

LGNSW QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

- 1. The Hon. AILEEN MacDONALD: You were talking about a land rebate for neighbours and you pointed to Muswellbrook Shire Council. Can you go a little bit more into how this would work? Can it be implemented under existing regulations?**

A land rate rebate could be one of the options included as part of a renewable energy planning agreement. For example, in 2024 Muswellbrook Shire Council endorsed key elements of the Muswellbrook Solar Energy Planning Agreement Offer which includes a monetary contribution from the proponent to be allocated in annual instalments in the following ratios:

- 10% Specialist staff contribution;
- 45% Muswellbrook Shire Community Benefit Fund contribution (incorporating training and scholarships); and
- 45% Neighbour benefits contribution (land rate rebate) administered via Council.

The proponent nominates properties to which the neighbour benefits contribution is to be allocated. The contribution acts as a pre-payment (or part payment) of the council rates on the nominated land parcel(s). This is achievable under existing legislation (the *Local Government Act 1993*).

- 2. The Hon. EMMA HURST: Do you agree that consideration for wildlife corridors should be made mandatory through that planning process surrounding these REZ projects to be able to ensure that while this planning process is underway, it is a front-of-mind consideration?**

As discussed in our response to supplementary question 6, the planning process should give stronger consideration to the protection of wildlife corridors. Our submission also recommended that the Wind Energy Guideline, Large-Scale Solar Energy Guideline and Transmission Guideline all specifically include the need to avoid impacts in wildlife corridors, and that regional master planning should identify important biodiversity corridors as inappropriate locations for renewable energy projects.

- 3. The Hon. EMMA HURST: I also noticed that the submission suggests that renewable energy projects should be focused on rehabilitated mine land or mining-owned buffer land to lessen the impacts of those environmental impacts. Are you aware of any work that's actually been done to focus renewable projects on this type of land?**

Councils are generally supportive of rehabilitated mining land being used for renewable energy projects. Some examples include Wollongong City Council working with a local business to identify old mining sites in the Illawarra that could be used for gravitational energy storage systems (similar to hydro), and Mt Arthur Coal and Muswellbrook Coal in Muswellbrook Local Government Area (LGA) considering pumped hydro as a post-mining land use.

In Singleton LGA there are 40,000 hectares of coal mining land that could potentially host renewable energy projects in the future. Challenges in accommodating such projects include ensuring the site provides the required geotechnical stability, navigating mining lease arrangements and allocation of risk for post-mining land.

LGNSW SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

Strategic Planning and Coordination

- 1. LGNSW highlights that there's no regionally coordinated plan to sequence projects. Can you give examples of where this lack of coordination has led to planning failures, resource conflicts, or community backlash?**

The lack of coordination and the resulting cumulative impacts on accommodation, services and resources is being felt by councils in relation to state significant development / infrastructure more generally. However, fast-paced renewable energy development is exacerbating these impacts in the Riverina, Hunter and Central Orana.

For example, the Hunter Central Coast REZ has started to see an increase in renewable energy projects including the Hunter Transmission Project, the Bowmans Creek Wind Farm (Stage 1 and Stage 2), the Maison Dieu Solar Farm and the proposed Mitchell's Flat Solar Farm in Singleton LGA. Although still in the early stages, the information available to the community lacked detail and transparency, resulting in significant community backlash. This has led Singleton Council to modify its approach to engaging with renewable energy projects and to write to the NSW Government seeking¹:

- a. Further strategic studies within the renewable energy zone; with an outcome being the development of mapping to provide transparency, clarity and certainty to communities already affected on the best locations within each REZ for renewable projects, and specifically, where State significant renewable projects are not appropriate; and
 - b. Amendments to the State Environmental Planning Policy (Resources and Energy) 2021 to include a requirement for all energy projects to obtain a site verification certificate prior to lodging a development application as well as a requirement for a renewable energy bond to ensure any land used for renewables is returned to its pre-used state (or other defined best use state).
-
- 2. Has NSW Government responded to your calls for regional master planning, including identification of inappropriate locations for renewables, and what authority do councils currently have to influence project siting?**

¹ https://singleton.infocouncil.biz/Open/2024/11/CM_26112024_MIN.PDF