

3 July 2025

The Principal Council Officer  
Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW  
Committees - Legislative Council

[PortfolioCommittee4@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:PortfolioCommittee4@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Sir/Madam

**PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 4 – REGIONAL NSW | INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT OF RENEWABLE ENERGY ZONES (REZ) ON RURAL AND REGIONAL COMMUNITIES AND INDUSTRIES IN NSW | SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS**

I refer to the Portfolio Committee No. 4 – Regional NSW hearing held on 16 May 2025 for the Inquiry into the Impact of Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on Rural and Regional Communities and Industries in NSW. Thank you for your subsequent email dated 29 May 2025 requesting responses to supplementary questions related to the Inquiry. Accordingly, please see the below responses:

**Fire Risk**

- (1) You mention wind towers being used for bushfire detection tech, could you expand on this a little?**

**Response**

With the greater presence of tower infrastructure across the Region there is capability to deploy internet connected technologies that allow for remote and AI type monitoring. Cameras linked with sensing technology are able to identify fires before the human eye can spot a fire in the distance. Pano AI is one solution that Council is aware of and have made that connection to regional Rural Fire Service (RFS) leadership. There are other solution providers in the market as well. Council was introduced to Pano AI by the NSW Chief Scientist office.

**(2) What role, if any, will Council play in monitoring or managing these systems long-term?**

Response

This would be the responsibility of the primary combat agency being the NSW Rural Fire Service if they are deployed. Given they would allow for fires to be targeted at earlier stages, there is a saving in the amount of resources deployed to control a fire. In this regard, a business case that includes long term asset maintenance should be undertaken by the RFS.

**(3) If this pilot does not proceed or underdelivers, what is your fallback strategy for bushfire detection and response in REZ-affected areas?**

Response

This matter is fundamentally the responsibility of the NSW Government. It is a proven technology in regard to monitoring during daylight hours e.g. softwood plantations where there is a financial incentive to prevent wildfire from establishing at scale. There is also research by groups such as the Minderoo Foundation which is working on a satellite monitoring solution that could prove effective for monitoring at night, allowing for ignition by dry lightning to be identified very early in the growth of a wildfire.

It is also important that the Committee acknowledges that the significant majority of renewable projects in the Dubbo Regional Local Government Area are not REZ projects but projects seeking to utilise Essential Energy and Transgrid transmission networks. Council will continue to facilitate connection between the RFS and technology providers.

**(4) Has Council conducted or commissioned any modelling on how REZ infrastructure could impact fire behaviour or access for emergency services?**

Response

Again, this is a NSW Government responsibility.. An element of feedback from local brigades Council has received was that in an era of aging volunteers, aerial firefighting increases in importance. How does the RFS therefore, consider any impacts to their more traditional methods of aerial firefighting?

Council has facilitated and enabled the testing of eVTOL aircraft at its Bodangora airfield. The business is AMSL Aero. Council is also aware that AMSL Aero received a grant from the Western Australia Government to develop an autonomous eVTOL aircraft that could be deployed to fight fires at the early stages of wildfire development.

It should be noted that on windfarms the internal roads are of a very good standard between turbines so truck access for RFS vehicles could be considered as improved.

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**(5) In your opinion, are local brigades and the RFS adequately resourced to deal with potential fires near high-voltage infrastructure or turbine sites?**

Response

It is perhaps not a question of enough resources but have we as a broader community (including agencies) thought critically about the best allocation of existing resources. The RFS has significant aerial assets and that combined with using technology that keeps producing new solutions would enable us all to meet the challenges posed by an expanding energy system noting that other power assets are being retired.

A significant resource is volunteers – feedback we have is that the cohort is getting older so how does RFS allocate technology to overcome that risk of not enough volunteers over time.

An opinion expressed on a specialist technical area of expertise in respect of resourcing for fighting fires is best posed to specialist agencies in the NSW Government. I don't think it is appropriate to provide a personal opinion in this regard.

**(6) Have you assessed whether the presence of wind or solar farms could delay or deter aerial firefighting efforts?**

Response

No – it would be unfair to ratepayers for Council to spend its scarce resources on a study that is a core NSW Government responsibility. There is enough data to show the impact on existing cost shifting let alone contribute further to that practice.

**Housing, Workforce and Accommodation**

**(7) You've flagged 3,000 – 5,000 workers for the REZ, how confident are you that Dubbo can house this surge without pushing out existing residents, given there was huge pressure placed on the housing market from the solar farm out near Mudgee?**

Response

Council commissioned a study in 2023, to undertake an analysis of short term worker accommodation needs in the Dubbo Regional Local Government Area. This report provided a further basis for understanding the accommodation challenges and has assisted in shaping Council's strategic approach in seeking accommodation solutions that are within or either close proximity to Dubbo or Wellington and/or the Villages through the LGA. Information in respect of the study can be found on Council's website here [Short Term Worker Accommodation - Dubbo Regional Council](#)

In understanding the importance of the positive economic impacts from workers living close to or within established centres and Villages, Council's approach includes exploring strategic accommodation solutions in Wellington, in the north-east and southern areas of the Local Government Area (LGA). This aims to ensure strategic accommodation solutions can be found within a reasonable proximity of projects within these areas.

Council has also been working with Squadron Energy on the development of a temporary workers accommodation project on residential zoned land in Dubbo. This project is proposed to house some 400 workers from the approved Spicers Creek Wind Farm. A Development Application for this project is now with Council for assessment and consideration. If this project is granted Development Consent, this will assist in ensuring the Dubbo Housing Market is not impacted by the Spicers Creek Wind Farm project.

With a projected workforce influx of 3,000 – 5,000 workers associated with renewable energy developments, this presents opportunities, however, also places pressure on housing availability. Council is working closely with stakeholders to ensure housing supply keeps pace with demand.

Our Tourism Destination Network – Destination Country and Outback is also undertaking a study looking at the impact of major projects, including the Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone on the Visitor Economy and rental housing within the LGA. The aim of the study is to inform short-term accommodation strategies, including the expansion of caravan and temporary housing facilities, to avoid displacement of existing residents and tourists.

**(8) What is the projected strain on Dubbo's essential services (healthcare, education, childcare) from this workforce influx?**

Response

We acknowledge the potential strain on healthcare, education, and childcare services. Council is advocating for coordinated planning with State Agencies to ensure service capacity aligns with projected population growth. We also see renewables development as an opportunity to attract investment into these sectors, potentially improving long-standing service gaps in regional NSW.

**(9) Will the temporary worker accommodation at Keswick Estate be repurposed post-construction, or is it a one-use investment?**

Response

Council in May 2024 resolved to lease 10 hectares of Council owned land at the Keswick Estate to Squadron Energy for the purposes of developing a temporary workers accommodation project, which will be for the Spicers Creek Wind Farm.

The terms of the lease between Council and Squadron Energy is for a term of five years with a further five year extension. It is understood that the accommodation will initially be for workers associated with the Spicers Creek Wind Farm. However, it is understood that there may be the capability for other projects to utilise the facility.

Following its cessation of use as temporary workers accommodation, the buildings are proposed to be removed from the site. However, it is proposed that the majority of the infrastructure will remain on the land, which will facilitate future permanent residential development in the future. Council is also in negotiation with Squadron Energy for the provision of a Voluntary Planning Agreement and package of works, which will ensure this project will provide important legacy infrastructure.

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**(10) Do you have any data showing the impact of REZ-related housing demand on rental prices or housing stress in surrounding areas like Wellington?**

Response

Council doesn't hold specific data on price impacts in the residential housing market across the LGA, however, Council frequently reviews residential vacancy data and median house price data for both Dubbo and Wellington from publicly available sources including Corelogic and SQM Research.

The data for May 2025 for residential vacancy rates in Dubbo was 0.7%. This vacancy rate was 1.2% in January 2025. In respect of Wellington, which is geographically closer to a number of Renewable Energy projects, the rental vacancy rate in May 2025 was 1.6%. Council is acutely aware of the need to ensure a consistent housing development pipeline is maintained for the Region and has a focus on ensuring Development Application approval times are continually reviewed to ensure systems and processes can be streamlined to reduce processing times.

**Waste, Circular Economy and Decommissioning**

**(11) You reference wind turbine and solar recycling trials, what happens if those pilots are not commercially viable?**

Response

Council is involved in collaborative conversations around both wind turbine and solar panel recycling options. We are committed to ensuring that renewable infrastructure does not create future waste burdens for our communities and are actively advocating for state and federal government assistance to support circular economy solutions, through policy levers and investment.

**(12) Have you costed the upgrade or expansion required at Whylandra Waste Facility to manage the full REZ waste load?**

Response

Dubbo Regional Council is working closely with REZ proponents and State Government Agencies to ensure waste compliance and support practical and scalable resource recovery outcomes. Council is actively reviewing REZ Waste Management Plans and contributing to cumulative waste impact studies to understand the types and volumes of materials generated, including how much may be recovered or sent to landfill. This work supports informed planning and explores how councils like Dubbo can assist in managing these materials locally.

Council is committed to playing a leading role in regional resource recovery across the Central West. This includes preparing for emerging waste streams from the energy transition, such as end-of-life solar panels and wind turbine components. These challenges create strong opportunities to leverage REZ project funding for infrastructure upgrades and to deliver long-term circular economy outcomes through well-developed business cases and regional collaboration.

To support this, Council is developing a master plan for the Whylandra Waste Facility, which is focused on expanding and future-proofing infrastructure. At the same time, Council is advocating for policy reforms that enable better waste outcomes and welcomes co-investment opportunities to pilot innovative recovery solutions. By planning ahead and engaging with Government and industry, Council is aiming to position the Region as a hub for sustainable waste management and circular economy leadership in the energy transition.

**(13) With no comment on decommissioning bonds, should Council push for mandatory security deposits from developers to cover long-term disposal costs?**

Response

The State Government Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure is the consent authority for large scale renewable energy projects. Guidelines prepared by the Department of Planning for both solar and wind projects include the consideration of issues and factors around project decommissioning.

**(14) Is Council prepared for the environmental liability if dumped or degraded solar panels and turbine parts become a regional issue?**

Response

Dubbo Regional Council is constructively engaging with REZ proponents and State Agencies to ensure all waste related compliance obligations are appropriately addressed. Council is actively reviewing REZ Waste Management Plans and contributing to cumulative impact waste studies to assess the projected volumes and types of waste associated with large-scale infrastructure projects. This work supports the identification of materials suitable for recovery and reuse and assists in planning for how local and regional facilities can support their responsible management.

Council acknowledges the broader implications of the energy transition and is taking a proactive and solutions-focused approach to future-proofing the Region. This includes planning for new and emerging waste streams, such as end-of-life solar panels, wind turbine components, and other construction and decommissioning materials and identifying opportunities for circular economy industries to be established locally. Council is working with industry stakeholders to explore local processing options that support regional job creation, investment attraction, and long-term waste reduction outcomes.

To advance these goals, Council is participating in a range of consultation forums, including EnergyCo steering groups, regional business development presentations, industry workshops, and cross-sector planning sessions. These platforms are enabling Council to shape practical responses to waste and resource recovery challenges and explore co-investment opportunities with government and the private sector.

The master planning of Whylandra Waste Facility is a key element of this work, ensuring infrastructure is fit for purpose both now and into the future. Through strategic engagement, technical planning, and policy advocacy, Dubbo Regional Council is positioning the Central West

as a leader in regional resource recovery and circular economy innovation within the context of the renewable energy transition.

### **Community Engagement & Oversight**

#### **15) Your community committee model is promising, but how will you prevent it becoming tokenistic or dominated by developers?**

##### **Response**

Council's Renewable Energy Zone Benefit Committee was designed to provide for community representation from localities in our LGA where renewable energy projects are proposed, in development or in operation.

The Committee has the following objectives and purpose:

- Provide a voice for residents of the nominated localities;
- Identify, with the input of residents, the priorities of the nominated localities that specific renewable energy projects are occurring in and communicate these priorities with Council;
- Review and provide advice on community benefit fund projects as required; and
- Receive project updates from proponents and Council as required.

The Committee has been primarily designed for community to have a say on what happens with funding from Voluntary Planning Agreements and to also ensure community members are provided with information from Council and Proponents on individual projects and policy settings.

The Committee does not have Proponents or Developers in the membership structure.

It should be noted that the Committee functions do not take any place of consultation required to be undertaken by Proponents and consultation required to be undertaken by the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure as part of the State Significant Development process.

There are currently 23 renewable energy projects at various stages of planning and development in the Dubbo Regional LGA. With such a range of projects and the need to ensure our community is consistently and accurately informed, there is a need for the development of an overarching community based committee. Council through Voluntary Planning Agreements entered into with Proponents also needs to ensure that an appropriate community consultation and advice mechanism is in place.

#### **16) How do you intend to deal with community fatigue or growing resistance if project volumes increase?**

##### **Response**

Community fatigue is a real concern. Council is prioritising transparent communication, regular engagement, and ensuring that community voices are heard early in the planning process. We

are also advocating for a more coordinated approach to project rollouts to avoid overwhelming local capacity.

**(17) Have any of the 23 REZ projects in your LGA faced public pushback or protest, and if so, how has Council responded?**

Response

Of the 23 renewables projects in our LGA, only three projects are connecting to the new transmission line, which is currently under construction by consortium ACEREZ. The rest of the projects are either connecting to the existing Transgrid network through the Wellington Substation or connecting to the Essential Energy network. It is important that at all levels of Government the correct terminology is adopted for explaining to community what projects are REZ projects and what projects are renewables projects in general.

In respect of Council's approach, Council aims to ensure that the community can seek to understand the role of Council, the role of Proponents and the role of Government. The community needs to have access to plain English and easily understood information on the following:

- The Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone;
- What is a Renewable Energy Zone project;
- The State Significant Development process;
- How and when a submission can be made and to what body; and
- Council's role in the process.

In this regard, Council for the Kerrs Creek Wind Farm, which is a project in the southern section of our LGA, held a community meeting, which was also attended by the Proponent. The role of the meeting was to provide community with information around the dot points as included above and to explain Council's focus through Voluntary Planning Agreements on providing greater local benefits for community from the project.

Council also encourages all renewables proponents to have meetings like this early in the initial consultation phase for a project to allow community to seek information around both the project and the State Significant Development process. Council also advocates that project Proponents have a local presence on the ground to enable more effective communication with stakeholders.

**Infrastructure and Local Impact**

**(18) Has Council modelled the strain on local roads, water supply and sewerage systems during peak construction periods?**

Response

This has not been modelled by Council. However, the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water has recently prepared a report titled "Water availability and access pathways" for the Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone in May 2025 that assesses both



the water demand and wastewater requirements associated with the development activity associated with the Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone.

Council is unaware of any road modelling associated with the cumulative impacts of the development on the local road network as these are dealt with in individual developments.

**(19) The wastewater reuse facility sounds valuable, how will you ensure it's financially sustainable once REZ construction winds down?**

Response

The advanced wastewater treatment plant (AWTP) reuses effluent that is generated from the Dubbo Sewerage Treatment Plant. Council is committed to the reuse of the effluent so that it is not required to be discharged to the Talbragar River in accordance with existing approvals.

At this point in time, Council is targeting the end product from the AWTP as construction water for concrete batching and dust suppression. The AWTP has been over designed for this construction water purpose and the intention is for further analysis to be undertaken on the quality of the water for application to open space areas such as sporting fields.

Use of the water for irrigation reduces the reliance on irrigation from the Macquarie River or potable water supplies which is of particular importance in the time of drought, but is also socially responsible in times when access to river water is readily available. There are significant fees associated with the discharge of effluent to the river system and the ability to reuse this effluent reduces the number of occurrences to discharge to the river which reduces the financial to Council.

Other opportunities will also be explored for additional market uses for alternate water sources.

**(20) Is there a risk the benefits being promoted (e.g. REACT centre, tourism hubs) are oversold without evidence they'll deliver long-term outcomes?**

Response

We recognise the importance of evidence-based planning to ensure benefits are not overstated. Council is working to ensure that projects are underpinned by clear business cases and measurable outcomes to avoid overpromising and underdelivering.

The business case that supported Council's application for stage 1 funding for the Renewable Energy Awareness and Career Training (REACT) centre showed that the centre will deliver a benefit-cost ratio of >1, using NSW Treasury guidelines for benefit cost analysis.

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**Planning, Land Use and Energy Balance****(21) Given your Region's agricultural importance, has Council modelled how much productive farmland may be lost or downgraded due to REZ infrastructure?****Response**

Managing land use conflict between agriculture and renewable energy is fundamentally a responsibility of the NSW State Government, rather than local Councils, due to the scale, complexity, and strategic importance of the issue. The NSW Government has the legislative authority, resources, and statewide planning frameworks necessary to balance competing land uses while aligning with broader goals like net zero emissions and food security.

Local Government, while essential in community engagement and development approvals, lacks the jurisdiction and capacity to resolve conflicts that involve statewide infrastructure planning, energy policy, and agricultural land protection. For example, Dubbo Regional Council may be involved in assessing local impacts of a solar farm, but it cannot independently evaluate how that project fits into NSW's renewable energy roadmap or agricultural land use strategy. The State Government's role is to provide consistent policy direction, ensure inter-agency coordination, and manage land use mapping and planning systems that transcend local boundaries. This centralized approach helps avoid fragmented decision-making and ensures that both agriculture and renewable energy can coexist sustainably across NSW.

Agricultural land is not necessarily lost from production as a result of a renewable energy project. However, through the State Significant Development process, the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure needs to ensure, especially in the case of solar energy projects, that agricultural land use can continue.

Council recently reviewed an agricultural productivity assessment for the Cobbora Solar Farm project. Whilst this is a good start in assessing the suitability of agriculture to co-exist with a solar project, further work needs to be done to encourage productive agricultural uses to exist with renewables.

In addition, in assessment and consideration of this outcome, the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure should consider requiring agricultural land use as part of a project approval and to ensure the agricultural use provides a greater return financial return than a pre-development scenario.

**(22) Is Council open to advocating for a more balanced or mixed energy grid that includes firming sources like gas or nuclear, rather than relying almost entirely on wind and solar?****Response**

Council has no policy setting in this regard and it is largely a State and Federal Government responsibility.

**(23) You mentioned the importance of a “lasting legacy” from REZ development. Could you share how Council currently defines or measures this — are there specific indicators you rely on to track long-term community benefit?**

Response

Council defines a lasting legacy as tangible, long-term benefits for our communities. We track this through mechanisms such as Voluntary Planning Agreements (VPAs), which provide measurable income and infrastructure benefits. We are also exploring broader indicators, including employment, education, and energy affordability.

Council has a focus on capturing benefits for our community through VPA's. VPA's are not focused on primary impacts as these impacts must be adequately ameliorated as part of the State Significant Development process.

In December 2022, Dubbo Regional Council was one of the first in NSW to adopt a Renewable Energy Benefit Framework. The Framework provides guidance to developers of electricity generating works, which includes solar and wind energy farms, hydrogen energy, pumped hydro and battery energy storage systems, and Council's requirements to deliver benefits to our community through VPA's.

The Framework seeks to achieve the following:

- Ensure our community positively benefits from large-scale electricity generating works;
- Manage and seek to ameliorate the impacts of large-scale electricity generating works; and
- Provide opportunities for proponents to proactively and positively add to the betterment of the community.

The Framework is also focused on seeking funds to deliver projects for the community across this range of topic areas:

- Road infrastructure provision and maintenance;
- Housing opportunities and initiatives;
- Strategic planning;
- Economic development and investment attraction opportunities and initiatives;
- Skills development;
- Community facilities and recreation opportunities;
- Youth welfare and support;
- Town centre development and maintenance in Wellington;
- Other infrastructure provision that provides for the continued health, wellbeing and development of the community.

Ultimately, projects Council undertakes from funds captured from VPA's must be in accordance with the Renewable Energy Framework, will have community consultation and input, including through Council's Renewable Energy Zone Benefit Committee and will have Council approval through an open and transparent process.

Examples of how Council is seeking to use VPA's is the improvement to the Forestvale Road causeway, which is included in the VPA for the Spicers Creek Wind Farm. Similarly, the VPA for the Orana Battery Energy Storage System lists the upgrade of a shared pathway along Showground Road, Wellington as a project where community will be the beneficiary of upgraded assets that would have been addressed in a longer timeframe due to Council's budgetary constraints.

In terms of infrastructure, there are two main outcomes that are achieved and classed as lasting legacy infrastructure.

The first is where renewals of assets are undertaken that would not have necessarily being included in the Council program of works. Examples of these are through the conditions of consent that require road upgrades such as Twelve Mile Road as part of the Uungula Wind Farm. This was required to be undertaken as part of the development with widening and strengthening of the road. This would not have occurred as part of the normal Council renewal program but the general public will obtain the benefit of an improved road.

The second is where contributions are obtained for new infrastructure such as the advanced wastewater treatment plant as a result of the Uungula Wind Farm. This was negotiated to address the need for construction water for these developments and provides a solution that does not impact on the water demands from the Macquarie River.

**(24) The REACT Centre sounds like an exciting initiative. Could you provide an update on the next steps for its rollout — including who your training partners are and what the first programs will focus on?**

Response

The REACT Centre is progressing well. We are currently finalising partnerships with local TAFE and industry leaders to deliver training programs focused on renewable energy operations, maintenance, and safety. The first programs will target upskilling local workers and creating pathways for youth employment in the clean energy sector.

**(25) You referred to a developer "star rating" system — do you see value in formalising this kind of feedback tool across NSW to encourage best practice and greater accountability?**

Response

This is an Australian Government project arising from a previous Energy Infrastructure Commissioner report recommendation. Dubbo Regional Council is participating under the auspice of the Australian Local Government Association alongside Local Government from around Australia so the intent is for this to be a national program. In short yes, there is value in this approach to recognise good project proponents and put pressure on those who would have a poorer rating to improve.

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**(26) Regarding the Renewable Energy Community Committee (RECC), could you outline how members were selected and what steps have been taken to ensure it reflects a diverse cross-section of the community? Has the committee influenced any planning decisions or changes to developer behaviour so far?**

Response

Council's Renewable Energy Zone Benefit Committee was designed to provide for community representation from localities of our LGA where renewable energy projects are proposed, in development or in operation.

Council has sought Expressions of Interest from residents of specific localities where renewable projects are proposed to be developed to be on the Committee. Membership from the localities is based on proportional representation based on population, which no locality having greater than two representatives.

In addition, it should also be noted that the Committee has permanent community members from both the Villages Committee and the Wellington Town Committee. Any items considered in the meeting, which relate to specific localities will only have the permanent Committee members and the specific locality members present.

The Committee has now had its second meeting. However, the initial meetings of the Committee have been designed to inform and educate members on the role of the Committee and an introduction to renewable energy development. Renewable energy development can be a confusing space for community given the complexities of the industry, legislation and the role of State and Local Government.

**(27) You noted that Dubbo has around 10,000 potential housing lots. Are there future plans or opportunities to ensure this land is REZ-ready in terms of infrastructure, affordability, and sustainability?**

Response

Dubbo has been strategically planned to provide land that can realise in the order of 10,000 housing lots over the next 25-30 years. The focus of residential housing in Dubbo is ensuring the Central Business District is situated at the centre of the City. This is proposed to be achieved through providing housing opportunities in three Urban Release Areas in West Dubbo.

Council has been progressing planning and infrastructure work in the North-West Urban Release Area. This area is 1.5 km from the Dubbo Central Business District and will provide housing for 15,000 people once completed and is serviced by an extension to the Newell Highway.

The strategic planning for the area included the provision of a major urban collector road, which will connect to the Newell Highway. Council received \$9.23 million for construction of stage 1 of the River Street West Collector Road. However, Council had to fund construction of the intersection of this road with the Newell Highway to ensure traffic from this major access road could have full vehicle and pedestrian access to the Dubbo CBD. This project has now cost Council

in excess of \$10M and arguably should have been delivered by the NSW Government during construction of the Newell Highway bypass project.

The costs of this major intersection will ultimately be borne by future occupants of housing in the area and recouped through the infrastructure contributions planning processes.

With the costs of housing being lower in regional areas, the economics for residential developers are not the same in metropolitan areas and as such significant changes to the costing of development can detrimentally impact feasibility and ultimately whether a development proceeds from planning to completion.

This points to the need for greater government assistance in the form of infrastructure grant programs in Regional areas and in particular renewable energy zones. In addition, there is also a need for a housing infrastructure analysis for Councils in renewable energy zones. This analysis would ensure infrastructure funding gaps are known to government and can be analysed for solutions that can suit the delivery of housing for renewables projects.

**(28) From your experience with projects like Squadron and ACEREZ, what improvements would you suggest to ensure councils are engaged earlier and more meaningfully in the planning process?**

Response

Our experience with projects like Squadron and ACEREZ highlights the need for earlier and more meaningful engagement. We support the development of a Consultation Charter that mandates face-to-face engagement and avoids over reliance on virtual meetings. A rating system for developer engagement could also incentivise best practice.

**(29) Do you feel the consultation processes to date have reflected the needs and aspirations of your community? What mechanisms would help bridge any gaps?**

Response

While some consultation processes have been constructive, others have fallen short and when they do, it impacts the credibility of all projects and proponents in the REZ. Mechanisms such as community advisory panels, independent facilitators, and transparent feedback loops would help bridge gaps and ensure community aspirations are genuinely reflected. Council is working with communities through our Consultative Committee to support them to define legacy impacts and develop ambitious investment targets in order to inform negotiations with Proponents.

**(30) Are there ways the NSW Government could better coordinate with councils to ensure information-sharing and planning transparency across all levels of government?**

Response

Council has a strong working relationship with Energy Co and a range of government agencies. In addition, through the regional steering committee, there is both state government agencies and Council's, which meets regularly to discuss common issues across the REZ.

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One common issue of concern is the role of Energy Co in overall oversight of the Candidate Foundation Generator projects and the transmission line project. Consideration should be given to what overall State Government coordination body has overall oversight for the rest of the projects in the REZ.

**(31) What positive outcomes — such as local jobs, infrastructure or community benefits — have flowed from these projects? How could these be enhanced or better communicated to the broader public?**

Response

Council has developed a community committee structure for renewable projects.

In respect of consultation by EnergyCo and individual proponents, Council actively assists through offering local intel and through co-design of consultation strategies and mechanisms.

There are many positive initiatives beginning to emerge as REZ project proponents work closely and directly with impacted communities to develop long-term solutions that build a lasting legacy.

One notable example is AMPYR Australia's support for the Wellington First Nations community, enabling them to take a 5% equity stake in a battery project. This stake is expected to generate a revenue stream over more than 20 years, estimated between \$20 million and over \$40 million, depending on project returns and financing costs.

A significant opportunity exists for Governments at all levels to ensure that REZ communities benefit from cheaper, cleaner energy as a result of hosting these projects. Council is actively working with local communities to develop models that help alleviate energy poverty. When communities can see the direct financial benefits of these projects—both through reduced energy costs and long-term community investments—much of the concern and opposition may be mitigated.

**(32) Would you support the establishment of a standardised local engagement framework, co- designed with councils, to ensure consistency across REZ projects?**

Response

Yes.

**(33) Which local or regional roads in your area should become state roads as a consequence of increased usage because of renewable energy projects?**

Response

The road network will be affected by the surge in construction of renewable energy projects. The Wellington area is particularly affected by the Orana REZ given the proximity to the REZ and need for the transportation of oversized, over mass componentry.

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There are three particular roads in the Dubbo Regional Council LGA that will be heavily affected by this construction activity and the movement of workers to and from the sites. The main routes for parts of the Orana REZ from the Port of Newcastle utilises the Golden Highway and Saxa Road. Saxa Road is classified as a regional road that connects the Mitchell Highway to the Golden Highway. Saxa Road is crucial for the NSW Government's renewable energy vision, and in particular the Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone. Saxa Road also provides an important role in the transport of freight across NSW and this was discussed on Wednesday 6 November 2024 as part of the NSW Freight Policy Reform Program. This road is critical to cater for the increasing level of activity to meet the NSW Government vision for renewable energy as well as other large scale State Significant Developments and general transport requirements.

The renewable energy developments also go beyond that of REZ with a large number of renewable projects that are not within the designated Orana REZ. These developments also have an impact on the road network with Gollan Road and Burrendong Way (both regional roads) utilised for the transportation of components associated with these State Significant Developments. These roads will be serving the function of a state road given the number, size, and mass of these vehicular movements.

Yours faithfully

*Steven Jennings*

Director Development and Environment