

Collaborating for a fair energy shift

A handbook for communities



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We acknowledge the contributions of our regional facilitators Heidi McElnea, Kim Mallee, Claudia Hodge and Dr Jarra Hicks to this work, and the communities that they are connected with. We also thank Dr Megan Kessler (RE-Alliance) and Jo Lynch (Hunter Community Environment Centre) for their support and input.

About us

Community Power Agency is a not-for-profit organisation with a mission to put community benefit at the heart of Australia's renewable energy shift. Through collaboration, research, capacity-building and advocacy, we share knowledge and encourage community participation in energy policy and project development.

Citation: Lakey, M., McElnea, H. (2025) Collaborating for a fair energy shift: A handbook for communities, Community Power Agency.



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Version 1, November 2025

Acknowledgment of Country

This Handbook has been prepared on the lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation and Djarra (Dja Dja Wurrung) people. Community Power Agency wishes to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of these lands and pay our respects to Elders, past and present. We extend that acknowledgement and respect to all First Nations peoples across Australia and recognise that sovereignty was never ceded. The knowledge and connection that First Nations peoples have to land, sky, water and community is integral to our resilient and renewable futures. We offer our solidarity and support to First Nations groups working towards self-determination and justice.

We respectfully advise that this document contains images of First Nations people who have died. We are grateful to their families who have kindly given permission for these images to be used.

Contents

1. Introduction	4
Aim of this handbook	5
About our work	5
Who is this for?	5
How to use the handbook	6
Snapshot: Five steps to get started	8
2. Background	10
A time of change	10
The energy shift	11
Understanding change	11
Community-led regional collaboration	14
3. Understanding our regional context	15
Learning about place, policy and people	15
Understanding impacts and concerns	18
People, groups and relationships	18
4. Finding our shared goals	21
Establishing shared goals	21
Working together to define goals and outcomes	23
5. Organising collaborations	26
Forming collaborations	27
Clarifying our ways of working	28
Sharing skills for collaboration	30
6. Taking action on what matters	32
Building mutual benefits for agriculture	33
Protecting biodiversity in the energy shift	36
Unlocking local clean energy jobs and skills	40
Ensuring housing accessibility	46
Community engagement	49
Sharing funds for regional benefits	52
Respecting First Nations people and self-determination	55
7. Reflecting on our work	62
Adapting as we go	63
8. Conclusion	65
9. Further reading	66
10. References	67

1. Introduction

Australia is in the middle of a once-in-a-generation shift to clean energy. Wind, solar, batteries and hydropower projects are being built, along with new transmission lines to transport this energy across the country. This shift to clean energy is a national effort requiring significant coordination and expertise. New clean energy projects can bring many benefits as well as create impacts for the communities and environments where they are located. The best outcomes are created when communities are 'on the front foot' and able to be involved in shaping this change.

We believe that communities have the knowledge and insight that's essential to maximise the benefits and unlock an energy shift that supports local needs. And while government and industry engagement is improving, organised communities can better advocate for local aspirations and shape clean energy projects and policies transforming their regions.

In places where change is happening quickly, communities are already coming together to understand the impacts of building new energy projects, voice local needs, and find ways to shape a prosperous future together.



Aim of this handbook

This handbook is designed to support communities that are at the forefront of the clean energy shift. It provides a simple approach for community-led change - where local people collaborate and work together to achieve a shared vision.

This involves taking a constructive approach, looking for opportunities for clean energy to contribute to local goals, while being proactive on the challenges we want to minimise or see managed.

By sharing knowledge from clean energy regions across the country, we aim to support other communities in building on these approaches and maximising positive outcomes.

About our work

Many of the ideas in this handbook come from work on the ground with communities, especially in areas where multiple large clean energy projects are being built.

At Community Power Agency, we've worked across all states and closely with people in the New England in New South Wales and Western Downs in Queensland, as well as various parts of Central Victoria, regional Tasmania and Queensland.

This work has supported local leaders and groups to work together and drive progress on what matters to them and their communities.

This handbook also draws on work of other organisations, such as RE-Alliance, the First Nations Clean Energy Network, The Energy Charter, The Next Economy and the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal among others.

Who is this for?

This handbook is for community members, connectors and leaders who want to get involved in shaping how the clean energy shift happens in their region.

We've worked with people across all walks of life in the energy shift. From farmers and ecologists exploring agrisolar and regeneration opportunities; businesses and workers connecting with new income streams; First Nations people sharing expertise on Country, to councils empowering communities with resources and information.

Whoever you are, this handbook shares approaches, tools and examples from real communities navigating this once-in-a-generation energy transformation.



How to use the handbook

This handbook has been designed to unpack the processes and methods for community *collaboration* to make the most out of renewables.

The main **sections** include information on the ideas, practices, strategies and processes that support collaborative work. In these sections, you'll find many **case studies** from communities across the country and **toolboxes** with practical tips for hosting workshops, facilitating meetings, managing conflict and much more.

The sections of this handbook include:

- **Background:** Provides context related to the energy transition and introduces key concepts for collaborative work.
- **Understanding our regional context:** Describes processes that help build foundational knowledge about place, local people and impacts.
- **Finding our shared goals:** Details processes for finding shared goals and setting priorities.
- **Organising collaborations:** Describes processes for how we can work together.
- **Taking action on what matters:** How to identify and take action on the issues that matter and ways to get traction.
- **Reflecting and adapting our work:** Describes how we can use reflection to build on what's working, stop what isn't and celebrate our achievements.
- **Conclusion:** Summarises key reflections and highlights the opportunity for deeper community collaboration in our regions.

Key terms used in the handbook

Clean energy: Includes renewable energy, such as wind and solar, as well as storage like batteries and hydropower. Clean energy does not include fossil fuels like gas or coal, or nuclear.

Community: For us, community is a group of people within a certain geographic area with an attachment to that area.

Energy developers: Are the companies that develop renewable energy and storage projects, which can be government-owned or private companies.

First Nations people: Is a term we use to describe all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Where possible, we refer to First Nations people by the preferred name of that group. This may relate to their Country or language.

Stakeholders: Refers to any individual, group of individuals, organisation or political entity with an interest or stake in the outcome of a decision.

Transmission companies: Are the companies that develop and manage transmission infrastructure, that connects energy projects to the wider electricity grid.



Snapshot: Five steps to get started

This *Snapshot* summarises the five core steps described in this handbook. But this is just one way and one simple summary. Every community is different and there are many ways of working together. Take this process as a jumping-off point, not an instruction manual.

Step 1: Understand our regional context

See Section 3. *Understanding our regional context*

Start by building foundational knowledge about what's happening in our area:

- Reflect on the places we are in and our relationship to these places
- Research the history, economy and environment of our regions
- Identify which clean energy projects and policies are affecting our area
- Map out who the key people, groups and organisations are
- Seek to understand what matters most to local people
- Find potential collaborators with shared interests

Step 2: Find our shared goals

See Section 4. *Finding our shared goals*

Bring people together to get on the same page:

- Host workshops, community conversations, meetings and gatherings to explore what matters most
- Identify common values and aspirations across different groups
- Establish broad shared goals for our region's future
- Define specific outcomes to work towards together

Step 3: Organise our collaborative efforts

See Section 5. *Organising collaborations*

Put structures in place to work together effectively:

- Clarify how we'll make decisions and communicate as a group
- Consider whether we need support to coordinate
- Share skills and knowledge amongst collaborators
- Manage conflict constructively when it arises

Step 4: Taking action on what matters

See Section 6. *Taking action on what matters*

Focus our collaborative efforts on the issues that matter most in our region:

- Building mutual benefits for agriculture – Work with developers to unlock win-wins for farm productivity, income streams and clean energy
- Protecting biodiversity – Coordinate local expertise and share nature-positive approaches for habitats, ecosystems and species
- Unlocking local jobs and skills – Connect local people with information, training and industry pathways to get clean energy jobs
- Ensuring housing accessibility – Find opportunities for clean energy developments to build housing supply
- Deepening community engagement – Set clear expectations for developers and build community understanding of the energy shift
- Sharing benefits fairly – Work towards regional benefit-sharing approaches that pool funding for long-term community goals
- Respecting First Nations rights and leadership – Enable meaningful participation in the energy shift and learn from First Nations-led projects

Step 5: Reflect and adapt

See Section 7. *Reflecting on our work*

Build in regular opportunities to learn and improve:

- Review what's working and what's not and reflect on our progress
- Celebrate our achievements and recognise contributions
- Adapt our strategies as circumstances change

2. Background

A time of change

We're currently living through a time of dramatic social and environmental change. Internationally, we're seeing greater political instability, leading many people to feel uncertain about the future¹. Technology is developing quickly with AI, new machines and communication technologies transforming businesses and economies². Many people are becoming more isolated as online ways of working³, communicating and connecting become the new normal. And our climate is becoming more unstable, driving more extreme droughts, fires, floods and heatwaves and rising costs of essential goods and services.

At the same time, we have a greater opportunity to connect and collaborate on these complex problems. We have access to information, resources, networks and technologies that can help us drive positive change in our communities.

Whether that's using online spaces to find and connect with like-minded people, looking to make use of new technologies to reduce emissions and unlock new jobs, or using data and harnessing local knowledge to understand, protect and strengthen the places we live in. Many people and communities are coming together to work towards positive outcomes, even in the face of uncertainty.

The energy shift

One area of dramatic change for many communities in Australia is the introduction of large-scale clean energy development.

Wind, solar and other renewable energy projects are essential for reducing climate pollution. At the same time, we need to replace ageing coal-fired power stations with clean alternatives. Australia is fortunate to have abundant renewable resources to power this shift. By combining renewable generation with storage technologies like batteries, we can maintain a stable and reliable grid that provides the same critical services as 'baseload' coal. To better plan this renewable and storage rollout, governments have identified geographic areas for clean energy projects and grid upgrades, sometimes called Renewable Energy Zones (REZs). These areas have been identified as having the necessary sun, wind, and other resources to power these technologies and connect them to the grid, enabling them to power the country⁶.

However, large-scale clean energy development brings significant change for host communities, particularly in REZs where multiple projects are being developed in the same region at the same time. Careful coordination is essential to manage these changes, protect and enhance what matters most to our communities.

Understanding change

Change will affect people and places differently depending on various factors that are often invisible to us. Sometimes events or issues we experience are influenced by deeper processes: local histories of development, experiences of past or current government policies, the effects of boom and bust economies, and personal lived experiences, cultural norms and values^{7,8}.

All these processes have a role in how we experience change. Understanding these factors can help explain why our responses to change differ, identify root causes for the issues we're experiencing and work strategically on our goals.

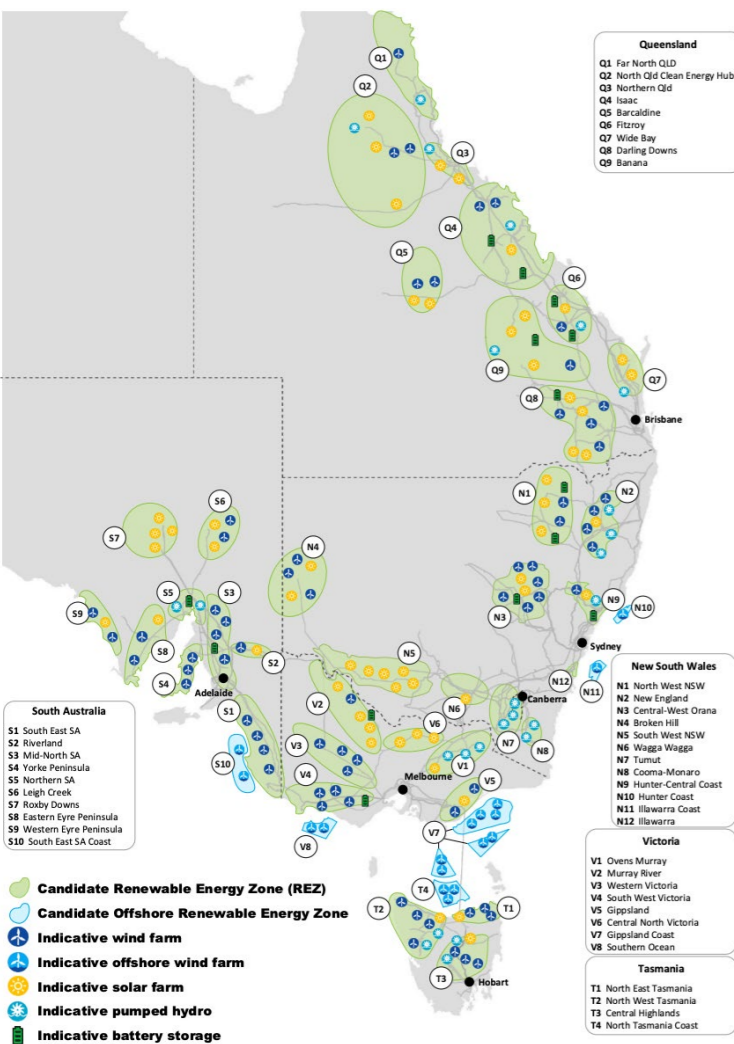


Figure 1. Potential and existing REZs in the National Electricity Market⁵

Case Study 1: Coal closure in the Latrobe Valley

When the Hazelwood power station in the Latrobe Valley closed in 2017, many community members were shocked. Local responses reflected the varied experiences of the coal industry, government policy and the region's history of economic instability.

In the 1990s, privatisation of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria (SEC Victoria) led to the loss of thousands of jobs in the Valley¹⁰. Many workers and the wider community felt powerless as government policy upturned lives and the region's prosperity tumbled. The Hazelwood Power Station closure triggered familiar fears about the community's future. It also raised questions about the stability of coal. While responses differed from person to person, conversations about a transition away from coal became more open.

The Morwell mine fire in 2014 demonstrated to some community members that the industry was too risky to continue. Through this event, fire smoke had caused real and serious health impacts, leading some residents to advocate for a transition to safer

and more sustainable industries. Understandably, others were unable to imagine different industries that could support the region. These differing perspectives were a source of tension and conflict in the Valley¹¹.

Responding to the growing sense of economic uncertainty and instability in the Valley and the announced closure of Hazelwood, the Victorian Government established the Latrobe Valley Authority (LVA). This Authority invested in new industries, training and transition programs. Community and advocacy groups also stepped up, looking to listen, connect and plan steps ahead for the Valley¹³.

These community-led and government efforts helped to address one of the core problems facing the region, ensuring locals had a consistent voice in decisions around the energy shift. The LVA has now been absorbed into state government but the community continues to have a voice in the region's future through council, conferences, collaborations and various community groups.



Hazelwood Coal Power Station, credit: John Englart

Protecting what we value

Values are a core part of how we understand and respond to change; they guide what we protect, what we prioritise and how we work together. We might value things like: strong community connections, caring for the land and wildlife, honouring traditions and cultural practices, having the freedom to make our own choices, living within sustainable limits of the planet, or prioritising secure and stable livelihoods.

When something we value is at risk of changing, it is not uncommon for strong emotions to arise. For instance, people may experience fear, anger and frustration at the prospect of large changes to their community due to new energy projects¹⁴. These feelings are natural - they come from a desire to protect the places and people that matter most.

However, when we take proactive steps and action to protect or strengthen something we care about through collaboration, this creates a sense of connection, hope and empowerment¹⁵. Recognising these values early can help find common ground for collaboration and shared solutions to manage the changes posed by large-scale clean energy and grid developments.

Toolbox 1: Common themes in clean energy development

In Victoria, engagement activities were undertaken with communities to gather their feedback on proposed REZs as part of the Victorian Transmission Plan process¹⁶. Through surveys and consultation activities, the most common priorities included:

- Sharing impacts from the energy shift fairly, not just in regions
- Good planning for transmission projects
- Ensuring opportunities to have a meaningful say
- Protecting agriculture and land use productivity
- Consideration and feedback on different energy sources
- REZ design considerations
- Protecting biodiversity and the natural environment
- Regional economic development
- Avoiding deepening natural hazard vulnerability

In Community Power Agency's work across REZs, we have heard many of these before, as well as the importance of maintaining connection to Country for First Nations peoples, housing to accommodate workers, avoiding road congestion from clean energy construction activities, supporting greater workforce development and coordination, and enabling community participation and ownership.

Community-led regional collaboration

One way to manage change is through community-led regional collaboration. This approach is place-based¹⁷, meaning that it recognises that no two communities are the same, and that we, as community members, are the experts of our towns and places. Because of this, how we manage change and support better outcomes must be driven by the insights, needs and aspirations of local people and local places.

For many communities, this concept isn't new. Collaboration is at the heart of how

many regional or remote areas come together, support one another and make positive change. But for others this can seem like a daunting task. Either way, it can still be hard work.

The following sections describe an approach to facilitate community-led collaboration. This involves: deepening our understanding of our regional context, organising with others to collaborate and set goals, taking action on the issues that matter to us and reflecting on our work.

Toolbox 2: Resourcing and funding

Work in the clean energy shift at the local scale is complex and often under-resourced, requiring voluntary efforts and / or funding to support our efforts. This funding pays for the time, materials and inputs needed to connect, collaborate and engage with a large group of people and organisations.

Funding may come from:

- State and federal grant programs
- Philanthropic funds and donors who prioritise community participation, climate and energy projects.
- Industry partnerships with developers or network operators, who may support engagement, benefit-sharing, or biodiversity initiatives

- Local councils, which may offer community grants for engagement or cultural projects related to energy. In some instances, council may also employ and resource community organisers in this space.
- Business organisations, such as regional development organisations and chambers of commerce.
- Local environment centres or sustainability groups who may be interested in partnering or supporting local efforts.

3. Understanding our regional context

It's useful to have a foundational understanding of what clean energy development might mean for our region and local people. To do this, it's important to get a clear sense of the context we're working in, what changes might come from these developments, who might be affected by these changes, and to find potential collaborators.

Learning about place, policy and people

There are lots of factors influencing how our communities respond to, and are affected by, clean energy development. Considering these factors can help us understand why large-scale renewables, storage and grid upgrades are being deployed in our area, what past issues or sensitivities we need to be aware of, what work has already been done and who might want to be involved in collaborating for positive outcomes.

As building blocks for this understanding, it's good to consider the following key factors:

- **Place:** Refers to the geographical scope, economy, history and local environment.
- **Policy:** Refers to the local or state government policies, politics, programs and projects influencing our region.
- **People:** Is focused on the key stakeholders and relationships in the region.

These factors often influence each other. For example, we might know that affordable housing is a problem in our region, because of people moving from the city and general price increases. There might be council policies being developed, supporting granny flats or new residential areas, but change is slow and several young families in our region are finding it tough¹⁸. With this context, housing might be a key issue we want to collaborate on.

One tool to map out these factors is to write a 'context narrative' which we've described in Toolbox 3: Building understanding.



Toolbox 3: Building understanding

A context narrative is a good way to understand the local factors and dynamics that may be at play in our region before we start collaborating. It helps us see what's happening, who's involved, and what issues might matter most to different people and groups.

To create a context narrative, start by doing some basic research online and/or discussing these topics with others. To build this context narrative, explore three key factors:

1. Place: Understand the history and setting

- What major events or changes have shaped the region?
- How has colonisation shaped the area?
- Are there differences between towns, localities or sub-regions?
- What economic influences shape the region?
- What long-standing issues affect the area?
- What natural features and ecology are present such as threatened species, waterways or recreation areas?

2. Policy: Look at the bigger picture

- What policies, regulations, plans or projects are influencing clean energy in this area?
- How decisions about these projects are made, what sorts of planning processes they go through and who oversees these?

3. People: Map the key groups and relationships

- Who are the First Nations groups and Traditional Owners in the area?
- What different demographics and cultures are dominant in the region, and where?
- What local groups, organisations or institutions are active in the energy shift or may want to be involved?
- What local concerns exist about development and/or the energy shift?
- Who influences decisions about clean energy projects?
- Who else might play a role in outcomes?
- Whose voices are often left out of decision making and how can they be included?

We've provided a brief example of a context narrative for the New England Renewable Energy Zone in Toolbox 4.

Toolbox 4: Context narrative for the New England Renewable Energy Zone

The New England region lies in northern inland NSW and is known for its high country, deep forests, and pastoral lands. The region's geography means that it has strong wind and solar resources, which contributed to its declaration as a REZ in December 2021.

Since then, there has been sharp growth in renewable and storage projects. At the time of writing (October 2025) 43 solar, wind, battery and hydro projects are at various stage of development, with 7 operational, 1 under construction, 10 approved, 19 in planning and 6 more being investigated¹⁹.

The government body coordinating the New England REZ is EnergyCo. However, EnergyCo initially had a technical focus and did not engage proactively with communities. Regional councils, such as Armidale, Glen Innes Severn, Inverell Tamworth, Uralla, and Walcha, collaborated

early on to establish their own priorities to help manage the changes that would come from development.

In addition, local leadership from community development practitioners and community groups has been a central part of this REZs development. Groups have been established to collaborate on clean energy job development and local biodiversity considerations, with members from local businesses, not-for-profits, service providers, educational facilities, sustainability groups, ecologists, First Nations groups and others. These groups have worked on issues that mattered to them, seeking to find solutions and improve planning, development and benefit-sharing opportunities across the region.



Understanding impacts and concerns

Clean energy developments lead to changes or “impacts” – many positive, and some that communities may prefer to avoid. Importantly, every project will have different impacts, and when managed well, can leave our communities better off on the whole.

When we lack information or don’t have much of a say over these impacts, this can leave people with concerns. These concerns often reflect local history, economic influences, experiences, relationships and our personal values and will vary from person to person and place to place. Local concerns might also flag challenging impacts that need to be addressed, and our proactive efforts can shape these projects for the better.

Common impact themes we’ve come across, include:

- **Biodiversity:** Habitat loss or regeneration opportunities, connectivity of habitat and protecting waterways
- **Culture:** Access to Country, heritage, protecting sacred places, Traditional Knowledge and land management, and change in the community
- **Agriculture and land use:** Farm management, land availability and productivity, complementary uses, resilience and sustainability
- **Jobs and economies:** Stable income, access to new jobs and training

- **Transport:** Increased traffic, road impacts and accidents
- **Natural hazards:** Fire risk and storm impacts to energy systems
- **Benefit sharing:** Access to real and meaningful benefits, longevity, equity and fairness
- **Housing:** Ensuring accessible and affordable housing for residents and workers

Understanding what positive or negative impacts are priorities in our community can support constructive conversations on how the clean energy shift could support our region.

People, groups and relationships

There are a variety of common groups, people, rights holders and institutions that we’ll likely interact with when working in areas with large-scale clean energy developments. We generally call these “stakeholders”²⁰.

These can include, but are not limited to community members, organisations, businesses, services, agencies, government and First Nations peoples and groups^a.

Clarifying these different stakeholders and institutions helps us understand our social context better, including who is in our region and how they might relate to the common interests or concerns we’re identifying.

For example, we may find that several groups are already working to address potential impacts. This could look like a local Landcare group collaborating with a clean energy developer on a tree planting project, or council staff coordinating developer funds for community benefit.

Understanding who is in our region, the issues they care about and in some instances, how we can contact and connect with them, is a critical foundation for community-led collaboration.

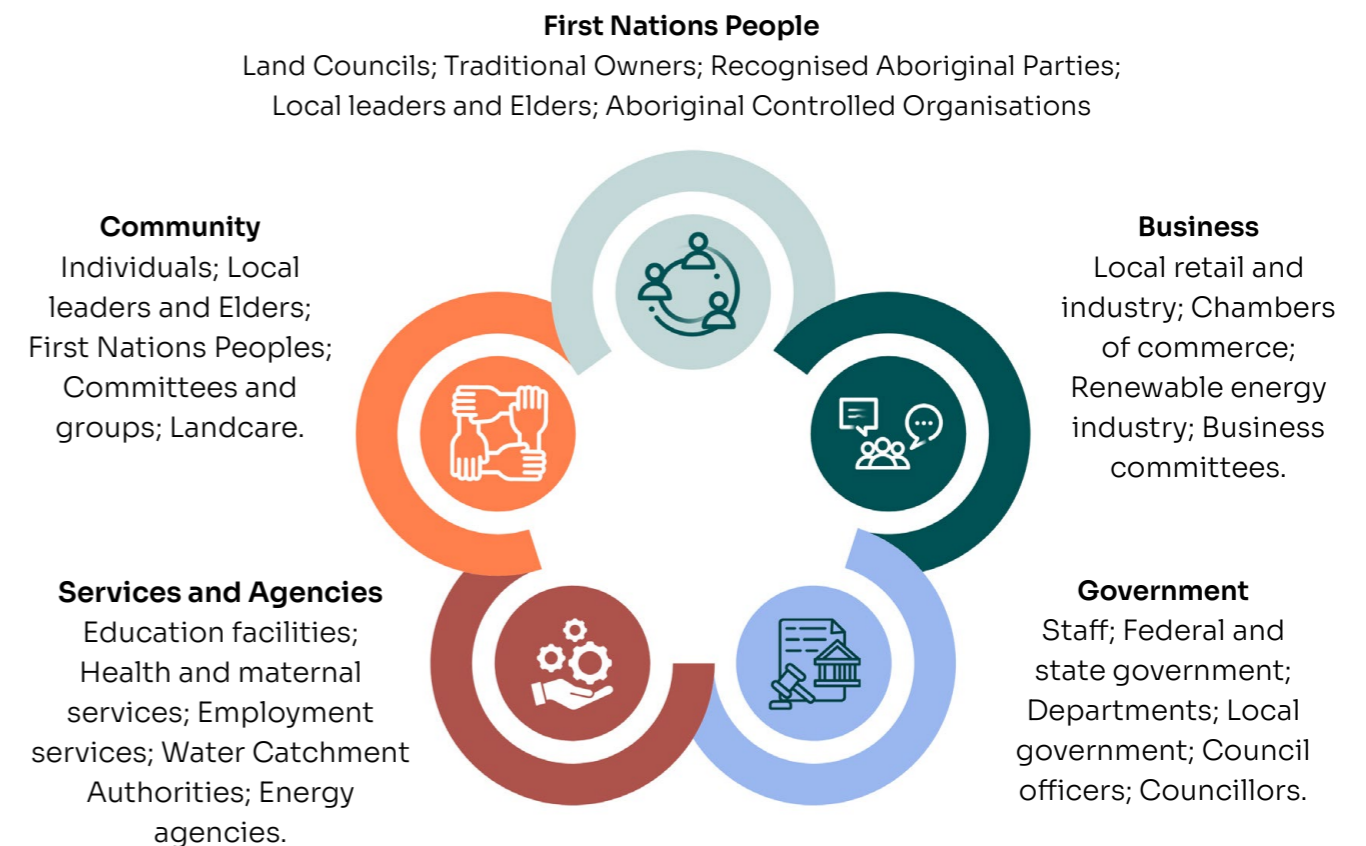



Figure 2. Common people, groups and organisations involved in clean energy

^a First Nations people have specific rights as Indigenous people, and as Traditional Owners. Engagement must enable free, prior and informed consent on decisions that influence First Nations people. For more information, see *Respecting First Nations People and Self-Determination*.



Toolbox 5: Mapping stakeholders and our local strengths

In some instances we might need help to identify the people, groups, organisations and resources that could influence our collaborative efforts. Various tools can help us dig in to this detail in a structured way, including:

- **Stakeholder Mapping:** Identifies anyone who has something to gain or lose from a project or initiative. It involves listing stakeholders and categorising them by their influence and interest over a project and considering their potential impact²¹.
- **Actor Mapping:** Identifies people and groups who might want to be 'active' on specific issues. It involves listing common issues, identifying who is connected to these issues and looking for relationships, gaps and overlaps in interests²².
- **Asset Mapping:** Identifies community strengths and resources that people value, ranging from individuals to physical buildings. It involves groups coming together to look at real maps and plotting out these different assets²³.

For more information on these tools see the references at the end of this handbook.

4. Finding our shared goals

Establishing shared goals

Our shared goals and intended outcomes help bring people together and clarify our aspirations for our local region. These goals are often broad and reflect our values. They describe the bigger picture we're collectively working toward. Some examples include:

- Wanting to see clean energy done well, with a new benefit locally
- Regional areas grow and thrive
- Communities can access services and live well
- Everyone gets a fair go
- People have a say in what affects them

Intended outcomes are the smaller, practical steps that help us reach our shared goals. They describe the opportunities that we're working towards in more detail. For example, some intended outcomes might include:

- Local businesses benefit from new income streams
- Benefits are shared equitably through the community
- Workforce and procurement opportunities flow through to local people
- Our young people have a bigger range of work opportunities at their doorstep

Toolbox 6: Running a collaborative session or workshop

Collaborative sessions are key to getting on the same page and enabling work down the track. A common approach is to host a workshop. These can be online or face-to-face, but generally, in-person is best for building understanding and growing relationships that help strengthen our work.

To hold an effective workshop, we:

- **Consider the purpose of the workshop:** What is the main aim of the session?
- **Identify our priorities:** Do we need a decision on something or do we want to focus on our relationships and getting to know each other?
- **Understand how much time we'll need:** Do we need a short or long meeting, and if so, will we have breaks?
- **Communicating our agenda:** Do we have this written up and can we share it with everyone?

- **Coordinate with others:** Do we need help from others or venue spaces to deliver this session?
- **Prepare for the meeting:** Do we need background material, slides or presentations from others to help everyone get on the same page?
- **Ensure inclusive participation:** How do we facilitate discussion and ensure different voices are heard and understood?

After a workshop or collaborative session, it's good practice to share our outcomes and provide everyone with an opportunity to give feedback; both on what we achieved and how the session was run. This can help us improve our workshops over time.

For more information on preparing and running a workshop, have a look at The Commons, Social Change library²⁴.



Working together to define goals and outcomes

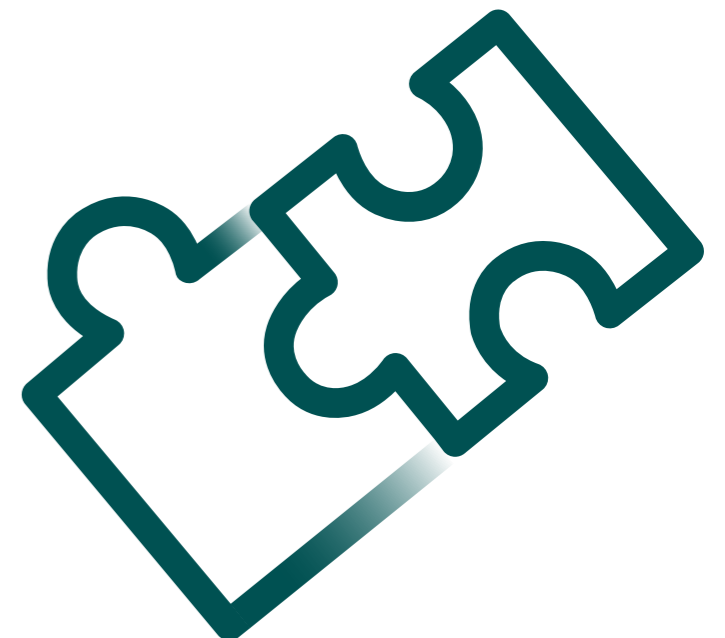
Defining shared goals and our intended outcomes requires getting on the same page. The approach we take to define these goals will depend on lots of factors, including the number of people involved, the resources we have and our existing processes for coming together.

For example, we could:

- Collaborate with council to organise a large community workshop looking to bring together a diverse array of community members and other stakeholders
- Enlist the support of skilled facilitators, community organisers or engagement practitioners to help design a session with representatives of our community
- Use surveys or pop-up stalls to gather feedback on proposed goals and outcomes
- Have a series of 'kitchen table' conversations or creative, information sessions or screenings with small groups

Each approach will present its own benefits and challenges. However you decide to collaborate, you'll want to explore questions like:

- What do we want our region to look like in the future?
- How could clean energy contribute positively to our community?
- What impacts do we want to avoid or respond to?
- What local opportunities could we act on?
- Who else should we involve to ensure diverse voices are heard?



Toolbox 7: Listening to concerns

Sometimes, establishing our shared goals and outcomes can be challenging if local concerns are already heightened. These concerns often come from real fears about impacts to our community and way of life. In some cases, these concerns can derail our efforts and move us towards “us vs them” thinking. This can shut down our ability to find good solutions.

For those community members who are taking a more active coordinating role, listening to and seeking to understand local concerns is an important part of our work.

Deep listening, without judgement, helps to improve trust and strengthens our relationships, which are the bedrocks of collaboration. Additionally, understanding these concerns can give us useful insight into real issues that matter most in our region and to identify solutions. By listening, we can check if concerns signpost local impacts that could be addressed by our collaborative efforts.



Getting support from others

The process of working together to establish shared goals can be hard work if you're starting from scratch. Creating collaborative forums to find common ground takes real skill, patience, time and resources. For many communities, existing organisations and groups may be able to help. For example, local development bodies and councils, environment and sustainability groups, Land Councils and other organisations may be able to offer their experience, knowledge or valuable resources, like meeting spaces or funding opportunities.

In *Section 5. Organising collaborations*, we elaborate on processes that can help us build our own collaborative efforts and connect with others working towards shared goals in the energy shift.

Case Study 2: Building principles for clean energy development in Hay, NSW

Hay Shire Council in NSW's Western Riverina region took a proactive approach to clean energy development when the area was designated part of the South West REZ in late 2022. Early on, there was a lot of uncertainty about large-scale clean energy projects, with many people worried about impacts to the agriculture industry²⁵.

Hay's Economic Development Manager Alison McLean partnered with RE-Alliance to develop a strategy. They started with “Renewable Energy 101” workshops for councillors, explaining the energy shift and providing clear information. A smaller group of key community members was then invited to a meeting to air out questions and concerns. Council then organised public meetings to build local understanding of the changes and opportunities these clean energy projects might offer²⁶.

Public meetings led to the development of a set of key principles that captured local expectations from clean energy projects in the region²⁷. These principles included the impacts that developers should avoid and the opportunities they could support, including cheaper power bills, access to household solar

and batteries, support for social services, and affordable housing. Developers were grateful for clear principles and have committed to subsidised power bills and shared funding to support regional priorities²⁸.

The Hay community now has a more collaborative relationship with developers, fostering a clean energy transition grounded by local goals.



5. Organising collaborations

Collaborating with other people, organisations and industry representatives is core to achieving our strategies in the energy shift. To do this well, we have to get organised.

The aim of organising is two-fold. For some, we're looking to meet and collaborate with like-minded people on the issues that matter to us. For others, we may be looking to connect and cross-pollinate people across different issues. Both are core parts of community-led collaboration and help progress towards our shared goals.

The following section seeks to describe how we can form collaborations and put in place processes that help us meet and work together.

Toolbox 8: Place-based initiatives and 'backbone' support

In "place based" initiatives - i.e. community collaborations that are working towards shared community goals - it's common for there to be a 'backbone' organisation or role²⁹.

The backbone helps in coordination, facilitation and administration for the broader collaboration. Generally, they have consistent funding and time for these activities. Depending on the community - councils, development bodies, sustainability or environment groups, community organisations and Land Councils might be suited for these sorts of roles. Alternatively, responsibilities could be split across different organisations and people.

If you'd like to find out more about place based initiatives we encourage you to review the QCOSS Place Based Approaches for Community Change Guide³⁰.

Forming collaborations

As we start taking action, we're likely to see a patchwork of existing groups, committees, organisations and individuals that are, or would like to take action on key issues that matter to them. In fact, clean energy development has prompted many new groups and collaborations to respond to these changes.

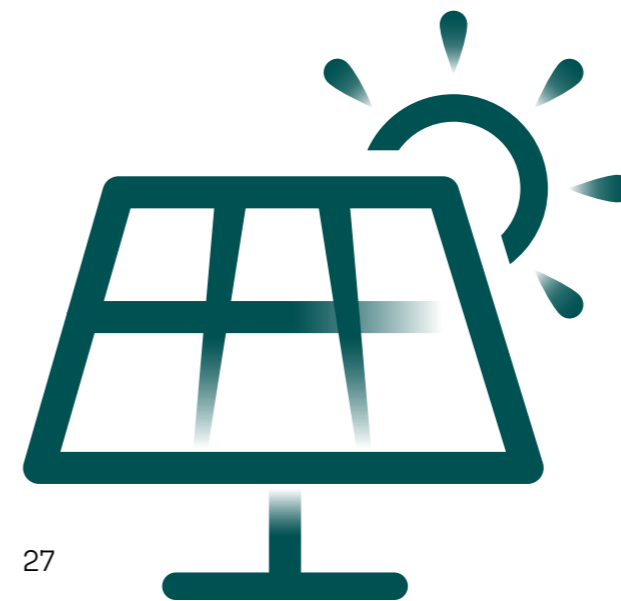
To avoid duplication and build on local strengths we'll need to plan how we connect and collaborate with these different people and groups over time. In some instances we'll want to create new groups or forums to address key topics or issues that matter to us.

Toolbox 9: Important principles for collaboration

The processes and practices we create for our collaborative efforts shape how well we work together. Some key principles for effective collaboration include:

- **Transparency:** Being honest, clear and communicating our interests and aspirations
- **Inclusivity:** Making space for different perspectives, with attention to the needs of underrepresented or marginalised groups
- **Consistency:** Being present over time
- **Accountability:** Doing what we said we would do
- **Adaptability:** Being flexible as things change

These processes can help us create a foundation of respect and trust, strengthening relationships and making it easier to resolve conflict. They can also improve how we make decisions and share responsibilities fairly.



Clarifying our ways of working

Our ways of working will look different depending on the group and collaboration forum we're in. For instance, how a Landcare group works in their own meetings will likely differ to how a reference group with representatives from Landcare, farming bodies and ecologists meets and works together. These different collaboration forums will need their own processes, as determined by the people involved.

The formality of the processes will depend on the scale and scope of work we're undertaking. Generally, if fewer people and groups are involved, something less formal will be sufficient. Where many groups are coming together, more structure and planning might be needed.

The important thing is that as we collaborate, we have confidence and trust in each other and a sense of how we're working together to achieve what matters to us.

Questions we may want to consider when establishing our collaborative processes include:

Decision making

- What approach will we use to make decisions? For instance, do we need consensus, majority support, or something less formal?
- Where will decisions be made? In regular meetings, workshops or other platforms?
- Do we need to keep a record of our decisions? If so, where will we keep these?

Communication

- What expectations do we have for respectful and clear communication?
- What communication tools will we use such as email, text or shared platforms?
- How will we share our goals, plans and progress with others?

Responsibility and accountability

- How will we decide who does what?
- How will we share and follow through on responsibilities?
- How will we keep track of who is doing what? For instance, using meeting minutes or other shared documents?



Toolbox 10: Facilitation

Good facilitation can help support better collaboration by making our meetings and workshops more reflective, balanced and thoughtful.

Facilitation involves keeping everyone on task, listening to what's coming up, creating opportunities for voices to be heard and supporting group problem-solving. Facilitators are also often involved in planning or structuring workshops and meetings.

Some skills that make for stronger facilitation include:

- Deep listening skills
- Respect and confidence in those involved
- Assertiveness when needed
- Ability to pay attention to subtlety, i.e. what is not being said? How do people feel?
- Neutrality and not picking sides
- Ensuring that all voices are heard

To learn more about facilitation and to access some good resources on facilitation tools, take a look at the Seeds of Change, Facilitating Meetings: A Guide to Making your Meetings Effective, Inclusive and Enjoyable, on the Commons Social Change Library³¹.

Sharing skills for collaboration

Everyone brings unique knowledge, skills and expertise to collaborative work, and when shared, these can strengthen our collective efforts. Some important skills for collaborative work in the clean energy shift include:

- **People and engagement skills:** Facilitation, planning, event management
- **Communications:** Writing for traditional and online media, graphic design
- **Knowledge:** Experience in energy, renewables, our environment, economy or other areas of interest
- **Fundraising:** Experience raising funds, applying for grants and community crowdfunding

We can share our knowledge and skills through things like:

- One-on-one chats
- Providing online and physical resources relevant to our work
- Running workshops or skill-share sessions
- Buddy systems that pair an experienced person with a person wanting to learn

In terms of sharing our knowledge, the critical step is having a sense of who knows what. This involves understanding who you're collaborating with. For instance:

- What have these peers done for work, in their hobbies or for recreation?
- Are these past experiences, networks or insights relevant to issues we're currently tackling?

Knowing a little more about each other and what we're working on can make it easier to connect, share and recombine our knowledge and insights to progress collective goals.

Toolbox 11: Managing conflict

Conflict can arise in collaborative work because different stakeholders often bring different priorities, values, and lived experiences to the table. While these differences are a natural part of collaboration and can strengthen outcomes when managed well, they can also lead to tension or mistrust if not addressed constructively.

We can help manage conflict through:

- Facilitation that helps everyone be heard in a way that is inclusive and equitable
- Creating spaces where differences, concerns and issues can be expressed
- Creating terms of reference or other documents to establish our ways of working

- Coming back to our values, motivations and shared goals when we're at meetings, and wider social events
- Maintaining a constructive mindset that looks for solutions and ways forward

Where conflict can't be avoided, we can always create alternative strategies:

- Acknowledging that a conflict exists, but highlighting what is shared
- Establishing clear steps for raising and solving issues
- Introducing spaces where conflicting parties don't have to engage directly
- Seeking experienced intermediaries to liaise between conflicting parties
- Seeking external mediation



6. Taking action on what matters

Taking action is about communities coming together to tackle the issues that matter most and move closer to our shared goals.

While issues we care about will differ from place to place and person to person, we've noticed some common themes. These themes often reflect the building blocks that make life good - our food, a healthy environment, meaningful work, a place to live and a say in decisions that affect us.

In particular, communities have told us these priorities often rise to the top:

- Building mutual benefits for agriculture
- Protecting biodiversity in the energy shift
- Unlocking local jobs and skills
- Ensuring housing stays accessible
- Respecting First Nations people and supporting self-determination
- Sharing funds for regional benefits
- Deepening engagement so everyone has a real say

The following section explores how communities around Australia are already acting on these themes - what's worked, what's been learned and how others can adapt these ideas to their own place. There's no one-size-fits-all formula, but plenty of inspiration for local collaboration.

Toolbox 12: What are strategies?

Strategies are big-picture plans focused on achieving outcomes. For instance, if our goal is that 'Local people benefit from new income streams', one strategy might be to help local tradespeople to build skills for clean energy jobs.

Some practical ways to make this happen include:

- Connecting local schools, TAFE and industry to help build training pathways
- Hosting or joining job expos to highlight job opportunities
- Presenting or meeting with schools, universities and community organisations to spark interest
- Developing information resources, like pamphlets, publications

Building mutual benefits for agriculture

Many regions hosting clean energy development are areas of agricultural production, with active farming industries and economies³² - so it's vital that clean energy and agriculture grow together, not compete.

Farmers for Climate Action recently surveyed producers in REZs. Many saw real potential benefits, such as extra income from hosting projects, more drought resilience, lower local energy costs and better regional infrastructure³³. And research backs this up, with estimates that large-scale wind and solar projects may deliver between \$9.7-11.7 billion in landholder payments, community and council contributions over 2024-2034³⁴.

At the same time, farmers have clear questions about how projects affect land use, safety, productivity and the long-term health of their businesses. They also want confidence that developers will engage respectfully and draw on local knowledge from the start³⁵.

Around the country, communities are finding ways to make clean energy and farming work side by side. The ideas below show how local people have built relationships with developers, protected farmland and unlocked shared benefits.



Opportunities and strategies

Building relationships between developers and farming stakeholders

Relationships between developers and farming communities is a great way to get on the same page about common issues and growing shared solutions.

Possible approaches:

- Form a local working group with farmers, First Nations people, council representatives, and developers to share information and address issues together
- Encourage developers to employ an agricultural liaison officer who can act as a trusted bridge between the farming community and developer project teams
- Host stalls or information sessions at agricultural shows and field days to discuss projects and hear directly from landholders.

Negotiating fair agreements

Renewables and storage projects need formal agreements with landholders to develop projects on their land. These typically move from 'licence to access' agreements to lease agreements as a project progresses. These agreements will cover different needs for producers and developers, including landholder payments, access and maintenance³⁶.

Possible approaches:

- Landholders can negotiate for good payments, clear access terms, sound construction and decommissioning processes.
- Share information and experiences with landholder agreements to make the process easy for other landholders to navigate.
- Negotiate for projects to be built to enable ongoing use for grazing and/ or cropping.

Exploring opportunities for greater farm and energy productivity

Clean energy can present an opportunity for farm productivity. For example, agrisolar systems can enable animal grazing nearby or under solar panels and some have crops planted among solar arrays. Other energy sources like bioenergy can turn agricultural waste into fuel providing additional farm income³⁷. These models can help farmers keep farming their land while earning income from clean energy projects.

Possible approaches:

- Research and share learnings on agrisolar projects and opportunities with developers and producers.
- Host or attend agrisolar demonstration projects.

Case Study 3: Agrisolar in Dubbo, NSW

A Dubbo farmer, Tom Warren, in NSW proposed an agrisolar model when clean energy developer Neoen approached him in 2013³⁸. The landowner noted that Neoen's projects internationally had allowed for grazing amongst their solar systems. He worked with the developer to create an agreement that would enable him to continue grazing under the panels and provide clear access rights, compensation and responsibilities between the two parties.

This system has supported both the farm and the developer. Neoen has reduced the frequency of mowing due to sheep grazing, while Tom Warren is earning another income stream from the lease and noticing improvements in pasture from condensation coming off solar arrays³⁹.



Protecting biodiversity in the energy shift

Biodiversity is essential for the well-being of people, animals and ecosystems across the globe⁴⁰. One of the biggest risks to biodiversity is climate change, as shifts in temperature and weather, and extreme events put pressure on these ecosystems^{41,42}. Addressing climate change and biodiversity loss requires many changes, including a shift from emission-producing coal and gas to a clean energy system⁴³.

Unfortunately, poorly planned and managed clean energy projects can lead to things like habitat clearing, ecosystem fragmentation, erosion from water run-off and concentration and disruptions to flora and fauna including birds and bats. To reduce these issues, federal, state and territory governments have planning processes

where projects must assess risks and plan for appropriate solutions⁴⁴. Community participation in these processes is essential to shape good outcomes.

Clean energy projects can also create opportunities for greater biodiversity. For instance, researchers have found that some solar farms have led to increased fungal, bacterial and plant diversity⁴⁵, and some developers have invested in programs and projects that create “nature-positive” solutions.

Many communities and clean energy developers are working towards biodiversity-friendly projects and there is a lot we can learn from these efforts. In the next section we describe some of the strategies we’ve seen across the country.



Credit: Andrew Fairney

Opportunities and strategies

Collaborating with clean energy industry and agencies on biodiversity

Early collaboration with clean energy developers and transmission companies can help strengthen environmental planning with local knowledge. Local First Nations people, environmental consultants, ecologists, Landcare and sustainability groups may all have important insights that can help improve biodiversity outcomes.

This knowledge could include: significant species and their behaviour, areas of high or low ecological sensitivity, regional environmental changes, areas suited to offsets, suggestions for environmental management plans and opportunities to strengthen existing conservation initiatives or programs.

Possible approaches:

- Bring together local expertise and other local stakeholders to form biodiversity reference groups.
- Seek early consultation opportunities with energy developers and transmission companies prior to their environmental assessments.
- Advocate to government departments and relevant agencies for a nature-positive approach to development.

Supporting nature-positive approaches

Environmental assessment processes often look to avoid, mitigate, manage and where needed, offset impacts. Additionally, communities can call for ‘nature-positive’ or ‘net-gain’ approaches. These encourage developers and transmission companies to improve biodiversity^{46,47}.

These nature-positive activities could include: introducing pollinator-friendly native plantings, the creation of habitat corridors and riparian zone care, supporting invasive species eradication programs and other activities.

There may also be existing local environmental initiatives that could benefit from funding or other forms of support.

Possible approaches:

- Build local awareness of nature-positive approaches and benefits for the local environment, landholders and developers.
- Engage with developers and landholders early in planning stages, ideally before environmental assessments begin, to encourage nature-positive approaches and coordination across these projects.
- Advocate to the government to consider formalising nature-positive approaches in planning processes.
- Partner with local Landcare and native nurseries to do native plantings.
- Work with local environment groups to host citizen science sessions to monitor progress.

Engaging on management plans and activities

Clean energy projects are required to establish plans to manage environmental impacts⁴⁸. Community organisations, sustainability groups, Landcare or First Nations groups can help inform these plans. However this needs to occur early on, before or during environmental assessments.

Sharing data for better environmental planning

Clean energy and transmission projects collect data through environmental assessments and other planning processes⁴⁹, and build on existing data sets. In our experience, existing data may not always be up to date or reflect local knowledge on the ground. Local knowledge can help ground-truth these early assessment processes.

Data access can also help local conservation groups with their projects and activities. Importantly, data access should not come at the cost of cultural protocols or risk sharing sensitive information.



Spotted Marsh Frog. Credit: Dr Eric Nordberg, University of New England.

Case Study 4: Better biodiversity on Solar Farms Workshops in the New England, NSW

In the New England region in 2024, environmental experts, engagement practitioners, and other local groups came together to address how energy, agriculture, culture and conservation could co-exist.

Several workshops were delivered on-farm and in the community by facilitator Heidi McElnea, ecologists Dave Carr and Eric Nordberg, and a team of collaborators, hosted by Natural Resource Management Groups GLENRAC and Southern New England Landcare.

By bringing expertise into the room, participants were able to workshop

opportunities and challenges for enhancing biodiversity and cultural land management on solar farm sites, while addressing agricultural uses and needs, such as sheep grazing. The workshop format enabled knowledge sharing, bringing together best practice science, land management and First Nations perspectives into this work.

A guide was also provided at these events, which is available for download on the Community Power Agency website⁵⁰.



Unlocking local clean energy jobs and skills

One of the big opportunities from the clean energy shift is the potential for new industries and jobs. Meeting national and state renewable energy targets will require huge growth in different trades and technician roles, professional services, engagement professionals, construction and operations managers, labourers, machine operators and administrative staff.

By 2051, an estimated 52,900 jobs are expected to come from the electricity sector, mostly in wind and solar⁵¹.

While these jobs can boost economic growth and support household wellbeing, clean energy regions face some common challenges in this shift. For instance, making sure there are training pathways for clean energy jobs, retaining local trades and professionals to meet local needs, and tackling employment barriers for women, First Nations peoples, and migrants.

In our work, we've also noticed that community members are often not aware of clean energy jobs and developers don't always have good processes to attract and employ local people.

We've seen how bringing together industry, unions, training providers, business representatives, employment services, job seekers and underrepresented groups can build awareness, skills and employment pathways. With coordination across these different stakeholders we can unlock fair, stable and rewarding work in the clean energy shift.

In the next section, we describe some of the strategies we've used to support coordination for new jobs and skills in the clean energy sector.

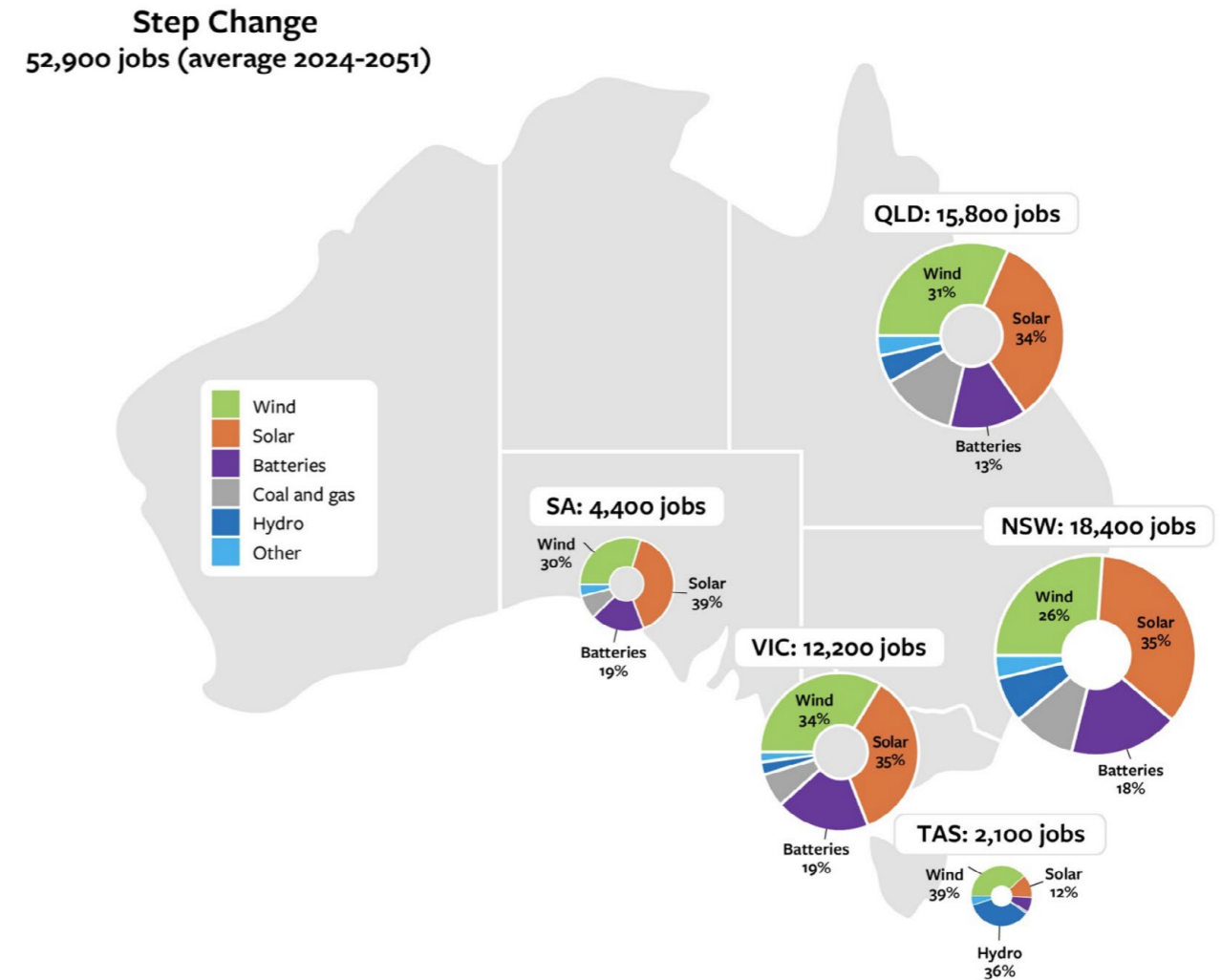


Figure 3. National Electricity Market, average electricity jobs by State, 2023-2050 (Step Change)

Opportunities and strategies

Understanding the local workforce and employment pathways

Every community has a different mix of industries, employers, education facilities and businesses that could benefit from clean energy opportunities. But there might be barriers in terms of skills, training, procurement processes, personal factors or issues of discrimination that hold back clean energy employment opportunities. Understanding these factors can help us fill the gaps and grow clean energy employment.

Possible approaches:

- Conduct outreach to local unions, businesses and existing or potential workers and research to understand the jobs and services that are needed, the skills and services we have and what training is available.
- Map gaps or barriers and think about what training, skills or support might be needed.



Heidi McElnea at the Armidale Secondary School Careers Fair, 2023

Collaboration between industry, workers and community

Workers, employment service providers, First Nations enterprises, unions, education facilities, councils and community representatives can all play a role in making the most of clean energy jobs. Bringing these different stakeholders together can help us work through employment barriers and build job pathways.

Possible approaches:

- Establish working groups to meet regularly and work through opportunities and challenges.
- Create plans for community employment pathways.

Engaging with developers on local employment

Many developers will have local procurement and employment targets. In some cases meeting these targets will be managed by contractors. It's important to work with local clean energy developers and their contractors to understand their targets and collaborate to meet or beat these and communicate potential benefits of doing so. There is also a need to coordinate between different projects to avoid boom-bust employment cycles.

Benefits for clean energy developers include: reduced travel costs of their employees and contractors, avoiding building as much temporary accommodation and improving their local reputation.

Possible approaches:

- Invite developers into jobs and skills working groups to collaborate on employment.
- Build relationships between the clean energy industry and service providers, employment services and skills programs.
- Communicate the benefits of local employees and contractors.
- Upskill local businesses so they can tender to provide supplies or services for clean energy projects.

Developing pathways for underrepresented groups

Some groups of people face specific barriers to employment due to gender, race, experiences of poverty and/or discrimination. These groups include women, First Nations people, people with disabilities, LGBTQI+ people, young people and those experiencing long-term unemployment.

Different groups will face different barriers so listening to their specific needs is a good place to start. Some examples include: care responsibilities, needing flexible training opportunities, culturally safe workplaces, having access to personal identification and free or low cost training.

Possible approaches:

- Reach out to relevant social service providers or representative bodies to understand barriers and build relationships.
- Connect with people in our community who are part of these groups and listen for insights into what is effective for their unique needs.
- Identify existing programs that could be supported.
- Partner or support new programs, projects and initiatives that reduce barriers.

Community and schools outreach and connection

Many people are unaware of the jobs, services and materials needed for clean energy developments. Reaching out to community, school and target cohorts and providing information is a good first step to address this gap. It's wise to think about how these different groups might communicate and the best ways we can reach them.

Possible approaches:

- Creating information resources, like flyers, postcards and newsletters.
- Provide information to schools and career counsellors.
- Host demonstration events or expos to connect people, industry and training providers.

Case Study 5: Jobs and skills development in the New England, NSW

In the New England region, the 'New England Skills and Workforce Working Group' formed to enable collaboration and work towards local jobs and employment outcomes.

The working group brings together local organisations, state government agencies, employment services providers, education facilities, community service groups, First Nations-led businesses and others. This group discusses and plans ways to make the most of the employment opportunities that clean energy development offers.

Working group members researched the trades, construction jobs, professional

and supplier services required by the clean energy sector, but realised that local people didn't know about these opportunities, or how to access them. Identifying this gap, they started planning opportunities to connect local people with the clean energy industry and share information about these jobs.

The working group collaborated with other local actors to organise the New England Renewable Energy Careers Expo. Over 100 local people came along, including high school students and small business owners, who were able to meet and ask questions of developers and employment services⁵².



Stallholders at the New England Renewable Energy Careers Expo, March 2025

Ensuring housing accessibility

Many regional and remote communities are struggling with housing affordability, availability and quality. Housing is a complex issue with government policies, out-migration to regional communities, and larger economic changes all playing a role. As large clean energy developments often involve construction and other workers relocating, this can put more pressure on local housing markets⁵³.

There are different strategies that can help tackle this issue, ranging from proactive planning from developers, local government amendments and zoning, and community or social housing models.

Solutions for housing affordability stand the best chance of success when they bring together community members, housing providers, local government and clean energy industry. In the following section, we describe some of the collaborative strategies communities and councils are working on.



Opportunities and strategies

Worker accommodation to support long-term housing

Developers need to plan worker accommodation for their projects. Engaging with community members, council and other relevant agencies can help improve these plans so they support current and future housing needs.

Possible approaches:

- Council can identify locations suitable for temporary accommodation developments that can one day transition to new residential areas⁵⁴.
- Collaborate with developers on temporary housing and how it could support long term accommodation. For instance, connecting services needed for future developments⁵⁵.
- Identify other sites that could be retrofitted to offer temporary accommodation.

Planning changes to support more housing

Councils may consider changes to local planning regulations, zoning and assessment processes to encourage and enable more housing.

Possible approaches for councils:

- Reduce lot sizes to enable more houses to be built in the same area
- Allow secondary dwellings, like granny flats, on existing lots⁵⁶.

Calling for coordination approaches

Importantly, coordination across clean energy projects can help to reduce peaks and troughs in worker populations. Government and agencies overseeing clean energy developments could work with developers to sequence projects to create a steadier rate of construction.

Local training and employment

Another avenue to reduce housing pressure is supporting greater local training and employment in clean energy projects. Attracting more workers from the local area developments would have fewer people moving or flying in for these projects.

Supporting affordable housing through developer funds

Developer funds may be able to contribute to local housing initiatives or programs, or create dedicated programs to support housing accessibility. Some developers have supported the uptake of residential solar and battery systems to reduce household energy costs, while others have provided direct subsidies for electricity bills.

Case Study 6: Planning for housing in Hay Shire, NSW

Through in-depth engagement with Hay residents and support from The Next Economy, Hay Shire Council established a series of principles for clean energy developers, with housing affordability, availability and stable supply being key issues⁵⁷.

Hay Shire Council has seen a rapid increase in housing costs, rising from roughly 11.6% of total annual household expenses in 2018-19 to 18.9% in 2023-24 and an increasingly tight rental market⁵⁸. With the prospect of an influx of temporary workers, local residents were clear that clean energy development in the region should support quality, affordable, long-term housing. Any solution put forward needed to support stability and avoid a 'boom and bust' cycle of housing demand or supply.

Council has been active on this front, engaging with developers to ensure adequate housing solutions are implemented, while also looking for opportunities to increase the supply of affordable housing through planning and investment initiatives.

One key focus area has been working with developers to establish worker accommodation that could transition to long-term housing and reduce pressure on the local market⁵⁹. In addition, Council has reduced lot sizes to support greater housing density⁶⁰ and supported innovative housing models that could provide more affordable housing.



Community engagement

Community engagement is a planned process that works with people on an issue, project or proposal that affects them⁶¹. In clean energy, engagement should start early, offer clear information, be transparent and integrate feedback for better project outcomes.

Engagement may occur at the REZ-level, led by infrastructure planners or agencies, or at the project level, usually led by developers. At the REZ level, engagement might look for input on transmission corridors, REZ boundaries and information on the study region. At the project level, developers are interested in the views of landholders, neighbours and close community members, looking to grow support and secure planning approvals.

While engagement is important, some communities are finding it hard to keep up, especially when several projects are being developed at the same time. This is called 'consultation fatigue'⁶². This fatigue gets worse when engagement is poor and doesn't provide clear information, listen and respond to local concerns, or isn't culturally appropriate for First Nations people.

Good community engagement can make or break projects. When it's done well, relationships are built, trust grows, issues can be addressed and real benefits can be unlocked. In the following section we describe some of the strategies communities can take to support positive community engagement on the clean energy shift.

Toolbox 13: Community engagement principles and concepts

Community engagement often has some common concepts and principles that inform this work. For instance, words like "inform", or "consult", mean specific things about how we can participate in a project or process.

- **Inform:** Provides information but no real opportunities to have a say
- **Consultation:** Invites feedback but it might not lead to anything.
- **Involvement:** Provides more opportunities for concerns and aspirations to be voiced and commits to reflecting these in decisions.
- **Collaboration:** Builds in our perspectives into projects and involves on-going two way conversations and problem solving.
- **Empowerment:** Communities lead the solutions they want and developers implement what communities decide⁶³.

For clean energy projects, most state guidelines encourage developers to aim to involve impacted communities. In our work, we've supported communities to collaborate on clean energy development. In some instances, community members and groups have started leading their own projects or programs in the clean energy space, which is an example of genuine empowerment.

Opportunities and strategies

Local community engagement staff

Local people may be well-suited to roles in community engagement. Existing relationships, local knowledge and trust all help community engagement staff to capture local concerns and interests and translate these into action. In some instances, employing First Nations people in community engagement roles may be appropriate. For a good example of the benefits of local community engagement staff, see Case Study 9. Building relationships and employment outcomes with Wiradjuri people, NSW.

Build community understanding of the energy shift

Local sustainability, community or environmental groups may be well placed to engage with the wider community on the clean energy shift. As trusted locals, reaching out to address local questions or concerns can bridge information gaps. Other trusted representatives like local councils, regional development organisations, or other groups can support wider engagement on renewables, storage and transmission, leading to more informed conversations.

Engage proactively with clean energy projects

Communicating local expectations on community engagement can improve developer processes. Providing clear principles offers developers clarity and could help simplify engagement processes. Early collaboration amongst the community is needed to establish these principles. A good example of this is provided in Case Study 2: Building principles for clean energy development in Hay, NSW.

Support First Nations participation

First Nations peoples should always have access to culturally safe and appropriate engagement pathways. All projects must adhere to principles of free, prior and informed consent for energy developments on their land. Understanding preferences around engagement channels and protocols is also important for strong First Nations engagement outcomes. Non-indigenous practitioners should seek out cultural awareness training.

For more information on First Nations participation in the clean energy shift, take a look at the First Nations Clean Energy Networks work^b, and the *Respecting First Nations people and self-determination* section of the handbook.

Encourage developer best practice

Communities can provide feedback to developers who are not performing. When engagement issues continue, feedback can be provided to the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner or relevant state authorities to help drive industry-wide improvements. There are also programs and training courses that look to encourage best practice, such as Community Power Agency's Socially Responsible Renewable Energy Development course, delivered in partnership with Griffith University^c.

^b For more on First Nations energy leadership and participation see: <https://www.firstnationscleanenergy.org.au/>

^c For information on the Socially Responsible Renewable Energy Development course, see: <https://cpagency.org.au/professional-training/>

Sharing funds for regional benefits

Community benefit funds from energy developers are another large opportunity for regional and remote communities. According to the Clean Energy Council and Farmers for Climate Action, communities and councils could receive up to \$1.9 billion between 2024 and 2050 from these funds. These figures don't include the lease payments to host landholders, adding \$7-9 billion⁶⁵.

Most developer funds have been delivered at the project level, often including specific payments (or programs) for neighbours, close community members and sometimes the wider region. But this approach hasn't always delivered the best results and several communities are now calling for "Regional Benefit Sharing".

Regional benefit sharing involves bringing community benefit sharing programs together in a region or area. This approach can help communities by pooling funding for longer-term shared goals, rather than small ad hoc projects⁶⁶. In the following section, we describe some of the key steps involved in regional benefit sharing and how to get started.



Opportunities and strategies

Starting a conversation on regional benefit sharing

While benefit sharing programs may be well understood locally, regional approaches are less well known. One-on-one conversations might be a good place to start. These conversations can build interest, understanding and buy-in from stakeholders who would need to be involved. Prioritising conversations with First Nations groups or Traditional Owner representatives, as well as with council and local developers, may be a wise choice.

Establishing a scope and core functions

Once we've found some interest and support amongst representatives of key groups, we can then collaborate on what we think this regional benefit fund could look like. For instance, the size of the region it could cover and the specific functions it will serve. Regional benefit sharing functions could include: simple grants, investment holdings and equity in clean energy projects, multi-year funding programs for essential services or programs, or larger infrastructure projects⁶⁷.

Considering strong governance structures

How regional benefit sharing is structured and governed will depend a lot on the region, government policy, existing partnerships and relationships between stakeholders.

In some instances regional benefit sharing might be delivered without a central entity, but relies on a more general Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) laying out how parties work together. For some communities, an existing entity (e.g. a local foundation or council) might be happy to host regional benefit sharing, or a new entity could be developed. Each approach has its own benefits and challenges.

Refining regional benefit sharing approaches with our community

Once a high-level scope and general functions have been laid out, these ideas will be easier to communicate and seek feedback from the community. We may be looking to confirm whether the region we've suggested is meaningful to people, whether the core functions proposed are useful, and to establish the common priorities or goals that different community members want the fund to support. Where different governance structures are being considered, we can bring people into this discussion too. Once these conversations have wrapped up we'll want to close the loop and clarify what the next steps are.

Evaluating and communicating progress towards community goals

Once the regional benefit sharing approach is implemented, those involved will need to communicate what is being achieved, by who and how. Creating and sharing newsletters, reporting platforms, social media, or online publications that share progress can improve transparency around regional benefit sharing.

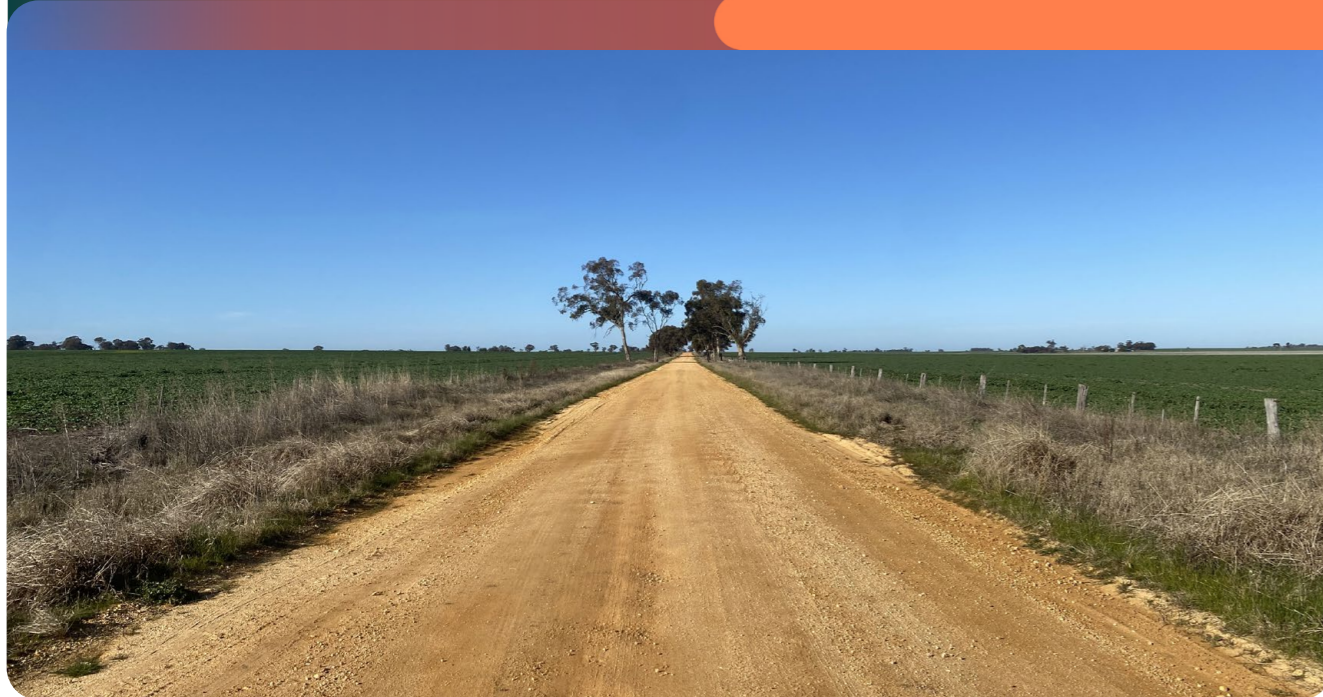
Case Study 8: Working together for fair land use and regional outcomes in the Wimmera Mallee, VIC

In Western Victoria, local councils, developers, community intermediaries and state energy agencies came together with Wimmera Mallee communities to shape how land use change happens — not just for energy, but for the future of regional communities. Initiated by the local Wimmera Southern Mallee Development, with the support and guidance of The Energy Charter, a partnership was formed to enable collaboration and foster real outcomes for the region's shift to clean energy.

The process brought together councils, developers, community intermediaries, and state energy bodies to create the Regional Energy Collaboration.

Agreements were established to structure ongoing collaboration and commit these parties to work together on key issues such as youth mental health, fire risk and other important issues. Collaboration Agreements also set expectations around ongoing engagement with the community, project operations and planning.

Wimmera Southern Mallee Development believes that this process has strengthened the confidence of community members to navigate the energy shift while unlocking long-term benefits many aspire to⁶⁸.



Respecting First Nations people and self-determination

First Nations people have inherent and statutory rights as Indigenous people and the first people of this Country⁶⁹. The clean energy shift is an opportunity to recognise these, affirm First Nations peoples rights to self-determination and support participation in clean energy transition⁷⁰.

Settler colonialism impacts First Nations people in many parts of life, including energy. Energy projects have led to sacred places being destroyed, land being exploited, access to Country limited and unfair sharing of project profits^{71,72}. On top of this, First Nations people are much more likely to face energy poverty and reliability issues⁷³.

Despite these challenges, First Nations people have been leading projects and initiatives that help communities, protect culture, share values and connection to Country. In the following section we describe some of the ways First Nations people are leading in the clean energy shift. Many of these strategies come from the First Nations Clean Energy Network.

Toolbox 14: Free Prior and Informed Consent Principles

Under the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, all Indigenous peoples have a right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)⁷⁴.

These principles seek to address a history of engagement with Indigenous peoples where decisions were made without clear and honest information being provided, or coercion and control influenced these decisions. For clean energy projects, this means providing deep and genuine opportunities for dialogue that respect these rights.

Opportunities and strategies

Fostering respectful engagement and First Nations leadership

Core to good engagement with First Nations people is having conversations early, and aiming to build long-term relationships based on trust, respect and integrity. Good engagement can strengthen outcomes for First Nations people, unlocking opportunities in clean energy jobs, environmental outcomes and benefit sharing.

Principles for engagement and collaboration:

- Identify different First Nations people or groups that may be interested in, or are already working on, efforts in the clean energy shift.
- Pay attention to communication preferences and any local protocols for speaking with knowledge holders, Elders or other important people.
- For non-Indigenous people, be culturally aware and consider training to support this.
- Follow FPIC principles, ensuring free, prior and informed consent⁷⁵.
- Back First Nations leadership, efforts and priorities.
- Collaborate towards shared goals.

Toolbox 15: Leading practice principles for First Nations engagement

For guidance on how developers and clean energy industry can work with First Nations peoples see the Leading Practice Principles: First Nations and Renewable Energy Projects co-authored by KPMG and the Clean Energy Council⁷⁶. The guide puts to use principles developed by the First Nations Clean Energy Network and their expertise.

The 10 key principles they cover are:

1. Engage respectfully
2. Prioritise clear, accessible and accurate information
3. Ensure cultural heritage is preserved and protected
4. Protect Country and environment
5. Be a good neighbour
6. Ensure economic benefits are shared
7. Provide social benefits for community
8. Embed land stewardship
9. Ensure cultural competency
10. Implement, monitor and report back

Creating a plan for Country

For all communities facing an influx of clean energy development, having a plan can help us understand opportunities and consider impacts or risks we want to avoid. For First Nations communities developing a plan for Country can help local people assess the kinds of partnerships and projects they want to work towards⁷⁷.

These plans could:

- Identify priorities like co-ownership or equity opportunities with developers.
- Establish principles on how clean energy projects should engage with First Nations communities and share benefits.
- Describe programs or initiatives that could be strengthened, like ranger programs.

Build First Nations participation in clean energy jobs and services

Clean energy projects can provide meaningful employment opportunities and income for First Nations people and businesses. First Nations-led social enterprises and consultancies may be able to provide professional services like environmental, technical or cultural assessments or providing expertise on agrisolar models and land management. Various jobs in trades, technicians and construction can also provide good opportunities. Many remote and regional communities may need training to skill up for these jobs.

Possible approaches:

- Build awareness of job opportunities and pathways through schools and networks.
- Find recruitment and training services to support First Nations peoples.
- Seek First Nations clean energy mentors and role models.
- Identify flexible and culturally safe training pathways.
- Advocate for procurement targets and developers to employ First Nations people.
- Connect local First Nations businesses and enterprises with clean energy developers.
- Collaborate with First Nations organisations, industry and training bodies on job, skill and service opportunities.

Case Study 9: Building relationships and employment outcomes with Wiradjuri People, NSW

During construction of the Avonlie Solar Farm, Beon Energy Solutions worked closely with the local Wiradjuri community to build relationships and provide employment opportunities. Respect and trust were critical principles for Beon's engagement efforts and central to the success of the project. These efforts also demonstrated Beon's commitment to community engagement.

In 2021, Beon was engaged by developers Iberdrola Australia to build the Avonlie Solar Farm near Narrandera, NSW. As part of the project's First Nations engagement activities, two First Nations women were employed in community engagement roles^{78,79}, and all Beon managers received cultural awareness training.

The knowledge and relationships of the community engagement staff were essential to the project's success. Early in the project, they identified key barriers to employment of community members, such as the need for identification documents to obtain qualifications, and for many female workers, caring responsibilities for children.

The community engagement staff also sought permission from Wiradjuri Elders to host events and training with the wider community to address these issues. These included an ID day at the local TAFE, where they supported attendees to obtain birth certificates, Medicare cards and other critical documentation. They also offered pre-employment training on topics like health and safety, while Wiradjuri community members organised childcare for participants.

As a result of these community engagement efforts, Beon employed 38 First Nations people (27 men and 11 women) during the construction phase, the majority of whom were previously unemployed. These jobs also led to further employment of First Nations workers in local government and on other local and regional renewable energy projects^{80,81}.

"There have been very few projects – if any – that have come to our community and benefitted our local Aboriginal women and men the way the Avonlie Solar Farm has."

– Brenda Poole, Aboriginal Engagement, TAFE, Narrandera

"The Avonlie Solar Farm has been a great example of how projects like these and proper Aboriginal engagement based on trust and respect, can not only benefit Aboriginal communities, but also benefit the projects themselves by getting good workers and community support."

– Gundyarri Aboriginal Corporation, Narrandera.



Source: Beon



Source: Yindjibarndi Energy

First Nations-led energy projects and programs

Several First Nations communities have been leading in clean energy with co-ownership partnerships with developers, and projects developed by and for First Nations communities⁸².

- **First Nations-led energy and resilience projects:** Some energy projects look to tackle specific problems that are common in First Nations remote communities, like poor, unreliable electricity or ‘prepaid metering’ which can often lead to households going without power. These have included micro-grids and other clean energy projects⁸³.
- **Co-ownership and equity projects:** Co-ownership helps to share profits and increase decision making power in clean energy projects. This model often involves organisations having a stake or equity in a project. These models can support First Nations people to have a say over projects on their land and share benefits back with communities⁸⁴.
- **Leadership and capacity building programs:** The First Nations Clean Energy Network currently runs the First Nations PowerMakers program, which is a capacity-building initiative designed to empower First Nations participation in and ownership of renewable energy projects⁸⁵.

Case Study 10: Yindjibarndi people driving clean energy in the Pilbara, WA

The Yindjibarndi people of Western Australia’s Pilbara region have demonstrated the potential for meaningful renewable energy partnerships and First Nations leadership in the transition.

In June 2023, the Yindjibarndi Aboriginal Corporation (YAC) partnered with international renewable energy company ACEN Corporation (ACEN) to create Yindjibarndi Energy Corporation⁸⁶. With a Board comprising of Yindjibarndi and ACEN Directors, Yindjibarndi will hold 25-50% equity in all developed renewable energy projects under the partnership. As equity owners and the primary tenure holders of the development area, Yindjibarndi people

will receive long term revenue from YEC projects.

Shared understanding and strong relationships between Yindjibarndi people and ACEN were critical factors for the success of this partnership, with YAC Chief Executive Officer Michael Woodly noting that “from both ends there has to be a level of trust, first and foremost”⁸⁷.

YEC is looking to develop up to 3GW in capacity of wind, solar and energy storage projects on Yindjibarndi country. YEC’s first project is the 75MWac Jinbi solar farm, which has the ability to expand to 150MWac and an option to include Battery Energy Storage System in the future^d.



Source: Yindjibarndi Energy

^d These figures were updated with feedback from Yindjibarndi Energy Corporation in November 2025.

7. Reflecting on our work

Reflection processes help us understand what has happened, what's working, what needs adjustment, and how we can improve over time. This doesn't have to be a formal process, with significant input or preparation and can support how we adapt our work as we go.

Review is the process of looking at what has happened and the facts that we can observe. Whereas reflection is where we start making some judgements and think more about what the 'facts' mean in our context. Importantly, these processes are about learning and improving, not assigning fault. Some questions we may want to ask include:

Review

- What did we set out to do, and what actually happened?
- What worked well, and what didn't go as planned?
- Who participated, and how did people respond?

Reflection

- Why did things happen the way they did?
- What surprised us? What confirmed what we already knew?
- What have we learned about our strategy, our community, or how we work together?

Process questions

We might also want to focus on key areas in our reflection. As managing our time, resources, and workload is essential to our long-term collaborative efforts, regularly reviewing and refining these processes can help us strengthen our work over time. Key questions to consider:

- What efforts or activities are not essential to our collective goals?
- What wider support from our community or peers can we access?
- Can we leverage the resources of other organisations or groups?
- Are there ways we can take breaks and others can step in?

These reflection and review processes are the cornerstone of how we progress towards shared goals. Embedding these processes into our collective forums can help us adapt to change, improve our understanding, celebrate our achievements and recognise personal contributions. By collectively sharing these reflections, we can improve our effectiveness and how we work together over time.

Adapting as we go

Bringing our reflections into our future work is essential, aiming to adapt our efforts and respond to changes in our context. This helps to improve our effectiveness and make sure we're not putting time and energy into strategies that are no longer effective.

Adapting involves bringing together our understanding of what is going on in our context (external factors), what is happening for our collaboration (internal factors) and what this means for our strategy and next steps.

We may need to adapt to changes in:

- The people and organisations involved in our efforts
- Concerns and impacts raised by our community
- Wider shifts in policy or politics
- Events or physical changes in our region

Sometimes, as a collective, we might reflect on some of these changes and decide to adapt or drop goals or intended outcomes.

Changes to consider:

- **People:** Are new or different stakeholders now involved that we need to understand or bring in?
- **Concerns:** Are we aware of new concerns or impacts that we need to consider and/or potentially address?
- **Context:** Have new policies, politics or local events arisen that require new or different strategies or tactics?
- **Goals and outcomes:** Do we need to update our goals, or adjust our intended outcomes because of changes in concerns, impacts or our context?

To give an example of what reflection and adaptation could look like on the ground, we've provided a short example.



Toolbox 16: Legacy benefits and policy change example

Let's say you're a community group that has had a goal of creating greater *long term* or '*legacy*' benefits from the energy shift, and one outcome you've been working towards is a *regional benefit fund* that all developers would have to chip into.

A group member discovers that a new policy has been announced, which will require all developers to contribute to a planned regional fund. This policy will be enforced in the next 12 months and details are still being worked out on how the fund will be managed, and by who.

As a group, you reflect that the intended outcomes you were working towards have been achieved, which is great news. But some group members are concerned that the fund might be delivered without community involvement.

The community group decides on some new strategies or approaches, including:

- engaging with the government agency that announced the regional fund to learn more about how it will work;
- reaching out to contacts in other regional communities to get their read of the policy; and
- drafting a position statement about the approach they'd like to see going forward.

This is just one example showing how we might use reflection to keep on track with our goals and adjust our approach as our context changes.

As with most elements of collaboration, reflecting as a group can help improve our awareness and assessment of the situation, including what has changed and what needs to happen next. Some simple processes can help us build our capacity to assess, reflect and adapt in our collaborative work, which we've described below.

Practical tools:

- **Regular check-ins:** Making time for group members to provide updates and news to help build context awareness. For instance, are we aware of new local concerns? Have we heard about new policies? Have we met people who would like to get involved?
- **News monitoring:** Checking local news, or setting up Google Alerts for specific search terms to access updates on events relevant to our work in the region.
- **Strategic planning:** Using resources like SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) for planning sessions.
- **Reflection:** Integrating reflective practices into regular meetings, like asking 'What worked well, what could we do better next time?'

These are just a few ways we can start building our awareness as a group and supporting our ability to adapt and change, so we can focus on the issues that matter.

8. Conclusion

The clean energy shift offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity for many regional and remote communities to come together and work towards a more prosperous, healthy and just future. While the pace and scale of change can feel overwhelming, this handbook has described how local voices and actions are central to shaping lasting positive outcomes.

This handbook reflects on and shares approaches that communities at the forefront of the clean energy shift are using today to work towards local aspirations. We've summarised the common steps we've observed - understanding our regional context, finding shared goals, organising our collaborative efforts, building targeted strategies on issues that matter and reflecting on our progress.

While every community will find a different approach that works for them, we hope that this handbook provides a strong foundation to build from. In particular, the "Taking action on what matters" section offers many examples of strategies communities are using in the clean energy shift. Whether it's the Yindjibarndi people partnering with clean energy developers to lead renewable energy projects or farmers getting drought-proof income from grazing-friendly agrisolar projects - different communities are finding opportunities to benefit from this shift.

The processes, tools, stories and approaches in this handbook are only starting points. Every community will find its own path, shaped by local people, strengths, and priorities. By working together, we can foster a clean energy shift that is fairer for communities, sustainable for our environment and benefits generations to come.



9. Further reading

Publications

- **Guide to Regional Benefit Sharing** (2025) Community Power Agency: <https://cpagency.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Guide-to-Regional-Benefit-Sharing.pdf>
- **Striking a New Deal for Renewables in Regions** (2025) The Next Economy, RE Alliance, Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal, and Projects JSA: <https://assets.nationbuilder.com/vicwind/pages/7121/attachments/original/1754264697/Striking-a-New-Deal-for-Renewables-in-Regions.pdf>
- **Better Biodiversity on Solar Farms Guide** (2024) Community Power Agency and Stringybark Ecological: https://www.cpagency.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Better_Biodiversity_on_Solar_Farm_Guide_May_2024.pdf
- **Better Practice Renewables and Biodiversity: Opportunities for Collaboration Guide** (2024) RE Alliance and The Energy Charter: https://assets.nationbuilder.com/vicwind/pages/3175/attachments/original/1709082977/Better_Practice_Renewables_and_Biodiversity_Opportunities_for_Collaboration_Guide.pdf
- **The First Nations Clean Energy Strategy 2024-2030** (2024) Commonwealth of Australia: <https://www.energy.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-12/First%20Nations%20Clean%20Energy%20Strategy.pdf>
- **Leading Practice Principles: First Nations and Renewable Energy Projects** (2023) Clean Energy Council & KPMG: <https://cleanenergycouncil.org.au/cec/media/background/resources/leading-practice-principles-first-nations-and-renewable-energy-projects.pdf>
- **Regional Energy Collaboration Framework Toolkit** (2025) The Energy Charter: https://www.theenergycharter.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/VD4285-The-Energy-Charter_RECFF-Toolkit-A4_2025_FINAL.pdf

Websites and online resources

- **Re-Alliance Regional Leaders Network** – Peer learning and collaboration network for community leaders: https://www.re-alliance.org.au/regional_leaders_network
- **The Commons: Social Change Library – Online tools and guides for social change:** <https://commonslibrary.org/>
- **QCOSS Place-Based Approaches** – Online guide and toolkit: <https://www.qcoss.org.au/contents-page-for-place-based-approach-and-toolkit/>
- **First Nations Clean Energy Network Website** – Resources, case studies and programs on First Nations participation and leadership in clean energy: <https://www.firstnationscleanenergy.org.au/>
- **International Association for Public Participation Australasia** – Standards and resources for community engagement: <https://engagementinstitute.org.au/>
- **CPA Socially Responsible Renewable Energy Development** – Online training course: <https://cpagency.org.au/professional-training/>

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