

To the Australian Energy Regulator

I am writing to express my support for Essential Energy's application for a ring-fencing waiver to establish a regionally based Training Academy in Tamworth.

As an Apprentice residing in Broken Hill, in the Far West of New South Wales, I am well acquainted with the difficulties associated with accessing high-quality, accredited training facilities without the need to travel significant distances or relocate. I can speak from experience regarding the requirements for completing my Certificate III in Electrical Safety Industries (Lineworker), as the nearest training centres are located approximately 900 kilometres away, in either Parkes or Wagga Wagga. Throughout my qualifications, I undertook at least twelve trips to these centres, necessitating additional days spent travelling and extended periods away from my family, as weekend or afternoon returns were not feasible during two-week block releases. Furthermore, I was required to meet my electrical principal's requirement through TAFE NSW, where currently there is no electrical trades teacher in Broken Hill.

At present, numerous trainees and apprentices must travel considerable distances to fulfil their training requirements for qualification. This situation contributes to increased stress levels and can disrupt both learning outcomes and local work schedules, in addition to elevating the risk of driving-related incidents.

The Tamworth Training Academy would enable Essential Energy to conduct training using the actual equipment and systems utilised within its operations. Additionally, it offers graduates opportunities to upskill in qualifications not currently accommodated by Essential Energy or available in regional areas. At present, individuals such as myself lack access to post-trade qualifications—including pathways from Powerline Worker to Electrician, or Cable Jointing—due to limited training resources and facilities. Establishing the Academy is crucial, as it provides a controlled environment that mitigates the hazards and risks typically encountered in the field. This setting fosters a learning pathway that is difficult to replicate at existing training centres, ultimately delivering significant benefits; it ensures participants and future students become job ready more efficiently and with a deeper understanding of the practical challenges faced daily.

Providing local training enables greater staff retention in remote and isolated regions. This approach helps address skill shortages in regional NSW and supports the development of local communities and economies. Additionally, it establishes clear skills pathways for individuals in areas such as Wilcannia and Menindee, where opportunities for skilled employment and access to necessary training are almost non-existent.

Essential Energy's proposal is not only about training; it is about providing meaningful opportunities for individuals in regional and remote communities who are located far from major urban centres. By establishing this academy, we can help bridge the gap in accessing skilled employment and professional development. In addition, the academy will play a vital role in building a skilled, safe, and sustainable workforce to support both the current and future energy needs of New South Wales.

I respectfully urge the AER to approve this waiver and support the establishment of the Training Academy. It will make a meaningful difference in the lives of regional trainees and apprentices like me and help ensure the success of our state's energy transition.

Sincerely,

Liam Squire

Broken Hill Essential Energy