



An Australian Government Initiative



NSW & ACT

Ms Stephanie Jolly
Executive General Manager, Consumer, Policy and Markets Division
Australian Energy Regulator
GPO Box 3131
Canberra ACT 2601

10 July 2026

Re: RDA NSW & ACT Committee's Letter of Support for Essential Energy Ring-Fencing Waiver Application – Kerbside EV Charging Infrastructure

Dear Ms Jolly,

The Regional Development Australia (RDA) NSW & ACT Network welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on Essential Energy's application for a ring-fencing waiver to support delivery of the ARENA-funded Plug and Play kerbside electric vehicle charging program.

The RDA NSW & ACT Network strongly supports approval of the proposed waiver.

The waiver would enable Essential Energy to deploy, and lease embedded electric vehicle charging infrastructure within streetlight columns across regional, rural and remote New South Wales while leaving all retail charging services in the hands of private-sector operators. The proposal represents a targeted, time-bound intervention designed to address a market failure in regional Australia, where public EV charging infrastructure remains underdeveloped and private investment alone has not delivered the charging networks necessary to support widespread electrification.

The proposed model aligns strongly with the Commonwealth Government's Regional Investment Framework, Australia's net zero commitments, regional productivity objectives and emerging strategies to support transport decarbonisation across regional communities.

Importantly, the application provides an opportunity for regional communities, which are currently hosting significant renewable energy generation, transmission infrastructure and associated transition impacts, to see visible, practical benefits delivered locally through improved access to charging infrastructure and cleaner transport options.

The Importance of EV Connectivity for Regional Development

Regional connectivity is a fundamental driver of economic development. Just as roads, telecommunications and energy infrastructure have historically supported regional growth, access to reliable EV charging infrastructure will become an increasingly important enabler of economic participation, tourism, freight movement and population attraction.

Many regional and rural communities face unique barriers to EV adoption, including:

- lower population density
- greater distances between centres
- limited commercial viability for private charging investment
- lower availability of public charging infrastructure
- higher dependence on private vehicle transport.

These factors create a self-reinforcing cycle in which limited infrastructure suppresses EV uptake, while low EV numbers discourage further infrastructure investment.

Essential Energy's proposal directly addresses this challenge by creating a scalable pathway for infrastructure deployment in areas where the market has been unable to establish a viable business case. As noted in the application materials, the trial is specifically intended to test approaches that can unlock participation in regional charging markets and provide evidence about what is required to support long-term market development in non-metropolitan communities.

The RDA NSW & ACT Network believes this is precisely the type of strategic enabling infrastructure required to unlock future private investment while accelerating regional participation in the energy transition.

Alignment with the Regional Investment Framework

The Department of Infrastructure's Regional Investment Framework seeks to guide investment that delivers stronger, more resilient and more sustainable regional communities.

The proposed Plug and Play program demonstrates alignment across all elements of the Framework by:

Supporting Economic Resilience and Productivity

Accessible charging infrastructure reduces barriers to EV adoption by residents, small businesses, local governments and regional industries.

Improved charging availability can support lower transport operating costs, encourage investment in electric fleet vehicles and improve regional competitiveness as transport technologies evolve.

Supporting Liveability and Community Wellbeing

Public charging infrastructure increases amenity for residents, visitors and workers. It provides practical support for households that cannot install home charging infrastructure and promotes equitable participation in the transition to low-emissions transport.

Building Sustainable Regional Futures

The program supports emissions reduction objectives while helping regional communities adapt to changing energy and transport systems.

The RDA Network views this proposal as a practical example of future-focused infrastructure investment that strengthens long-term regional resilience.

Delivering Visible Benefits from the Energy Transition

Across regional NSW, communities are playing a critical role in Australia's transition to a lower-emissions economy.

Regional areas host substantial renewable energy generation assets, transmission infrastructure, energy zones and associated development activities that underpin national decarbonisation objectives.

While many communities recognise the national importance of this transition, there remains an expectation that the benefits of transformation should also be experienced locally.

The deployment of publicly accessible charging infrastructure provides a visible and tangible outcome that communities can directly connect with the broader energy transition.

Residents can see infrastructure being installed in their town centres, use it in their everyday lives and recognise that investment associated with decarbonisation is delivering local benefits.

The ability to demonstrate practical outcomes at ground level is important for maintaining community confidence and social licence as the transition continues.

The RDA NSW & ACT Network considers the Plug and Play proposal to be an example of how regional communities can share in the opportunities created through Australia's transformation to a low-carbon economy.

Supporting Regional Freight Electrification

The waiver proposal also has broader strategic significance for future freight and logistics decarbonisation.

Regional NSW plays a central role in Australia's freight task. Agricultural production, manufacturing, mining, forestry and regional supply chains depend on increasingly efficient transport systems linking regional centres to domestic and export markets.

While this trial focuses on light vehicle charging infrastructure, it contributes to the broader ecosystem necessary for transport electrification.

Progressive expansion of EV charging infrastructure will increase confidence in electric vehicle ownership and operation across regional corridors. Over time, improvements in charging availability for passenger vehicles can help pave the way for larger-scale investment in commercial fleet electrification and emerging freight charging solutions.

The RDA NSW & ACT Network sees transport electrification as an important future economic development opportunity and considers this proposal a valuable foundational step toward broader regional transport decarbonisation.

Supporting Market Development Rather Than Market Distortion

The Network notes that Essential Energy's proposal is carefully structured to support market development rather than replace private-sector participation.

The waiver application proposes that Essential Energy install and maintain charging infrastructure while private operators remain responsible for retail charging services, including customer interactions, billing and pricing. The proposal further notes that access will be made available through open and transparent arrangements and that costs will not be recovered from regulated customers.

This distinction is important.

The model reduces infrastructure barriers that currently prevent market participation, while preserving competition in customer-facing services.

Given the limited deployment of kerbside charging infrastructure across Essential Energy's network area and the recognised market challenges facing regional locations, the RDA NSW & ACT Network considers the proposed waiver to be an appropriate, proportionate and evidence-based response.

Conclusion

The RDA NSW & ACT Network strongly supports Essential Energy's application for a targeted ring-fencing waiver for the Plug and Play kerbside EV charging program.

The proposal:

- addresses a demonstrated market gap in regional and rural NSW
- supports regional economic development and connectivity objectives
- aligns with the Regional Investment Framework
- contributes to net zero and transport decarbonisation goals
- provides visible community benefits from the renewable energy transition
- supports future regional freight electrification opportunities
- maintains an appropriate role for private-sector participation in EV charging services.

The RDA NSW & ACT Network therefore encourages the Australian Energy Regulator to approve the waiver application and enable this important regional infrastructure trial to proceed.

Thank you for your consideration of the NSW Regions.

Yours sincerely



Anna Guillan AM
Chair
RDA NSW & ACT Committee