document titled 'Is the New England REZ Broken?' by ReD4NE.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The public hearing concluded at 3.05 pm. The public and the media withdrew.

Tendered documents

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Murphy:

- That the committee accept and publish the following documents tendered during the public hearing:
 - 'Renewable Energy Zones and Engagement', research project proposal as funded by the University of New England Internal Funding Scheme for Early Career Researchers
 - 'Submission notes from the presentations made by Cameron Greig and Damien Timbs – Voice for Walcha', Armidale, dated 17 July 2025
 - Hills of Gold Preservation Inc supporting document, dated 17 July 2025
 - Presentation titled 'Living in an EIS environment', dated 31 August 2022
 - Presentation to the NSW IPC Thunderbolt Wind Farm proposal by Neoen, dated March 2024
 - Document titled 'The Cumulative Effect', including a map of the New England region and a list of in progress and proposed renewable projects in the region as at 16 July 2025
 - Document titled 'Is the New England REZ Broken?' by ReD4NE.

- The committee to accept and publish the following documents tendered during the public hearing with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information:
 - Submission to the Independent Planning Commission on Thunderbolt Wind Farm SSD-10807896, dated 12 April 2024.

6. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 3.10 pm until Friday, 15 August 2025.

Frances Arguelles

Committee Clerk

Draft minutes no. 42

Friday 15 August 2025

Portfolio Committee No. 4 - Regional NSW

Room 1043, Parliament House Sydney at 9.02 am

1. Members present

Mr Banasiak, *Chair*

Ms Hurst, *Deputy Chair*

Mr Donnelly

Mrs MacDonald

Mrs Mitchell

Mr Murphy

Mr Primrose (via videoconference)

2. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell that draft minutes 39 and 40 be confirmed.

3. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received:

- 19 June 2025 – Email from Ms Emma Bowman providing additional information regarding her submission, for the inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional communities in New South Wales
- 16 July 2025 – Email from Mr Mark Robinson, Engineering Manager, MRC Strategies & Wild River Engineering, advising that he is unable to attend the hearing on 17 July 2025 due to flight delays, for the inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional communities in New South Wales
- 11 August 2025 – Email from Mr Edward McDougall, Office of the Hon Steve Kamper MP, responding to the committee's request that Mr Michael Tidball, Secretary, Department of Communities and Justice, attend the Budget Estimates 2025-2026 Lands and Property, Multiculturalism, Sports, Jobs and Tourism hearing on 20 August 2025.

Sent:

- 18 July 2025 – Letter from the Chair to Mr Killian Wentrup, ACEN Australia thanking them for hosting the committee at the New England Solar Farm during the site visit on 16 July 2025, for the inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional communities in New South Wales
- 18 July 2025 – Letter from the Chair to Dr John Peatfield thanking them for hosting the committee at their property during the site visit on 16 July 2025, for the inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional communities in New South Wales

- 18 July 2025 – Letter from the Chair to Mr Peter Dawson thanking them for hosting the committee during the site visit on 16 July 2025, for the inquiry into the impact of renewable energy zones on rural and regional communities in New South Wales
- 11 August 2025 – Email to Mr Edward McDougall, Office of the Hon Steve Kamper MP, advising that the committee has considered the Minister's proposed amendments to the witness list for the Budget Estimates 2025-2026 Lands and Property, Multiculturalism, Sports, Jobs and Tourism hearing on 20 August 2025 and maintains its request that Mr Michael Tidball, Secretary, Department of Communities and Justice, appear at the hearing.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Hurst: That the committee authorise the publication of the email from Ms Emma Bowman providing additional information regarding her submission, dated 18 June 2025, with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information.

4. Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2025-2026

4.1 Witness list – Lands and Property, Multiculturalism, Sports, Jobs and Tourism

The committee considered the appearance of Mr Michael Tidball, Secretary, Department of Communities and Justice at the Lands and Property, Multiculturalism, Sports, Jobs and Tourism (Kamper) hearing on 20 August 2025.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That Mr Michael Tidball, Secretary, Department of Communities and Justice, be required to appear at the Lands and Property, Multiculturalism, Sports, Jobs and Tourism hearing on 20 August 2025.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Noes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

5. Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales

5.1 Public submissions

The committee noted that the following submissions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submission nos 148, 150, 152, 153.

5.2 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The committee noted that the following answers to questions on notice were published under the resolution appointing the committee:

- answers to supplementary questions from Ms Leah Tucker, Senior Policy Manager, Energy and Infrastructure, Business NSW received on 10 July 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Ms Lu Allen, Advocacy Director, Re-Alliance, received on 14 July 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Mr Cameron Greig, Voice for Walcha received on 30 July 2025.

5.3 Attachments to supplementary questions

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee authorise the publication of the following attachments to answers to supplementary questions

- Mr Brad Cam, General Manager Mid-Western Regional Council, received 16 June 2025
- Mrs Annette Piper, Chair, Secretary, Uarbry Tongy Lane Alliance, received 19 June 2025

- Ms Sally Edwards, past community representative / community development coordinator, received 19 June 2025.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee authorise the publication of the following attachments to supplementary questions with the exception of identifying/or sensitive material:

- Mr Grant Piper, Chair, CWO REZist, received 19 and 24 June 2025.

5.4 Inquiry timeline

The committee noted that the committee agreed via email to conduct a regional visit on 24 and 25 September 2025 to the Hunter and Central Coast region.

5.5 Consideration of Chair's draft interim report

The Chair submitted his draft report entitled 'The impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries – First Report', which having been previously circulated, was taken as being read.

Chapter 1

Ms Hurst moved: That the following paragraph be inserted after paragraph 1.74:

'Economic opportunities in response to environmental challenges

The Nature Conservation Council gave evidence about the economic, social and other benefits of renewable energy developments:

'The build of renewable energy through REZs is a once in a generation opportunity to transform rural and regional communities in [New South Wales] for the better through economic community benefits, the ability to diversify industry and income streams for farmers, and increased nature restoration and protection opportunities. Climate change poses one of the biggest risks to nature, through impacts including drought, bushfires, storms, ocean acidification, sea level rise and global warming. Many plants and animals cannot adapt to the effects of climate change. [New South Wales] has 1000 plant and animal species and ecological communities that are at risk of extinction due primarily to climate change and habitat destruction ... We need to build renewable energy in a timely manner to reach our emissions reductions targets, minimise the impacts of climate change on our environment, provide reliable energy for our state, and bring down energy prices to alleviate cost of living pressures.' [FOOTNOTE: Submission 34, The Nature Conservation Council of NSW, Page 3.]

Question put and passed.

Chapter 2

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.13 be amended by omitting 'Most landowners' and inserting instead 'A significant number of landowners'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.33 be amended by omitting 'many individuals and some local councils' and inserting instead 'some individuals and local councils'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Donnelly moved: That:

- (a) paragraph 2.38 be amended by omitting 'Indeed, the evidence presented by these stakeholders suggests that the CWO REZ has had widespread negative ramifications for communities in the

CWO region.' and inserting instead 'The committee clearly understands that there are concerns in the community about the impact of the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone'.

- (b) **Finding 1** be omitted: 'That a significant proportion of the Central-West Orana community believe the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone has negatively impacted the region.' and the following new finding be inserted instead:

'Finding 1

That there are concerns in the community about the impact of the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.40 be amended by inserting 'however, not all projects are guaranteed to proceed.' after '31 generation projects in the CWO REZ'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.41 be omitted: 'These concerns are well-founded, considering what appears to be the NSW Government's 'hands off' approach to managing the development and implementation of the CWO REZ. The committee concurs with the inquiry participants that the NSW Government's lack of central planning for the REZ has left smaller rural and regional communities, like the Central-West Orana, facing significant cumulative impacts on local infrastructure, such as roads, and services, like health services. Moreover, this is coupled with additional pressures, such as rising rents.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That paragraph 2.41 be amended by omitting 'These concerns are well-founded, considering what appears to be the NSW Government's 'hands off' approach to managing the development and implementation of the CWO REZ.'

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.42 be amended by omitting: 'before further projects are approved in the region. To this end, the committee recommends that the NSW Government place an urgent moratorium on further renewable energy projects in the CWO REZ until an independent cumulative impact study on the region is complete and any identified impacts have been addressed.' after 'to address any identified impacts'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That paragraph 2.42 be amended by inserting 'urgently' before 'address any identified impact'.

Question put and passed.

Ms Hurst moved: That paragraph 2.42 be amended by omitting 'before further projects are approved in the region.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Donnelly moved: That Finding 2 be omitted 'That there are 31 renewable projects in the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone which is well-above the ten awarded access rights by the NSW Government, leading to community concerns about the significant cumulative impacts in the region.' and the following new finding be inserted instead:

'Finding 2

That there are 31 renewable energy projects which have applied to the planning system inside the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone. Cumulative impacts are assessed in the planning system and not all projects are guaranteed to proceed, noting that this uncertainty is causing community concern'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That recommendation 1 be omitted: 'That the NSW Government place an urgent moratorium on further renewable energy projects in the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone until an independent cumulative impact study on the region is complete and any identified impacts have been addressed.' and the following new recommendation be inserted instead:

'Recommendation 1

That the NSW Government continue its work to address cumulative impacts associated with renewable energy development, including by releasing reports on cumulative impacts'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That Recommendation 1 be omitted: 'That the NSW Government place an urgent moratorium on further renewable energy projects in the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone until an independent cumulative impact study on the region is complete and any identified impacts have been addressed.' and the following new recommendation be inserted instead:

'Recommendation 1

That the NSW Government urgently conduct an independent cumulative impact study on the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone and ensure identified impacts are addressed'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.43 be amended by inserting a new sentence at the end: 'However, others such as Mr Grant Piper, Chair of CWO REZist, described constant consultation leading to community fatigue.' [FOOTNOTE: Evidence, Mr Grant Piper, Chair, CWO REZist, 16 May 2025, p 10.]

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.50 be amended by inserting 'from some community members' after 'The committee heard'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.73 be amended by omitting 'overwhelming' before 'evidence of inadequate consultation'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.73 be amended by inserting 'that there have been cases' after 'evidence'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.74 be amended by omitting 'as there is continued angst and lack of trust from the individuals, families and the wider community regarding any their engagement process.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.74 be amended by omitting 'Moreover, this lack of trust undermines' and inserting instead 'A lack of trust can undermine'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.75 be amended by:

- (a) omitting 'It is disappointing and disheartening, but not surprising, to hear' and inserting instead 'The committee notes with concern'.
- (b) inserting 'some' before 'community members are experiencing'
- (c) omitting 'The committee therefore recommends that EnergyCo provide mental health support to landowners who are affected the by CWO REZ.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That paragraph 2.75 be amended by:

- (a) omitting 'and disheartening, but not surprising'
- (b) inserting 'some' before 'community members are experiencing'
- (c) omitting 'often compound the poor mental health of' and inserting instead 'already increase the risk of mental health concerns for'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That Finding 3 be omitted: 'That there has been inadequate consultation between the NSW Government, renewable energy developers and the Central-West Orana community. This has had significant repercussions, including, but not limited to, impacting the mental health of community members, eroding social cohesion and undermining the social licence of renewable energy operators in the region.' and the following new finding be inserted:

'Finding 3

While there has been consultation with the Central-West Orana community, issues have been identified with engagement practices. A number of community members who engaged with this inquiry reported impacts to mental health and social cohesion'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Hurst moved: That Finding 4 be amended by:

- (a) omitting 'real and pressing'
- (b) omitting ', including the practice of agrivoltaics'
- (c) omitting 'whether renewable energy development can successfully coexist with agricultural production' and inserting instead 'any impacts'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Ms Hurst moved: That the following new paragraphs be inserted after paragraph 2.136:

'In response to concerns regarding wildlife corridors, the Nature Conservation Council gave evidence that developing regional conservation priorities for each REZ would be an effective way to ensure wildlife corridors are protected:

'It's a really strong impetus to develop regional conservation priorities for each REZ. If those priorities are identified, it means that developers can take them into account when they're choosing where to site their projects, which is when you can have the biggest nature impacts, reducing community impacts and so on by choosing the right site. But to choose that right site you have to know what those regional conservation priorities are, and so you have to identify where are places that would make good wildlife corridors. We strongly think that those regional conservation priorities should be identified. We think local community groups should be involved in identifying

those priorities because they know their local area. [FOOTNOTE: Evidence, Dr Brad Smith, Policy and Advocacy Director, Nature Conservation Council of NSW, 13 May 2025, p 53.]'

The Nature Conservation Council further gave evidence that the best way to protect the environment is to ensure New South Wales has robust nature laws across the board:

'There is always a risk that any form of development can negatively impact the environment. The best way to ensure our environment is properly protected is to strengthen [New South Wales] nature laws and reform the planning system to increase nature positive developments, as recommended in the Independent Review of the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016. [Nature Conservation Council] has welcomed the important first step taken by the NSW Government in reforming our nature laws through the passage of the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Biodiversity Offsets Scheme) Bill 2024, though there is still a lot more work to be done. [FOOTNOTE: Submission 34, The Nature Conservation Council of NSW, p 6.]

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That a new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 2.142:

The committee heard that current support for councils includes funding for additional staff and an allocation of \$11.25 million per council. [FOOTNOTE: Evidence, Mr Ash Albury, Executive Director, Planning and Communities, Energy Corporation of NSW, 13 May 2025, p 4].

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.144 be amended by omitting 'As previously mentioned, given that the NSW Government has not taken a leading role in the REZ development, we consider' and inserting instead 'The committee acknowledges'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That paragraph 2.144 be amended by omitting 'been insufficient' and inserting instead 'not met expectations'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Ms Hurst, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr Donnelly moved: That Finding 6 be amended by omitting: 'which have been further compounded by insufficient NSW Government support, planning and oversight.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Donnelly, Ms Hurst, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Ms Hurst moved: That the following new paragraph and recommendation be inserted after paragraph 2.147:

- (a) In order to ensure key wildlife corridors and biodiversity are protected, the committee recommends that the NSW Government identify ecological protection and restoration priorities for each REZ and encourage developers to contribute to nature positive environmental regional outcomes.
- (b) **Recommendation X**

That the NSW Government identify ecological protection and restoration priorities for each Renewable Energy Zone and encourage developers to contribute to nature positive environmental regional outcomes.

Question put and passed.

Ms Hurst moved: That the following new paragraph and recommendation be inserted after paragraph 2.147:

- (a) The committee further recommends that the NSW Government take steps to strengthen nature laws and reform the planning system to increase nature positive developments.

- (b) **Recommendation X**

That the NSW Government take steps to strengthen nature laws and reform the planning system to increase nature positive developments.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Hurst.

Noes: Mr Banasiak, Mr Donnelly, Mrs MacDonald, Mrs Mitchell, Mr Murphy, Mr Primrose.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That:

The draft report as amended be the report of the committee and that the committee present the report to the House;

The committee secretariat correct any typographical, grammatical and formatting errors prior to tabling;

The committee secretariat be authorised to update any committee comments where necessary to reflect changes to recommendations or new recommendations resolved by the committee;

Dissenting statements be provided to the secretariat within 24 hours after receipt of the draft minutes of the meeting;

The secretariat is tabling the report at Thursday, 21 August 2025;

The Chair to advise the secretariat and members if they intend to hold a press conference, and if so, the date and time.

6. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 10.08 am, until Wednesday, 20 August 2025, 9.15am, Jubilee Room, Parliament House (PC4 Budget Estimates).

Frances Arguelles
Committee Clerk

Appendix 4 Dissenting statements

The Hon Emma Hurst MLC, Animal Justice Party

I was disappointed that other committee members would not support my recommendation *‘that the NSW Government take steps to strengthen nature laws and reform the planning system to increase nature positive developments.’*

We heard clear evidence that the best way to protect animals and the environment – including through the renewable energy transition – is to ensure NSW has strong nature laws, and to reform the planning system to increase nature positive developments. There is a lot more work to be done to ensure our environmental and planning laws genuinely protect animals and the environment from harm, and I urge the NSW Government to take action to strengthen these laws as soon as possible.

The Hon Sarah Mitchell, The Nationals

While I am supportive of parts of the interim report and its findings and recommendations as reflected in the committee minutes, I am concerned that some of the stronger wording that was originally proposed by the Chair has been watered down by some members of the committee during the deliberative proceedings.

I am particularly concerned that Recommendation 1 as originally drafted, which called for an urgent moratorium on further projects in the Central West Orana REZ until an independent cumulative impact study is completed, was not supported by the majority of the committee. Instead we have a recommendation that calls for an urgent cumulative impact study only.

In my view, it is important that any reports the Committee releases about this inquiry should adequately capture the community sentiment. During our visits to properties in the area, and at the public hearing held in Dubbo, it was very clear to me that the prevailing sentiment from community members was that the rollout has been rushed and poorly handled by the NSW Government.

People are angry that these projects have been forced into their backyards, and they are fed up with how badly this process has been handled. Residents feel there has been a lack of proper consultation and that they have not been listened to by Government. They feel sidelined in the process – leading to increased tension and division within communities.

There were also significant concerns raised about the lack of overall planning and coordination, including the challenges for local councils trying to grapple with a multitude of issues that are linked to these projects and the pressure placed on local housing, roads, and essential services.

With more projects being added, the REZ seems to be getting bigger and bigger. That's why I believe the committee should have recommended an urgent moratorium. The NSW Government needs to do a stocktake on the renewables projects in the region to get a clear idea of the cumulative impact. This is the state's first active REZ and it is already completely overblown, which not only causes concern for local residents but leads to angst in other parts of the state.