

**To:**

Australian Energy Regulator  
Email: AERringfencing@aer.gov.au

**Diane Gray**

Business NSW

Regional Director, New England North West

26 August 2025

**RE: Letter of Support – Essential Energy’s Ring-Fencing Waiver Application to Establish a  
Regional Training Academy**

To Whom It May Concern,

Business NSW strongly supports Essential Energy’s application for a ring-fencing waiver to establish a regionally based Training Academy. As the state’s peak business organisation, we represent thousands of employers across regional NSW who urgently require access to a skilled workforce to meet the demands of the energy transition and deliver major infrastructure projects.

This initiative is critical to addressing the shortfall in energy-related technical skills across regional NSW. It directly supports industry needs, improves training accessibility in underserved areas, and contributes to economic and community development in line with the National Electricity Objective (NEO).

**1. Workforce Need for Regional Energy Projects to 2050**

The *Race for 2030* report forecasts the electricity sector workforce will need to double by 2029. This growth is being driven by Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) projects and grid transformation across regional NSW. However, the skills shortage in these areas is severe and escalating.

Essential Energy’s proposal responds directly to this challenge, offering targeted, place-based training in key REZ locations including Tamworth, Parkes, Grafton, Wagga Wagga, and Goulburn. These hubs will ensure a steady pipeline of skilled workers where projects are being delivered.

**2. Gaps in Training Access and Impact on Delivery**

Regional employers face a lack of accredited, contestable training providers. Most RTOs are metro-based or offer limited face-to-face delivery in relevant technical fields. This forces trainees to relocate or travel long distances, increasing project costs and undermining regional retention.

Without this Academy, the skills gap will widen, delaying energy infrastructure delivery, inflating costs, and threatening the viability of clean energy investments across NSW.

### **3. Economic and Community Benefits**

The Training Academy will drive regional economic development by enabling locals to upskill and secure quality employment in energy, utilities, and construction sectors. It also supports equitable access to training for young people, First Nations people, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Further, the initiative aligns with community benefit objectives under the NSW Government's REZ access programs, including long-term workforce participation goals.

### **4. Safety and Workforce Capability**

Essential Energy is widely recognised for its quality, safety-led training programs, with a 95% apprenticeship completion rate. Its ability to deliver industry-relevant, high-stakes training, particularly for live line work and substations, is unmatched in regional NSW.

Authorising the Academy will enhance workforce safety, support regional project delivery, and strengthen the overall capability of the energy sector workforce.

Business NSW considers this a low-risk, high-impact proposal that fills a well-evidenced gap in regional workforce development. It complements, rather than competes with, existing contestable training providers and ensures a level of workforce readiness that benefits the entire sector.

We encourage the AER to approve this waiver and enable Essential Energy to proceed with the establishment of the Training Academy.

Yours sincerely,



**Diane Gray**

Regional Director, New England North West  
Business NSW