

INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF RENEWABLE ENERGY ZONES (REZ)
ON RURAL AND REGIONAL COMMUNITIES AND INDUSTRIES IN

NEW SOUTH WALES

Hearing: 29 October 2025

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

Hi Neighbour

(1) Throughout this Inquiry, we've heard suggestions that REZ projects are being 'rushed'. However, in your submission, you express concern about delays in the development of renewable energy projects in the Illawarra region as being negative, in part due to the lack of job creation for locals. Can you further explain your concerns around these delays and the impact it is having?

I think rushing large-scale renewable processes without proper consultation, environmental assessments, development of community benefits schemes, meaningful consultation with First Nations communities and percentage based commitments to local procurement and jobs is not acceptable. The roll out of large scale renewables must be undertaken with great care and thoughtful and pragmatic planning. At the same time we must acknowledge the time pressures presented to us by the need to take meaningful action to reduce our carbon emissions to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. I do not think these things are mutually exclusive. This is the challenge for our government and I fully expect them to be up to the task. I would like to see evidence of careful and pragmatic rollout of renewables in the Illawarra. I would like to be able to point to REZ projects in our area when I talk about future career opportunities. Currently, to the best of my knowledge, the Illawarra has an approved wind zone with no proponents and no other projects in the mix. If we want to get people excited about the career opportunities that this transition brings, it would be impactful to be able to point to some large scale projects alongside the wonderful domestic scale opportunities and smaller scale innovation projects. Perhaps this is the promise of the urban REZ will bring. I certainly welcome consultation and collaboration with Hi Neighbour as the Urban REZ is developed, as we've already created some pioneering examples.

(2) What are some of the things you are most excited about in relation to renewable energy transition, and how will it benefit your community?

The Illawarra is an industrial region with a proud industrial past. I hope kids growing up today will be able to point with pride to the way the region harnessed its industrial roots and powered the next generation with clean energy.

I am excited by the idea that the new renewable industry, when effectively collaborating with groups like ours, can diversify their work forces. I am excited to be able to surf the tide of demand for talent in a way that draws in women, gender diverse, First Nations and Coal connected folks into new careers where they might otherwise be underrepresented.

(3) Your organisation is heavily focussed on community engagement and community interaction with renewable energy projects. Do you think the majority of people in your community support the renewable energy transition?

I can't speak to the percentages of support across the Illawarra. I can say that the folks we interact with are excited to be part of the emerging clean energy industry. Our scholarship applications and interactions at community events reflect that general support, but, of course,

it is likely folks interacting are drawn to our work because of existing positive attitudes towards clean energy.

I will add that on an issue like this there is a complexity of views. For my part I support an environmentally sensitive rollout of renewables and look to documents like the ACF's Mapping Renewables For Nature to guide principals around how this can be done. There are a range of views in the community and emphasising a "for" and "against" mentality has proved to be very damaging.

(a) Why do you think there is any misinformation and mistrust about renewable energy in some parts of the community?

I have no expertise beyond a general understanding that social media seems to have created a hotbed for the proliferation of misinformation and a general distrust in government and academia that often causes deep social divisions seen broadly across our society, particularly since covid.

(b) What are some ways the NSW Government could better engage with the community about the renewable energy transition, and help combat some of the misinformation and disinformation that has been circulating?

Bringing community groups together, using the frameworks provided by independent groups like Democracy Co to help stoke healthy conversations would be a great start. A process like that might be very helpful in developing a community vision that is united in its goals for protections and benefits would be incredibly healing.

I would invite the government to support our work and share the really positive stories that are happening in our community. Even in the absence of large scale renewable energy projects we are still doing amazing things in the region to innovate and make sure the workforce is diverse, dynamic and durable. Where the Urban REZ is concerned I would like the government to consult and collaborate with existing groups.

If renewable companies are serious about developing projects in our region they should be actively brought together, by the government, with community organisations. This work needs to be taken seriously, and not as a 'tick the consultation box' exercise. I have been very vocal about welcoming a direct dialogue with industry. I think there is a really effective place to co-develop planning for projects between renewable energy groups and community groups. I think there would be a much higher likelihood of success for the projects

(c) Does there need to be greater NSW Government support for community-led organisations that support the renewable energy transition and can help facilitate better community engagement and communication? Please explain why.

I believe that my answers have covered my support for more effective NSW Government support and collaboration with communities. There needs to be support for not only for the groups that definitely support renewables. I think communities should be supported, in the diversity of their views to come together and find common ground. With independent frameworks like Democracy Co. to find a more united voice on the best way to move forward with an inclusive energy transformation.



Hi Neighbour Donor List, Financial Years 22-23, 23-24, 24-25

22-23	Groundswell
23-24	WWF
	Music Industry Masters
	1 Million Women
24-25	1 Million Women
	Bluescope
	CANA
	WWF
	Sidney Myer Foundation
	WELA

*Raisely campaign launched in March 2024 receives individual supporter donations through our website

REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 4 - REGIONAL NSW

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