

19 June 2025

The Hon. Mark Banasiak, MLC
Chair, Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW
Parliament of NSW
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000
Email: PortfolioCommittee4@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Banasiak,

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Portfolio Committee No. 4 Regional NSW on 13 May 2025 regarding the Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on rural and regional communities and industries in New South Wales.

I have reviewed my transcript from the hearing and do not have any corrections.
Please find enclosed the response to the supplementary questions asked by the committee.

If the committee require further information, please contact me via email

Yours sincerely,

Alison Stone
NSW Agriculture Commissioner

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

Supplementary Questions to the Agriculture Commissioner, Ms Alison Stone

QUESTIONS

Conflict Prevention and Management

- (1) Have you established framework to systematically handle disputes between agricultural producers and renewable energy developers? If so, could you explain it?

ANSWER

Part 2 of the *Agriculture Commissioner Act 2024* specifies the functions of the NSW Agriculture Commissioner, which focus on providing advice and recommendations to Government on agricultural matters.

As such, I am holding roundtable discussions and meeting on-site with farmers and primary producers during a series of regional visits. I am hearing first-hand the broad range of issues affecting farmers and others involved in the agricultural and land management sectors. I will consolidate the issues relating to disputes between farmers and energy developers and will raise these with the relevant agency.

Noting that EnergyCo has an established framework through its [Complaints handling policy](#) and the Energy & Water Ombudsman has been established as a government approved dispute resolution service.

- (2) What steps are you taking to ensure that renewable energy projects do not lead to irreversible loss or degradation of prime agricultural land in NSW?

ANSWER

As the NSW Agriculture Commissioner, I have four key priority areas, including to assist the NSW Government to develop an ongoing system for defining, identifying, and mapping significant agricultural lands in NSW and to provide input and advice related to critical renewable energy infrastructure.

An important part of this work will be to monitor changes in land use to understand the rate of change or loss of state strategic agricultural land from renewable energy and other major land use changes. I am meeting regularly with the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, Energy Co and the Net Zero Commission to ensure that agricultural land is appropriately considered in decision making.

- (3) How are you ensuring agricultural communities have sufficient information and resources to effectively engage in negotiations and consultations with renewable energy developers?

ANSWER

One of the priorities set for the NSW Agriculture Commissioner is to provide input and advice relating to critical renewable energy infrastructure.

I have commenced a series of regional visits to hear first-hand from communities on their experiences and engagement with renewal energy developers and EnergyCo. I will continue to provide feedback including whether farmers have sufficient information and resources to negotiate with renewable energy developers to EnergyCo, as the agency responsible for leading the delivery of NSW's renewable energy zones.

Assessment of Agricultural Impacts

- (4) Are there independent economic studies or reviews planned to evaluate how large-scale renewable energy infrastructure has affected, or could affect, local agricultural economies?

ANSWER

One of the priorities set for the NSW Agriculture Commissioner is to provide input and advice relating to critical renewable energy infrastructure.

I will continue to advocate to EnergyCo and the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure the importance of including the impact on agriculture in any studies or reviews to evaluate the impacts of the transition to renewable energy.

Advocacy and Representation

- (5) Have you intervened or publicly opposed any renewable energy project proposals due to unacceptable impacts on agricultural land or communities? If not, under what conditions would your office consider doing so?

ANSWER

The NSW Agriculture Commissioner role was established under the *Agriculture Commissioner Act 2024*. The NSW Agriculture Commissioner's primary purpose is to provide independent advice to government on strategic agricultural land use issues and support a more sustainable and productive agriculture industry in NSW.

Effectiveness of the Farm Practices Panel

- (6) What progress has been made in piloting the Farm Practices Panel aimed at reducing conflicts between agricultural producers and their neighbours? How is the effectiveness of this panel being evaluated, and what are the plans for its broader implementation?

ANSWER

One of the NSW Agriculture Commissioner's priorities is to pilot a NSW Farm Practices Panel to seek to minimise land use conflicts between agricultural producers and rural neighbours.

An initial meeting with peak industry bodies, NSW Farmers, Local Government NSW and relevant government agencies has been held to confirm the outcomes and objectives of the pilot and to seek nominations for membership of the Panel. Detailed planning, including an evaluation framework is underway.

The pilot is designed to test the feasibility of delivering:

- a reduction in complaints arising from land use conflict.
- a reduction in the administrative burden on councils in managing land use conflict.
- improved information to those moving into locations with agricultural uses of land.
- More certainty to the agricultural industry

- (7) How does the Farm Practices Panel engage with stakeholders from both the agricultural sector and renewable energy developers to ensure balanced and equitable outcomes? What mechanisms are in place to incorporate community feedback into its processes?

ANSWER

The NSW Agriculture Commissioner has commenced a series of regional visits across NSW. Part of these visits include hosting roundtables with farmers and local councils to discuss land use conflicts, meet with intensive agricultural industries and agriculture stakeholder. The Farm Practices Panel pilot is discussed during these regional visits and will continue to inform and shape the development of the Pilot program.

Long-Term Vision for Agriculture Amidst Energy Transition

- (8) What is your long-term vision for balancing the growth of renewable energy infrastructure with the sustainability and productivity of the agricultural sector in NSW? How does this vision inform your current policy recommendations and advocacy efforts?

ANSWER

The NSW Government is continuing work to ensure farmers and agriculture industry are safeguarded into the future with the appointment of a NSW Agriculture Commissioner.

As NSW Agriculture Commissioner, I will provide independent advice, conduct reviews and make recommendations to the NSW Government on agricultural matters, including productivity, land use conflict and food security.

Agriculture is the backbone of our state, and my role is to collaborate with government, landowners and industry leaders to drive tangible, on-the-ground outcomes and practices to ensure NSW has a strong and prosperous agriculture sector.

One of my key priorities is helping government to protect and support our agricultural land, ensuring productivity remains on the government's agenda alongside its priorities for renewable energy, housing and environmental conservation.