



VicGrid
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To whom it may concern,

Submission to consultation on draft Renewable Energy Zone Orders

I welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the VicGrid consultation on the draft Renewable Energy Zone Orders.

My electorate of Indi covers 29,000 square kilometres of Victoria's North East, from Corryong on the upper Murray River to Kinglake near Melbourne's outer north-eastern fringe. The draft Central North REZ covers parts of my electorate of Indi around Benalla, including the towns of Goorambat and Glenrowan.

Consultation on the Central North REZ has not yet opened, but more information on this expected in early 2026 according to VicGrid.¹ This submission focuses on community engagement and benefit, which is important in the transition to renewable energy and applicable across all REZ and non-REZ areas. I am making this submission to the current REZ consultation, to recommend community consultation be embedded within renewable energy policy settings in Victoria, both in REZ areas and across broader Victoria.

Recommendation 1: The Victorian Government promptly release their Community Engagement and Social Value Guidelines for Renewable Energy and Transmission Projects, prior to the Victorian Access Regime commencing.

Recommendation 2: The Victorian Government promptly release the REZ Community Benefits Plan, ahead of officially declaring zones a REZ.

Recommendation 3: Community benefit must deliver long-term economic benefit to regions hosting renewable energy infrastructure.

Recommendation 4: Community engagement and benefit requirements should be consistent across REZ and non-REZ areas.

¹ VicGrid (2025) *Central North Renewable Energy Zones*, <https://www.vicgrid.com.au/transmission-planning/renewable-energy-zones/central-north-renewable-energy-zone>



Community Engagement and Social Value Guidelines should be implemented promptly

The importance of community engagement is clear in the transition to renewable energy. Across Australia, there is broad support of renewable energy infrastructure.² 70% of regional Australians living within a renewable energy zone (REZ) are supportive of renewable energy projects, and 73% of people connected to farming supportive of these projects.³ Most regional Australians believe authentic and early community engagement by developers is essential in building community trust of a project.⁴

In my regional electorate, I often hear from constituents on the importance of early and meaningful community engagement. There are 22 renewable energy projects in Indi that are pending planning approval, under construction or operating listed on VicPlan.⁵ I have received correspondence from some constituents raising valid concerns on the impacts of renewable projects on the natural environment, bushfire risk, visual amenity, air quality and land value. Residents are not against renewable energy, they are just requesting fair warning, fair process, and fair and intergenerational community benefit from projects.

I understand VicGrid have been undertaking consultation to develop Community Engagement and Social Value Guidelines for Renewable Energy and Transmission Projects.⁶ This has been part of broader work on the Victorian Access Regime, which sets rules around how renewable energy projects gain access to the Victorian transmission network.

I was pleased to review the Community Engagement and Social Value Guidelines and welcome the prompt introduction of these guidelines. They set an important indication to proponents that meaningful community engagement is critical. They also help communities to understand what to expect when engaging on renewable energy projects in their region.

Recommendation 1: The Victorian Government promptly release their Community Engagement and Social Value Guidelines for Renewable Energy and Transmission Projects, prior to the Victorian Access Regime commencing.

REZ Community Benefits Plans should be implemented promptly

Regional Australia is on the precipice of a gold-rush of investment from renewable energy. The Clean Energy Council predicts grid-scale renewable energy projects are expected to deliver up to \$11.7 billion in landholder payments and community benefit contributions across Australia over the coming decades

² Boundless Earth and 89 Degrees East (2025) *Clean Energy Solutions Index*, https://cleanenergysolutionsindex.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Clean-Energy-Solutions-Index_Report_Final.pdf

³ Farmers for Climate Action (2024) *Renewable Energy in Farming Communities*, <https://farmersforclimateaction.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/FFCA-89DE-RenewableEnergyReport-2.pdf>

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ Victorian Department of Transport and Planning, *VicPlan*, <https://mapshare.vic.gov.au/vicplan/>

⁶ VicGrid (2025) *Victorian Access Regime*, <https://engage.vic.gov.au/victorian-access-regime>



to 2050.⁷ Trust from early community engagement is foundational for negotiating this benefit. However, when community consultation is poor, this undermines trust in the relationship between communities and proponents and risks worse outcomes for both.

The Victorian Transmission Plan 2025 states renewable energy zones will have new access arrangements, and these will set clear expectations and requirements for proponents to undertake community engagement and deliver meaningful benefit.⁸ VicGrid have been consulting on REZ Community Benefit Plans, and I understand intends to release these plans this year.

I call on the Victorian Government to promptly release this plan, ahead of officially declaring REZ zones. This will indicate the importance of community benefit to proponents, helps future proponents to plan their projects accordingly, and helps communities to understand their rights in negotiating benefit.

Recommendation 2: The Victorian Government promptly release the REZ Community Benefits Plan, ahead of officially declaring zones a REZ.

Community benefit must deliver long-term economic benefits

The VicGrid REZ Community Benefit Plan notes the development of renewable energy zones will create opportunities for local workers, businesses and industries.⁹ In the context of the transition to renewable energy, community benefit is often referred to in terms of the number of jobs created. Jobs created for the installation of grid-scale renewable energy projects are overwhelmingly short-term construction jobs. There are limited ongoing, permanent jobs for regional communities hosting renewable energy infrastructure.

Regional communities who play a vital role in hosting renewable energy infrastructure should receive intergenerational economic benefits commensurate with this role.

There are some communities who are leaders in negotiating benefit from renewable energy projects. Armidale Regional Council is an example of a region who have taken it upon themselves to ensure they receive appropriate benefit. Armidale Regional Council (ARC) has published a 'Renewable Energy Community Benefit Framework' which sets minimum expectations for proponents to deliver community benefit for the life of a project.¹⁰ They have set their minimum expectations at:

- \$850 per megawatt of capacity per annum for solar energy and energy storage developments.
- \$1050 per megawatt of capacity per annum for wind energy development.¹¹

⁷ Clean Energy Council (2024) *Billions in the Bush*, <https://cleanenergycouncil.org.au/getmedia/2f9d50cb-60d1-4bec-86f0-65d77ce998ec/billions-in-the-bush-november-2024-final-compressed.pdf>

⁸ VicGrid (2025) *2025 Victorian Transmission Plan*, <https://www.vicgrid.com.au/transmission-planning/victorian-transmission-plan>, page 18

⁹ VicGrid (2025) *Community Benefits*, <https://www.vicgrid.com.au/community/community-benefits>

¹⁰ Armidale Regional Council (2024) *Renewable Energy Community Benefit Framework* <https://www.armidale.nsw.gov.au/files/assets/public/v/1/development/documents/renewable-energy-community-benefit-framework.pdf>

¹¹ *ibid*



ARC intend to use this investment to create a \$70- 80 million future fund and spend the interest earnings on council and community priority projects.¹²

The transition to renewables presents a major investment opportunity for regional councils, who have small ratepayer bases, tight budgets, and extensive responsibilities. When done right, it could deliver intergenerational benefit to regional communities, like the lasting benefits we see from the goldrush. However, policy settings must be established with this as their measurement of benefit, rather than shortchange communities with short-term jobs.

Recommendation 3: Community benefit must deliver long-term economic benefit to regions hosting renewable energy infrastructure.

Community Engagement and benefit requirements should be consistent across REZ and non-REZ areas

I often hear from industry, and in particular renewable energy proponents, that they are willing to deliver community benefits and community benefit funds, but they want consistent and transparent application of requirements for such benefits.

Constituents have also raised concerns that it can be difficult to understand and navigate community engagement and benefit processes. This would be more challenging if processes were different depending on whether projects were within, or outside, renewable energy zones. It could potentially risk community confusion and project uncertainty or delays.

Recommendation 4: Community engagement and benefit requirements should be consistent across REZ and non-REZ areas.

Conclusion

I am pleased the Victorian Government is undertaking this consultation on the draft renewable energy zone orders. While doing this important work, I urge them to concurrently progress their guidelines for community engagement and benefit from the transition to renewables. This is needed to ensure that Victoria can meet its renewable energy targets. It is also essential in ensuring regional communities are respected stakeholders in the transition to renewables and receive intergenerational benefits commensurate with their vital role in the transition.

Sincerely,

Helen Haines MP

3 March 2026

¹² Chris Palmer (2025) *New England eyes \$80 million REZ 'future fund'* <https://theenergy.co/article/new-england-eyes-80-million-rez-future-fund>