

Ag Energy Taskforce

Submission to

**Australian Energy Regulator
Social licence for
transmission projects**

November 2023

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Background

The Ag Energy Taskforce¹ (the Taskforce) was established in September 2014 to enable the representatives of the Australian agriculture sector to collaborate, build capacity and advocate to alleviate the impact of high energy costs on agricultural industries. More recently, the remit of the Taskforce has expanded against the backdrop of Australia's energy transition, with a strong focus on land use and relationships with farmers and rural communities who are being asked to accommodate much of the transition infrastructure across rural landscapes.

Introduction

The energy and agricultural sectors and rural and regional communities are facing unprecedented change as part of Australia's energy transition. Australian farmers grow food and fibre which is feeding and clothing the nation and the world.

The gross value of Australian agricultural, fisheries and forestry production in 2021-22 was \$93 billion². As a major trade exposed sector, agriculture needs competitive advantage at a national and global level to be successful.

Energy transition represents significant policy, regulatory, economic and land-use reforms and changes which are having tangible impacts on regional and rural communities. From an agricultural perspective, farmers and rural communities not only have an interest in securing affordable and reliable energy for the future, but they will house much of the infrastructure that is fundamental to the transition.

The early experience of energy transition and the angst felt by many communities, suggests the lack of recognition of the need to protect productive agricultural land, water and environmental assets and to deliver shared value to the communities in which renewable energy infrastructure is being built. The level of community engagement has often been poor and frequently, farmers are the last to be engaged in discussions on proposed projects.

As part of the effort to decarbonise our industry and energy system under our commitment to net zero along with the significant penetration of renewable energy and the need to build electricity infrastructure, the often-inadequate consultation with communities is causing significant community anxiety. We know that 10,000 km of high-voltage transmission lines will be required to be built by 2050 to support Australia's clean energy transition as set out in the Australian Energy Market Operator's (AEMO) Integrated System Plan (ISP).

The social and economic impacts on farmers and broader rural communities have not been fully understood and recognised. Communities and landholders are increasingly feeling a power imbalance between their rights and needs - against the desire and need of energy infrastructure developers to build transmission.

¹ **Ag Energy Taskforce:** National Irrigators' Council, National Farmers' Federation, Queensland Farmers' Federation, NSW Farmers, Victorian Farmers' Federation, Cotton Australia, Bundaberg Regional Irrigators' Group, Dairy Australia, Australian Grape & Wine, Canegrowers, Pioneer Valley Water (Mackay, Q), Central Irrigation Trust (SA), Murrumbidgee Groundwater Inc., AgForce Qld, Tasmanian Farmers & Graziers, Fruit Growers Tasmania.

² Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, *Agricultural Overview*, Sept 2023

Community Engagement recognising social licence: Key Recommendations

There is sufficient existing guidance to support genuine community engagement, as set out in this submission. It is critical however, that **commitments made within social licence guidelines are honoured and delivered** to avoid further alienating agricultural landholders and regional communities.

In making these recommendations, we seek the following assurances to address the existing power imbalance between renewable energy infrastructure developers and farmers and rural communities:

- Genuine and timely engagement/consultation with landholders and communities in line with the [Energy Charter National Better Practice Social Licence Guideline](#) (see page 8).
- Agricultural industries, and consumers more broadly, are not left to meet any additional social licence costs embedded in transmission businesses' pricing proposals to the AER; the AER to be mindful of public opinion regarding costs ultimately passed on to customers.
- Proposed transmission infrastructure avoids any adverse impact on existing land use and recognises the social and economic factors for farmers and rural and regional communities.
- Agricultural land continues to be used for future national and international food security and continues to provide much needed jobs in rural and regional Australia.
- Landholders are not worse off as a result of infrastructure development, nor suffer loss of income or equity in property value; landholders' equity is critical to their farming business bottom line.
- Appropriate compensation and/or commercial consent for infrastructure projects.
- Genuine shared value is available to communities impacted by renewable energy infrastructure.
- Safe operation of machinery around transmission infrastructure, including insurance implications.
- Information relating to studies on undergrounding transmission infrastructure is communicated to impacted communities.
- Cultural change and a systems thinking approach to ensure that all renewable energy infrastructure **businesses commit to, and deliver**, improved engagement and accountability, supported by these further measures:
 - AEMC's (Australian Energy Market Commission) draft rule to enhance transmission network service providers' (TNSPs) engagement with communities to build social licence.
 - Department of Climate Change Energy, Environment and Water (DCCEEW) development of National Guidelines on Social Licence for Transmission.
 - Opportunities arising from recommendations from the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner's (AEIC) current Community Engagement Review.
 - By becoming a signatory to the Energy Charter with broader CEO level commitments to customer and community centricity. Currently, all transmission businesses (with the exception of ElectraNet) are Signatories, but no renewable developers.
- Transmission businesses are transparent with their commitments and allow communities to hold the businesses to account. Commitments must be made across the entire supply chain including new entrants/renewable developers (collectively referred to as renewable energy infrastructure businesses). Communities expect all parts of the supply chain should meet their expectations on engagement.
- Funding may support communities to develop regional plans, as appropriate, in a coordinated way that identifies and addresses impacts of proposed transmission infrastructure development; this may also maximise opportunities from renewable energy and transmission development.
- Renewable energy infrastructure businesses to ensure landowners and communities are aware of complaints mechanisms.

Social Licence for Transmission Businesses

The Taskforce appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Australian Energy Regulator's (AER) directions paper relating to social licence for transmission businesses. While we note transmission businesses are the focus of the directions paper, a System Thinking approach to the issue of social licence acknowledges that renewable developers, system planners and transmission businesses all have a role to play here and we therefore, refer to "renewable energy infrastructure developers" in our response below. In our view, greater effort is needed to align renewable energy developers with transmission businesses to meet customer and community expectations.

The AER's consideration of social licence is one of several key associated activities currently under examination across energy regulatory bodies. Others include:

- The **AEMC's** draft determination seeking a more preferable draft rule to enhance transmission companies' engagement with communities to build and maintain social licence. The intention is that the changes would create greater consistency and clarity over their obligations to engage with communities and when and how they are required to engage. The rule change is expected to commence on 5 December 2023.
- The **Department of Climate Change Energy, Environment and Water (DCCEEW)** is developing National Guidelines on Social Licence for Transmission.
- The **Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO)** has established an advisory council on social licence. It is intended that the 2024 ISP will include a dedicated focus on social licence.

Concurrent with these activities, the **Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner (AEIC)** is conducting a Community Engagement Review and will provide a report to Government in December 2023.

The AEIC's 2022 Annual Report to the Australian Parliament made a series of practical recommendations relating to community engagement designed to improve the way renewable energy and infrastructure developers consult with farmers and agriculture communities. It is apparent that community engagement has not been well managed given the level of community hostility in many regions.

It is hoped that recommendations emerging from the AEIC's 2023 Community Engagement Review will provide clear guidance to strengthen energy infrastructure developers' approach to community engagement as they seek to secure social licence.

It is important to note here, the work of the Energy Charter through its #BetterTogether Social Licence initiative including:

- Better Practice Guide to Landholder and Community Engagement (2022)
- Ag + Energy Social Licence Roundtable (run since Oct 2022)
- Better Practice Social Licence Guidelines (May 2023)
- Landholder Engagement Training (Oct 2023 and ongoing)
- Evaluating Undergrounding of Transmission (current).

Social Licence and the AER's role

Social licence to operate is a concept that reflects community acceptance or approval around the operations of an organisation and its developments. Community acceptance comes from prioritising trust, delivering overall positive impact and is granted and denied by the community in line with their social and economic conditions.

Establishing social licence is not simple; it is based on the diverse values, interests and concerns that contribute to community expectations; it requires the consideration of relational aspects between the energy industry and communities, community understanding and confidence in a particular project.

The Directions Paper sets out how the *AER considers social licence issues can best be addressed within AER's regulatory remit, including:*

- *AER's expectations of transmission businesses in undertaking community engagement*
- *the outcomes AER wants to see from engagement*
- *when and how social licence issues can be factored into regulatory tests for the approval of and recovery of cost for new transmission development*
- *the evidence that AER wants to see to justify transmission network expansion and associated expenditure.*

The AER notes ... *transmission companies will need to build and maintain a social licence to operate for their projects to succeed, noting that effective engagement is fundamental to gaining the social licence needed to expand the transmission grid.*

The AER suggests ...*transmission businesses can build social licence by collaborating and resolving issues with impacted communities. Through effective engagement transmission businesses can identify ways to increase the benefits and minimise the negative impacts of new transmission lines on affected communities.*

While we will focus predominantly on chapter 3 of the Directions paper – **Engagement to Support Social Licence**, we note Chapter 5 discusses cost recovery issues. The AER acknowledges that transmission businesses will incur costs to build and maintain social licence during the construction and maintenance of new transmission lines and that they should receive adequate funding if they can appropriately identify how the social licence costs they will incur will contribute to the delivery of prescribed transmission services.

The AER will consider this on a project-by-project basis in determining a revenue allowance for the transmission business.

We are not in a position to quantify the level of costs that transmission businesses attribute to their incorporation of social licence in their cost structures submitted to the AER for approval. We would expect, however, the AER:

- to consider the capacity of agriculture industries' and consumers more broadly, to meet any additional costs in their energy bills

- to be mindful of the need to satisfy public opinion, given current high energy costs and the wider concerns of many Australians about the cost impacts of energy transition on consumers, and
- the importance of ensuring that renewable energy developers also shoulder their fair share of social licence costs and work collaboratively with transmission businesses to deliver shared value to landholders and communities including employment opportunities during construction and operation of the infrastructure
- be mindful that transmission businesses and renewable energy developers will also enjoy the benefit of operating the infrastructure in question over the life of the project while the individual landholders suffer the loss from that area being taken out of production, or is changed in amenity to the community.

Social licence was not always understood as a concept in the early days of planning for Australia’s energy transition. This goes to recognition by planners, modellers and renewable energy infrastructure businesses that significant effort is necessary to build social licence to establish dialogue and trust with impacted communities as a way of resolving issues.

Renewable energy infrastructure businesses must adopt a locally informed approach to engagement, relevant to the local community or region and the needs of local people. They must build knowledge of the region they are entering. This might be informed, for example, by an environmental scan to understand the type of farming occurring in the region (beef and sheep grazing, dryland cropping, irrigated cropping, dairy, intensive horticulture) and other key factors relevant to the community.

It would make sense if different parts of the supply chain undertook this work through collaboration. For example, we encourage renewable energy developers to work with each other and with transmission businesses to better understand the communities. This is a non-competitive space. Engagement must be coordinated, acknowledging that communities are not in the “business” of engagement – many community members have busy lives with families and businesses to run.

This is recognition of the crucial role of landholders, rural communities and Traditional Owners in the transition process against the backdrop of the need to build an energy grid capable of supporting the increasing shift to solar and wind power.

Securing social licence should not become a ‘box ticking’ process.

The AER Discussion paper, page 5, figure 1 sets out the three phases involved in AER’s roles to interact with social licence issues:

- Systems Planning
- Options Selection RIT-T which includes
 - guiding engagement approaches
 - guiding identification of credible options
 - guiding how costs and benefits are considered in selecting options
- Cost recovery which includes

- Guiding cost recovery of engagement and other activities
- Costs submitted cannot exceed the costs submitted to AEMO in the feedback loop.

National Better Practice Social Licence Guideline

The Taskforce has worked collaboratively with energy businesses through the [Energy Charter Ag Energy Social Licence Roundtable](#) to develop the [National Better Practice Social Licence Guideline](#) launched in May 2023.

This followed collaboration between a Community Outcomes Group (COG), made up of landholder and community representatives and a group of transmission businesses.

The COG included representation from the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner, Bundaberg Regional Irrigators' Group, National Farmers' Federation, National Irrigators' Council, RE-Alliance, Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association, Queensland Farmers' Federation and Victorian Farmers Federation. The Energy Charter Industry Collaborators included Energy Charter Full Signatories Transgrid (NSW, ACT) Powerlink Queensland (QLD) and TasNetworks (TAS) + #BetterTogether Collaborators AusNet (VIC) and ElectraNet (SA).

The Social Licence Guideline is a comprehensive, evidence-based document, developed as part of the #BetterTogether Landholder + Community Social Licence initiative, focused on social licence within the energy transition.

By validating impacts and identifying opportunities to improve outcomes for agricultural landholders, the Social Licence Guideline supports transmission businesses to better understand, and act on, the factors that contribute to building trust and maintaining social licence. It is also intended to support agricultural representatives, landholders and host communities to raise and discuss known impacts and work constructively with transmission businesses to achieve shared value outcomes.

The research conducted during the development of the Social Licence Guideline, showed that 67% of landholders surveyed felt that the development of community-level benefit sharing agreements was important to local communities living with transmission infrastructure. However, and not unexpectedly, priorities would differ between and across communities.

Commitments embedded in the Social Licence Guideline are designed to mitigate community frustration relating to infrastructure development. Examples include:

- *We will communicate at the start of the project as to why we need your input. This includes in the planning phase of the project and throughout the construction of the project itself.*
- *We will be accessible and inclusive in our engagement with you. This means engaging with you as early as is appropriate to ensure that our discussions with you are meaningful. We will keep you informed at all stages of the process so that you have an opportunity to have your say on key issues.*

- *Our aim is to be open, honest and transparent with you. Ensuring that you know all of the options that are available to you. This means we will tell you what parts of the project are open to negotiation. Equally, if the laws or regulations do not provide flexibility then we will be clear about what is not open for negotiation.*
- *During our engagement with you, we will ask you what is important to you, and we will actively listen to your input and feedback. It is important that we understand your perspectives and the values of your community. This might include understanding information about any reasonable activities. We will also be accountable to you for doing what we say we will do. That means, being responsible for our actions. We will let you know what we have heard from you and provide you with clear feedback on how we have responded and why.*

Clear accountability and transparency processes are in place to ensure these commitments are met. The Energy Charter Accountability Process provides a unique way for CEOs and their businesses to be transparent and accountable to the commitments.

The Taskforce commends efforts to train those on the ground to better understand and communicate with regional landholders through targeted Landholder Engagement training. The training was delivered to 50+ land agents across Australia with the purpose of supporting those responsible for working directly with impacted landholders to help them do their job well, while keeping themselves and the landholders physically and emotionally safe. Additional training is committed for early 2024.

The AER acknowledges the range of guidance available (and planned in future) where many of these guides have been developed through extensive stakeholder consultation and are already accepted by many groups. And to avoid duplication with other guidance and potential confusion amongst stakeholders, the AER does not propose to create additional guidance specifically for community engagement for new transmission developments.

We welcome this statement, however we would encourage other renewable energy infrastructure businesses to be held to the same standards. Landholders and communities do not differentiate between different parts of the energy supply chain: they expect the same community engagement commitments from renewable energy developers and system planners.

We note the AER's expectation that transmission businesses are already required, or have publicly committed, to meeting certain better practice engagement principles and outcomes. The AER expects transmission businesses to:

- meet, and explain how they have met, the Rule requirements and relevant jurisdictional policies and guidelines.
- undertake best practice engagement, in accordance with broadly accepted guidance in the sector.

What is better practice engagement?

It is useful to understand the external pressures faced by farmers who are typically required to meet a range of obligations. These include: health and safety regulation; climate policies; land management and conservation; biosecurity measures; labour laws; land tenure and ownership; and Government (state and federal) regulation. Farmers operate in an environment of market forces, necessitating a focus on farm business planning against this backdrop.

A series of questions may guide renewable energy infrastructure businesses in their engagement with landholders and communities. Questions and responses may also show the extent to which trust has been established within the community, or whether trust has been diminished.

Again, we reiterate the need for a System Thinking approach to community engagement, acknowledging that renewable developers, system planners and transmission businesses all have a role to play here. There is a need to align renewable energy developers with transmission businesses to meet customer and community expectations, with these entities encouraged to work collaboratively with landholders and the community.

Working jointly, sample questions from renewable energy infrastructure businesses might include:

- At what point in the planning process were impacted landholders and the community consulted on the proposed project?
- Who consulted with the impacted landholders and the community?
- Have a broad and representative range of landholder and community representatives been consulted? Examples of these?
- What was the nature of the consultation – eg individual landholder, selected community group, group community consultation via a forum?
- Who were the community representatives consulted (eg landholders, neighbours, local government representatives, Traditional Owners, local/regional businesses, environmental groups, agriculture peak body local representatives)?
- What was the breakdown of the number of people consulted in each category?
- What was the number and nature of queries and complaints raised by community members regarding a proposed project?
 - Have such queries and complaints been answered in a transparent and timely fashion?
 - What has been the landowner and/or community's reaction to the responses provided?
- What is being reported in local/regional media coverage regarding the project?
 - Are there any inaccuracies reported in the media?
 - If so, is there an opportunity to correct and/or explain any such statements?
- What is the nature of impacts on local industries reported by landholders (eg the movement of centre-pivot irrigation infrastructure)?
- Is there data available on visual amenity which might impact local tourism?

- What are the real or perceived impacts on the environment (eg removal of trees, land degradation, biosecurity breaches, water quality and inflows into river systems)?
- Have discussions occurred with landholders and the community regarding a potential alternative route for the proposed project? (Has the developer in fact considered and/or modelled an alternative route?) What has been the outcome of those discussions?

Most importantly, the question to be asked is what is the potential for renewable energy developers and transmission businesses to work together on consulting and engaging collaboratively with landholders and the community, and to deliver genuine shared value to them? If not, why not?

AEMC Draft Community Engagement Rules

Draft rules released by the AEMC relating to community engagement seek to support stakeholders early in the transmission planning process.

The development of the draft rules is an acknowledgement of the urgency of the situation on the ground and we would encourage the rules to be enacted as soon as possible. This is to guide accountability processes as new transmission projects are developed and to meet social licence expectations.

We would expect renewable energy infrastructure businesses to engage with stakeholders (including local landowners, local councils, community members and Traditional Owners) who are reasonably expected to be affected by: the development of the actionable ISP project; future ISP project; or project within a REZ stage; in accordance with the community engagement expectations.

Community Engagement: additional matters for consideration

Potential impacts on agricultural land

The monetary value of the land in question is not the only consideration – so too is the intrinsic value as recognised in the Energy Charter Social Licence Guideline. The Taskforce suggested to the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner, a consideration of the cumulative impact of a particular project to the adjacent landscape, neighbours and community, with questions like:

- Will this project be ‘yet another project’ in a district where there are already a number? (*these may be solar and/or wind installations*)
- Will a project’s presence have insurance or valuation impacts for adjoining properties during the 25 years of operation, and be an impediment to activities the owners have planned for example, farm stays or farm gate produce sales?

For adjacent land there are secondary impacts from a development. While not directly related to the [AER’s examination of social licence for transmission projects](#), but relevant to solar installations - the ‘PV heat island effect’ occurs where there is a warming effect across the landscape, with the potential to influence biodiversity and wildlife habit, ecosystem

functions and human health as well as agricultural land values of properties directly adjacent to these facilities.³

Solar installations typically occupy land which may be of better agricultural value, being flat and often suitable for cropping. The density of solar developments in REZs is rendering productive farming land unusable. Agricultural activities that can occur in tandem with solar developments, are often limited to sheep grazing.

For adjacent landholders there is also the expectation that the infrastructure owner and operator will over the life of the project, maintain their social licence by being a 'good neighbour'. An example might be, responding to the impact of storm runoff that has damaged adjacent property/ies. A growing number of people are reporting not only that the site design has underestimated the volume of storm water, the site operator/owner is unwilling to repair the damage the water has gouged out on an adjacent property.

The construction of transmission lines can interfere with crop-dusting and aerial spraying aircraft and render these activities unviable. Overhead powerlines can also obstruct the use of drones, preventing these more efficient and sustainable farming practices and often at a capital loss.

Other considerations relate to the decommissioning of wind turbines. Cables and concrete footings of wind towers are generally left in the ground following decommissioning, resulting in superficial rehabilitation, causing permanent changes and damage to the soil and water drainage. Farmers hosting renewable energy facilities have reported compaction of soil in a 50m wide strip between turbines and drainage changes around easements.

Biosecurity risks

Australians are familiar with their obligations around agriculture biosecurity requirements when returning from overseas countries, and the measures to mitigate disease incursions.

In the same vein, individuals and vehicles entering a property can also act as vectors for many endemic and exotic biosecurity threats. Clothing, boots, tyre treads and equipment can become contaminated with disease agents or weed seeds, while many insect pests are known to be found in the undercarriage of vehicles or within shipping containers.

Mandatory adherence to biosecurity measures is expected in the movement of infrastructure developers' equipment, their staff and/or contractors. This includes adherence to farm biosecurity plans (or industry best practice in the absence of farm plans). Farmers report that contractors and sub-contractors are often not meeting accountability standards and the onus is put on the landholder to identify the exact line of responsibility relating to biosecurity adherence.

³ Barron-Gafford, G. A. et al. (2016). *The Photovoltaic Heat Island Effect*

Local government councils' alignment on these types of measures would be helpful in establishing biosecurity requirements relating to, for example, the mandatory decontamination of equipment, washing down vehicles, including the use of dedicated clothing such as overalls and footwear.

Consideration could also be given to a type of "good neighbour program" where the energy infrastructure developer supports the landholder by complementing their weed and pest control efforts.

Land values and insurance premiums

Many landholders report that they have been unable to access public liability cover following renewable energy infrastructure development. An issue causing concern amongst landholders and their neighbors relates to the lack of clarity on renewable energy infrastructure's impact on insurance premiums.

Landholders should not be worse off due to energy infrastructure development, nor should they suffer any loss of income or equity value.

We know of cases where farmers have expressed a desire to increase their public liability insurance in the case of an accidental fire on their property. These issues require further examination and there appears to be little explanation or precedents that might clarify what would occur in the case of an accident or fire.

As developers determine route selection for a particular project, landholders frequently report little opportunity to discuss an alternative route through their property. This also includes examining the potential for an alternative route across government owned land rather than private productive agricultural land.

Farming families have reported the disturbance to rural landscapes and where they feel inadequate consultation has occurred regarding what the proposed final development might look like. This is particularly the case in REZs where there will be greater density of infrastructure.

On a positive note, we are aware that in one jurisdiction, there has been a change of proposed location of transmission towers as a result of landholder engagement.

Landholder Engagement Training

The Energy Charter has recently hosted a series of Landholder Engagement Training workshops. The purpose of training is to support landholder and community engagement teams – those responsible for working directly with impacted landholders and communities.

Over the two-day training course, there was opportunity to share insights with peers, hear from a range of subject matter experts and landholders with a focus on four key areas:

- Who – Understanding landholders (focus on agricultural operations)
- Why – Building and maintaining social licence

- What – The role of a Land Agent and opportunities for Better Practice
- How – Communication, empathy and psychological safety

The training was co-developed with participating businesses, with learning outcomes developed by the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner. The training builds on the successful training hosted by TasNetworks in June 2023 and will be offered again in early 2024.

Again, we would encourage all parts of the renewable energy infrastructure sector to participate in this capability building training opportunity. It is highly relevant to renewable energy developers and should go some way to ensuring more consistent alignment with the expectations of landholders and communities.

Renewable Energy Landholder Toolkit

The [Renewable Energy Landholder Toolkit](#) is an example of a partnership between Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) and the Queensland Government, and developed to assist and inform landholders as they respond and negotiate with energy industry representatives about accessing land and developing renewable energy projects.

The Toolkit provides background information and an extensive range of considerations for landholders who may be reviewing commercial agreements to host renewable energy infrastructure on their property as well as for those landholders who are at subsequent stages of development. The Toolkit includes:

- Detailed checklists to use throughout developer negotiation processes.
- Practical guidance for each stage of a renewable energy project
- Insights from legal and financial professionals, government bodies and landholders who have undertaken these processes themselves.
- Information on benefit sharing, community engagement and social license considerations.

It may also be a useful document for neighbours and communities seeking to understand the impacts and opportunities relating to a renewable development proposed in their region. The aim is that the Toolkit will support landholders to make more informed decisions when considering hosting renewable infrastructure. As outlined in the Toolkit, it is essential that landholders obtain sound legal and financial advice before entering into any agreement with a renewable proponent.

Complaints processes

Energy and Water Ombudsman schemes are in place across jurisdictions and it would be desirable if they were applied to landholder disputes (if not already). It might also be useful if such a scheme was extended to renewable developers and made accessible for community members with information to guide communities regarding how/where to lodge complaints.

A one-stop shop approach to disputes would be valuable to ensure they are dealt with efficiently and effectively, and that landholders and community members have knowledge regarding where they can access support.

Tasmanian Government Community Engagement processes

The Tasmanian Government announced in December 2022 the North-West region to be explored for the development of a Renewable Energy Zone (REZ). The Department of Renewables, Climate and Future Industries is conducting community engagement processes in the region during 2023 alongside a more detailed technical, environmental and economic study to examine potential hosting opportunities.

Stakeholder reference groups have been established, including local councils, peak bodies and communities alongside a mapping exercise to enable communities to engage in planning and design phase of the REZ. This is based on the premise that communities hold the relevant knowledge that can be shared through mapping tools and this allows more remote and marginal communities to represent themselves spatially.

Importantly, as part of this process, discussions have also occurred on agricultural land values, cultural values and natural values.

We commend this type of detailed mapping approach to understand relevant information regarding a region's suitability, as well as a way of establishing a comprehensive preparatory process to enable good community engagement. These types of mapping tools could be applied in other locations and/or jurisdictions.