



Minister for Energy and Clean Economy Jobs

Leader of the House

Our Ref: MN10626-2024

19 September 2024

Mr Neil Laurie
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Dear Mr Laurie

I refer to Petition No. 4103-24 titled 'Protect our region of Southern Downs against wind and solar farms', submitted by the Principal Petitioner Mr Charles Starky and received by the Queensland Legislative Assembly on 20 August 2024.

The Queensland Government is committed to global leading practice in delivering a renewable energy transition that protects existing values, industry, farmland and ecosystems while delivering the new energy infrastructure needed to replace our aging coal generators with the cleanest, cheapest, most secure option: renewables. A number of initiatives we are already delivering are summarised in the Queensland Energy and Jobs Plan Community Partnerships and Enabling Frameworks update published in May this year.

The Queensland Energy and Jobs Plan, released in September 2022, commits to 70% renewable energy by 2032 and 80% by 2035. The Plan sets out actions that will create jobs, diversify the state's economy, attract investment, and deliver clean, reliable, and affordable energy to households and businesses. As of the end of June 2024, Queensland has made strides towards our renewable energy targets, with 27.4% of electricity generated from renewables. This puts us more than halfway towards achieving 50% renewable energy by 2030.

These targets and the plan to reach them were set in law earlier this year by the *Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Act 2024* (the Energy Act). Not only does the Energy Act enshrine targets, but it also empowers significant changes to the way energy infrastructure is delivered. While this legislation did not gain support from the Opposition, this Government is committed to delivering outcomes that protect what matters to Queenslanders and that means working with them to deliver clean, affordable, secure renewable energy.

The Renewable Energy Zone Framework puts community consultation at the centre of building renewables, with consultation in central Queensland around what is anticipated to be the first declared REZ having commenced throughout June through to August. This engagement collected feedback through over 1,000 conversations across workshops, drop in sessions, and pop ups. Outcomes from this consultation will inform how cumulative impacts across the REZ can be managed to deliver benefits to communities and be supported by funding from the \$200 million Regional Economic Futures Fund to deliver actions identified by the community.

The Southern Downs region has been identified as one REZ location in Southern Queensland and is currently in-flight. In-flight REZs consist of foundational renewable energy developments that Powerlink is already progressing under the existing National Electricity Rules. In Southern Queensland, those foundation projects under development are the Wambo and MacIntyre Wind Farms. The REZ Roadmap identifies the scale of renewables development anticipated in each potential REZ, Southern Downs is expected to have no more than 2,000 – 2,600MW of renewables. For context, the Macintyre wind farm is approximately 1,000MW so could provide about half the expected capacity of the Southern Downs REZ.

In the Southern Downs region, agriculture is the largest employer, accounting for one-fifth of the region's economic turnover. Achieving our targets involves balancing the need for the rollout of renewable energy infrastructure while preserving the region's rich agricultural legacy to secure our food supply. Wind in particular has a small direct footprint, spread across a large project area meaning traditional cattle and cropping activities can continue. Importantly, wind and solar projects can be highly complementary to agricultural land uses by providing supplementary income to farmers and providing a financial lifeline during drought.

The Queensland Government aims to conduct a strategic REZ Readiness Assessment in Southern Queensland in early 2025. Building on the positive outcomes from Central Queensland, community engagement activities will form a key part of the assessment with events held for community groups to provide their valuable input.

The Energy Act also legislated the creation of Australia's first Code of Conduct for energy developments including Wind, Solar, Batteries, Hydro, Gas, and Transmission infrastructure. This legislation provides the ability for compliance with Code of Conduct to be considered through the granting of a generation authority. This compliance mechanism along with improved engagement required through the REZ framework and approvals process will ensure improved outcomes for communities.

The GasFields Commission Queensland was widely respected for helping to bridge coexistence issues between the Coal Seam Gas industry and landholders. That is why we have expanded the remit of the organisation to create 'Coexistence Queensland' following the passing of the *Mineral and Energy Resources and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2024*. Coexistence Queensland's remit includes the provision of information, engagement and education services to communities and industry on a broader range of land access and coexistence issues including the renewable energy industry and associated infrastructure. The refreshed Commission will establish the first Community Leader Councils for energy to formalise channels for engagement on renewable energy.

In October last year, the government released the Local Energy Partnerships (LEP) framework. It commits to working with local councils, industry, peak bodies and communities, other state agencies and the Commonwealth Government on various initiatives that support the energy transformation in Queensland. We have partnered with the Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) to deliver the Queensland Renewable Energy Landholder Toolkit, providing landholders easy-to-understand information to assist them when considering renewable energy development on their properties. QFF have also established the Energy Information Service for landholders providing farmers with tailored energy-related information and guidance, and equipping them with the knowledge to navigate the challenges of the energy transformation successfully.

Further initiatives under the LEP address various concerns raised in Petition No. 4103-24. We are working with the Queensland Conservation Council to identify better environmental outcomes from renewable energy projects. We are partnering with councils to give them the support they need to engage positively in the energy transformation, including a capacity building partnership with the Local Government Association Queensland, development of a Local Government Toolkit, and extending support to deliver community outcomes when councils access energy from the National Electricity Market through Power Purchase Agreements.

I thank the petitioners for their interest in this matter and I trust this information is of assistance.

If I can help with other matters within my portfolio, please contact my office on (07) 3719 7270.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mick de Brenni', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mick de Brenni MP
Minister for Energy and Clean Economy Jobs
Leader of the House