

FIRST NATIONS CLEAN ENERGY STRATEGY ROUNDTABLE – NEW SOUTH WALES

7 & 8 DECEMBER | WOLLONGONG

First Nations Clean Energy Strategy | NSW Roundtable

Location: Wollongong, NSW

Dates: 7 and 8 December 2023

Participants: 70

What is the purpose of the Roundtables?

The First Nations Clean Energy Strategy (the Strategy) roundtables provide an opportunity for First Nations peoples and organisations to discuss what is important from their perspective and to outline the barriers and opportunities so they can meaningfully share in the benefits of the clean energy transition.

The roundtables also provide a forum for government and industry to better understand First Nations perspectives and collaborate on actions, policies, and programs that could be implemented as part of the Strategy.

Key themes captured during the NSW Roundtable:

1. **First Nations landholders have a major opportunity to participate in the energy transition, but land tenure policy in NSW is deemed a barrier to realise this potential**

- a) The potential of land owned by First Nations people for renewable energy projects was a prominent topic at the NSW Roundtable. Participants highlighted the significant opportunities they see in the proposed NSW Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) and the transmission infrastructure which will pass through many First Nations communities.
- b) Challenges in land claim processes were critically discussed, with emphasis on the protracted and opaque nature of these processes in NSW. One participant mentioned they have a claim entering its seventh year without resolution.
- c) The Native Title Act, Aboriginal Land Rights Act and NSWALC Community Development Levy were seen as impediments, suggesting a need for legislative reform to facilitate more effective participation of First Nations in clean energy initiatives.
- d) Roundtable participants expressed a readiness to introduce moratoriums on clean energy projects to assert their rights in the face of what they experience as bureaucratic delays, in line with the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent.
- e) Instead of passively waiting for changes in legislation participants said that they will continue to explore seeking different ways to participate in clean energy projects.

2. **Sustainable economic benefits within the REZs, and support towards new Aboriginal Energy Zones**

- a) Roundtable participants expressed a desire for sustainable economic opportunities linked to clean energy projects. They want to ensure that the benefits from their participation in the energy transition are enduring, extending beyond the construction phase of any project, and reach individuals directly, not only organisations.

FIRST NATIONS CLEAN ENERGY STRATEGY ROUNDTABLE – NEW SOUTH WALES

7 & 8 DECEMBER | WOLLONGONG

- b) Participants proposed First Nations jobs and procurement targets in the REZs which align with the demographic proportions of First Nations people which live in the project areas.
- c) The aspiration for direct ownership and equity stakes in major clean energy projects was also evident from discussions, with a request for support for developing Aboriginal Energy Projects outside of the traditional REZ framework in NSW.
- d) Adjacent business ideas, such as constructing accommodation facilities for REZ construction workers, were discussed by participants as ways to broaden the economic impact of clean energy projects.
- e) Access to long term funding was requested to ensure First Nations participation across the clean energy project lifecycle and economic benefits can be sustained.

3. Improved collaboration and a data-driven approach could lead to ‘value stacking’ of socio-economic benefits in clean energy project areas

- a) The lack of coordination between various government departments who engage with First Nations communities was a point of critique.
- b) A proposal was raised for a more coordinated approach between government agencies to ensure multiple priorities in the ‘Closing the Gap’ reform are achieved simultaneously within clean energy project areas. Participants discussed how initiatives within the different project areas could be tailored, based on accurate community-level data.
- c) Historical trading practices among First Nations communities were recalled, with a proposition to revitalise these exchanges in a digital era. Participants raised the idea of collecting and mapping data in their individual communities against the ‘Closing the Gap’ priorities to ensure that initiatives are effectively targeted and beneficial.
- d) Participants requested resourcing to create this evidence base of community needs and to retain sovereignty over their data. They believe that this data-driven approach and better coordination across government agencies will improve collaboration and lead to ‘value stacking’ of socio-economic benefits in their communities.

4. Capacity building of First Nations organisations required to sustain and scale their ability to engage

- a) First Nations people’s eagerness to participate in clean energy projects is tempered by concerns about the capacity of their representative organisations to do so on a continued basis.
- b) The need for resourcing and support towards LALCs was underscored to empower them in their interfacing role between community, industry, and government.
- c) The high social return on investment of First Nations businesses was acknowledged. Participants requested greater investment towards First Nations businesses to scale their capacity to participate in clean energy value chains.
- d) Government was requested to explore how clean energy training programs typically available at TAFEs around Australia could be made available within First Nations communities, along with wrap-around support to ensure training is effective.

FIRST NATIONS CLEAN ENERGY STRATEGY ROUNDTABLE – NEW SOUTH WALES

7 & 8 DECEMBER | WOLLONGONG

5. Cultural heritage and environmental protection could be strengthened through cultural mapping, recognition of the voice of elders and improved legislation

- a) The destruction of culturally significant sites and biodiversity in past developments was a significant concern, with a call for proactive measures to protect these sites in future clean energy infrastructure rollouts.
- b) One participant relayed how archaeological and culturally significant sites, such as Aboriginal camp sites, middens and burial sites, have been destroyed through sand mining efforts in Northern NSW. She urged government and industry to not repeat these violations as clean energy infrastructure is rolled out.
- c) Participants were inspired by insights from the COP 28 Indigenous Dialogue. While Indigenous communities comprise less than 5% of the world's population, they protect 80% of global biodiversity. NSW Roundtable participants expressed a strong responsibility for protecting their natural environment, with concerns that activities on sea Country progressing without their inputs
- d) Participants proposed three solutions to strengthen cultural heritage and environmental protection throughout the energy transition:
 - The mapping of culturally significant sites and biodiversity across Australia, in partnership with First Nations communities
 - A revision of the Cultural Heritage Act in NSW to ensure better protection of culturally significant sites and artefacts
 - Initiatives to recognise and learn from First Nations elders as custodians of cultural knowledge and history to ensure protection of significant sites align with the deep-rooted values and traditions of their communities

FIRST NATIONS CLEAN ENERGY STRATEGY ROUNDTABLE – NEW SOUTH WALES

7 & 8 DECEMBER | WOLLONGONG

Organisations represented at the NSW Roundtable:

Armidale and Region Aboriginal Cultural Centre
and Keeping Place

Australian Energy Market Commission

Australian Radio Towers

Brewarrina LALC

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the
Environment and Water (DCCEEW)

Department of Regional NSW

Energy Consumers Australia

Essential Energy

First Nations Clean Energy and Emissions Reduction
Advisory Committee

First Nations Clean Energy Network

First Nations Clean Energy Strategy (FNCES)
Taskforce

Iberdrola

Illawarra Local Aboriginal Land Council

Indigenous Energy Australia

Mudyala Aboriginal Corporation

National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA)NSW
Aboriginal Land Council

NSW Decarbonisation Innovation Hub

NSW Office of Energy and Climate Change

NSW Parliamentary Secretary for Energy and
Climate Change

RPS

Squadron Energy

TAFE NSW

University of Wollongong

Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation