



Australian Government

Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner

3 June 2025

Jarrold Bleijie

Deputy Premier, Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning and Minister for Industrial Relations

Renewable Energy Planning Group

Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning

via email: renewablesplanning@dasilgp.qld.gov.au

Dear Mr Bleijie

Re: General Submission – Queensland Renewable Energy Reforms

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on Queensland's renewable energy reforms.

The Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner (AEIC) is an independent non-statutory role appointed by the Australian Government and supported by the Office of the AEIC.

We work collaboratively with all levels of government, industry, landholders, and community members to address local and systemic concerns, improve ongoing community engagement, and promote transparency and best practices across the life-cycle of renewable energy infrastructure and related projects. In simplest terms, the fundamental purpose of the AEIC is to help make the energy shift smoother and fairer.

Our responsibilities include:

- Resolving enquiries and complaints from community members regarding proposed and operational renewable energy projects (wind, solar and energy storage facilities), and new large-scale transmission projects.
- Promoting transparency and best practice engagement and information sharing about renewables, including for First Nations engagement.
- Leading and collaborating in implementing the recommendations of the Community Engagement Review (2023).

Through our work we are well placed to provide insights into broader community concerns and sentiments, as well as trends and observations related to the opportunities and challenges in the energy transition. Promoting best practice community engagement and addressing concerns are central to ensuring social licence and long-term project and sector success. We offer the following comments below for your consideration.

The proposed amendments to the Queensland planning framework through the *Planning (Social Impact and Community Benefit) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025*, provide a practical way of addressing community concerns and ensuring host communities of renewable energy projects receive targeted legacy benefits. Our Office views the establishment of a more formalised process for renewable energy approvals in the form of a community benefit system as an encouraging development to ensure these processes are consistent and transparent. The AEIC is supportive of any move towards a more Nationally consistent approach regarding planning frameworks and community consultation, even when implemented at a sub-national level. If properly implemented, these reforms should improve equity in outcomes and help to build a social licence in host communities.

The proposed reforms also provide an opportunity to take into consideration how community benefit sharing arrangements can be better coordinated to maximise regional benefits.

As identified in the Community Engagement Review, community engagement could be improved by reforming planning approvals processes which have to-date resulted in community members experiencing consultation fatigue in lengthy processes that are exacerbated by project delays. For some, this has in turn had a negative impact on mental health. When given the opportunity to provide feedback, community members have often expressed frustration about the short consultation timeframes. This reflects an asymmetry between community and developer resources to respond to and engage in planning approvals processes.

The requirement for proponents to conduct a social impact assessment and enter into a community benefit agreement prior to lodging a development application, effectively frontloading a proponent's engagement requirements, could address these imbalances. Ideally, this process would also lead to reduced approvals timeframes for projects which could provide more certainty for both proponents and communities, so long as this is not at the expense of quality assurance or public engagement.

We support any initiatives that seek to strengthen community engagement and community benefits associated with the delivery of the energy transition. I consent to any publications of this submission and may make a copy available through our website.

If you have any further questions or wish to discuss this submission, please do not hesitate to contact us via email at aeic@aeic.gov.au or on 1800 656 395.

Yours sincerely,

TONY MAHAR
AUSTRALIAN ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE COMMISSIONER