

Response to Supplementary Questions from The Hon. Mark Banasiak MLC

Submitted by: James Matthews, Merriwa Cassilis Alliance (MCA)

Hearing: Inquiry into Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on Rural and Regional Communities and Industries in NSW

Date: 16 May 2025

Response submitted: 19 June 2025

Question 1: *You raised concerns about the accessibility of consultation materials, including maps. What minimum transparency standards would you recommend to ensure all community members can meaningfully engage with project information?*

Response: The MCA recommends the following minimum transparency standards:

- **Accessible Mapping and Data:** All corridor maps, constraint matrices, and relevant data must be made available in high-resolution, easy-to-read formats, both digitally and in print.
- **Plain-English Summaries:** Technical documents should be accompanied by non-technical summaries to ensure accessibility for all community members.
- **Timely Distribution:** Consultation materials must be shared well in advance of any meetings or deadlines to allow proper review and feedback.
- **Public Methodologies:** All project evaluation methodologies, including constraint and cost analyses, should be published in full.
- **Open Data Platforms:** Public-facing platforms must be used to host and update information regularly, enabling ongoing community engagement and independent scrutiny.

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Question 2: *Do you believe organisations like yours should be given formal status or standing in the REZ development and oversight process, to ensure local voices are heard in a structured way?*

Response: Yes. MCA strongly believes that community-based organisations such as ours must be granted formal status in the REZ development process. The previous working group established with TransGrid lacked formal weight, and our agreed Terms of Reference were not upheld. Formal recognition would ensure local knowledge is embedded in planning, not merely consulted.

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Question 3: *You've expressed concerns about the negotiation process with developers. What changes could be made to ensure all dealings with landholders are conducted fairly, transparently, and without undue pressure?*

Response: We recommend the following changes:

- **Independent Legal Support:** Landholders should be granted funded access to legal advice throughout negotiations.
- **Third-Party Mediation:** An independent body, ideally government-appointed, should mediate all landholder-developer interactions.
- **Transparent Compensation Framework:** Compensation offers must be based on independently verified valuation models, with clear criteria.
- **Access and Acquisition Guidelines:** Government-mandated guidelines should be enforced to prevent pressure tactics.
- **Developer Code of Conduct:** An enforceable code should govern all engagement with rural communities.

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Question 4: *Would you support a requirement for developers to fund independent community liaison officers or rural mental health and wellbeing services as part of their social licence obligations?*

Response: Yes, MCA supports this requirement. The psychological and social toll on communities like ours has been significant. Independent liaison officers would ensure fair and clear communication, while dedicated mental health services would help communities cope with the stress of project uncertainty and disruption.

Question 5: *You highlighted the psychological and social toll on local residents. What supports or interventions would you recommend to address this, both during and beyond the consultation phase?*

Response: MCA recommends:

- **Proactive Rural Mental Health Services:** Funded services embedded in affected communities from project initiation to completion.
 - **Mandatory Early Social Impact Assessments:** SIAs must be completed before route selection to avoid entrenching harm.
 - **Community Wellbeing Funds:** Developer contributions should support local wellbeing initiatives.
 - **Long-Term Monitoring:** Structured wellbeing assessments should be carried out regularly with public reporting.
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These recommendations reflect our commitment to ensuring that renewable energy development in NSW proceeds with fairness, transparency, and genuine regard for the people and landscapes it impacts.