

Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner – Community Engagement Review

Queensland industry response

February 2024



Background and purpose

The Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner (AEIC) provided a report on its Community Engagement Review (the Review) to the Federal Minister for Climate Change and Energy (Federal Minister) which was publicly released on the 2nd February 2024.

At a high level, the scope of the Review was to consider community attitudes towards renewable energy infrastructure and development and provide advice on the best way to maximise community engagement and benefit in planning, developing and operating renewable energy infrastructure.

The Review process involved an online public survey, written submissions and a series of roundtable and interview meetings. The AEIC reports they held over 75 meetings with more than 700 participants, received over 500 submissions and over 250 survey responses in conducting the Review.

The Queensland Renewable Energy Council (QREC) provides this position paper in response to the issues and recommendations raised in the report. QREC is a not-for-profit organisation that is focussed on providing policy leadership and advocacy on matter relating to the development and operation of renewable energy projects in Queensland. We act in the best interests of our members in policy areas including social licence, co-existences, health & safety, environment, planning assessments and approvals.

QREC is pleased to see continued Queensland Government support for the renewables industry and the holistic approach that is being taken towards significant renewable energy development that is to occur if Queensland is to meet the renewable energy targets and the objectives in the Queensland Energy and Jobs Plan. It is acknowledged that the AEIC Review is a national report and QREC believes that while the issues raised in the Review are relevant to all renewable energy development, there may be opportunity to tailor some of the recommendations to better suit the Queensland specific context.

QREC acknowledges the concerns and issues raised in the AEIC Review and is committed to working with the State Government and other stakeholders, including industry and community representatives, to identify the best way to address these in a practical and effective manner.

The AEIC Review report is structured around six key themes and nine recommendations. This position paper considers each of these themes and recommendations as presented in the Review report.

Recommendation Summary and Response

Theme 1 – Improve community engagement by motivating developers to achieve best practice and only selecting reputable developers for new project development

The observations relating to this theme indicate a strong dissatisfaction with engagement, transparency and trust in relation to renewable energy development on a national scale.

The Review also expressed a need for greater control over the location and number of renewable energy projects within a region in order to reduce consultation burden for communities and a need for enhancement of developer capability in relation to the quality and outcomes of community engagement.

QREC was pleased to see acknowledgement in the Review of the Queensland Renewable Energy Landholder Toolkit developed by the Queensland Farmers Federation and QREC largely supports the concepts and ideas that are included in this resource. QREC also notes that the Energy Charter's Landholder Engagement Training (being run in Queensland on 27-29 February 2024) and Better Practice Social Licence Guide (which Powerlink Queensland is involved in) were recognised in the Review.

Recommendation 1- That the Federal Minister initiate a process to appoint a suitably qualified and experienced independent body or person to design, develop, implement and operate a developer rating scheme

This recommendation focusses on a nationally managed scheme to provide transparent and periodic ratings of renewable energy developer engagement performance and capability. The developer ratings could then be used by States and Territories as part of the selection criteria for renewable energy projects within a region.

While QREC recognises the underlying intent of the recommendation and the need for improvement in the engagement and transparency of the renewable energy industry as a whole, the implementation of this recommendation is likely to be problematic. QREC believes there may be better alternatives that can achieve real change in relation to the identified issues and concerns, with better outcomes for communities as a result.

An inherent problem with rating schemes in relation to qualitative performance characteristics is that they tend to be subjective in nature and largely rely on the experiences of stakeholders and the visibility or otherwise of a proponents activity. They are also generally a rating assessed at a particular point in time and require regular review and reassessment if they are to be beneficial.

Similar schemes have been attempted unsuccessfully in the past in Queensland, such as the certified operator scheme for resource proponents.

Rating systems of a qualitative nature are also difficult to apply to new or emerging proponents/companies where there is limited available data or stakeholder experiences to adequately inform an assessment process. Such systems automatically favour more established organisations and have the potential to hinder the establishment of new developers or innovative technologies and approaches within Australia. Rating schemes

also tend to favour larger organisations who have the resources to be able to demonstrate compliance, as opposed to smaller, less resourced organisations who may be conducting themselves in a way that matches community expectations.

While QREC appreciates the intent of the recommendation and the underlying need for improvement in community engagement and outcomes, QREC is not supportive of the recommendation in its current form as we do not believe it is implementable in a practical manner.

QREC Response

QREC believes that a better approach to addressing the concerns and issues raised in relation to renewable energy industry engagement performance and conduct could be to work with potentially affected stakeholders in the community to develop a solution that focusses on culture and capability of organisations and the renewable energy industry more broadly.

To address these challenges, QREC, in partnership with the Energy Charter, is proposing to lead a collaborative approach with community, local government, agriculture, conservation, environment, small business and First Nation representatives to co-design a fit-for-purpose accountability and transparency process, aligned to community expectations for renewable energy development in Queensland that leverages the Energy Charter Accountability Process (see further detail below).

The intent of this collaborative approach is to improve community engagement practice and most importantly, outcomes for communities. It is important that the working group provides recommendations that provide a practical approach for the renewable energy industry in Queensland whilst also delivering better shared value outcomes for landholders and communities.

The Energy Charter Accountability Process is an industry-led model led by across the supply chain CEOs and Boards nationally that focusses on trust and incorporates the core elements of:

1. CEO and Board Commitment
2. Transparency
3. Accountability
4. Capacity Building

The collaborative development of an accountability process in the context of the renewable energy industry in Queensland has the potential to lead the way for other States and Territories to follow suit.

QREC seeks Queensland Government support for the working group and the development of a process that achieves the intent of the recommendation in the AEIC Review in a manner that is stakeholder-led, collaborative and can be practically implemented in Queensland.

To this end, QREC and the Energy Charter feel that independent facilitation of the working group is likely to be the most beneficial approach and QREC would welcome support from the Queensland Government to achieve this along with support for organisation representatives to attend and participate as required.

SUMMARY – Key Proposal Points

- *QREC and the Energy Charter will establish a working group of community, local government, agriculture, conservation, environment, vulnerable customer, small business and First Nation representative bodies to develop a process for improving community and landholder engagement, trust and transparency of the renewable energy industry in Queensland with a focus on shared value outcomes*
- *Queensland Government support for facilitation for the working group is requested – specifically support with engaging an independent facilitator and support for relevant stakeholder organisation representatives to attend and participate in workshops as required*

Recommendation 2 – The Commonwealth, States and Territories continue their deployment of programs to better plan and control development of new generation and transmission projects whereby a developer is required to bid or apply to be selected to then prospect and develop a particular project at a particular site or location.

The recommendation focusses on methodologies to control or limit the number of prospective renewable energy developers that could be operating within a particular location, site or region in order to address highlighted concerns regarding consultation fatigue, project visibility and developer capability.

The Review identifies a proposed licencing regime whereby developers are required to bid or apply for a particular permission to undertake prospecting, development or research activities. A proponent's rating (as per recommendation 1 of the Review) would be taken into account as part of the bid/application process.

The intent of the recommendation appears to be threefold (in no particular order of importance):

1. to provide greater transparency regarding what developers are operating in a region and will be engaging with stakeholders;
2. to assess the suitability of a developer to conduct the proposed activities (including their rating as per recommendation 1); and
3. to provide the ability to control the potential locations for renewable energy development

As with recommendation 1, the intent of recommendation 2 is understood as is the need for improvement in the three key areas highlighted above. However, again similar to recommendation 1, QREC is not supportive of the recommendation in its current form as we do not believe it considers current legislative reforms that are occurring in Queensland and does not provide the best or most practical way in which to improve performance in relation to the presented issues.

QREC Response

QREC supports greater transparency regarding what developers are operating in a region and the need for this has been a common piece of feedback that QREC has received from local governments, communities, landholders and associated representative bodies.

However, the implementation of a licencing scheme would seem to be an unnecessary administrative burden for both industry and the Queensland Government when there are alternative available methodologies for achieving the objective.

QREC would support the establishment of a register, perhaps by local government area, of renewable energy proponents who are seeking to engage with landholders and other stakeholders for the purpose of exploring the feasibility and/or development of renewable energy infrastructure. Such a register could either be voluntary or required by legislation (potentially through amendment to the *Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill 2023*). The register would likely only need to be a simple list of company names and a key contact so as to provide transparency as to who is operating in an area.

In relation to assessing or ensuring the suitability of a developer to conduct activities in an area, QREC believes the establishment of a collaborative working group as per the proposal against recommendation 1 is the preferred approach to the development of a suitable solution. It is also noted that the *Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill 2023* contains consideration for the development of 'eligibility criteria' for assessing proponents who may wish to develop in a Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) and that this ability would also appear to supersede any perceived requirement for a licencing system, particularly when combined with a developer register (as proposed) to increase transparency.

The *Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill 2023* and the included declaration and management of REZ's would also seem to achieve the stated intent of recommendation 2 in the Review to provide greater control over the potential locations for renewable energy development. The Review itself highlights that most States and Territories are considering or implementing programs that give appropriate controls in this regard and QREC considers that the approach adopted in the *Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill 2023* is an appropriate methodology to achieve the intent of the recommendation without further administrative burden.

QREC would welcome the opportunity to work with the Queensland Government to work through the details on how best to address the AEIC recommendation seeking greater control of renewable energy development, potentially through the subsequent development of eligibility criteria and/or Regulations for the Act once the *Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill 2023* has been enacted.

SUMMARY - Key Proposal Points

- *QREC supports the establishment of a register, by local government area, of renewable energy proponents who are seeking to engage with landholders or other stakeholders in relation to renewable energy development. The register could be voluntary or could be inserted as a requirement in the Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill 2023*
- *The REZ framework being implemented by Queensland is a suitable methodology to ensure greater control over renewable energy development locations and projects and QREC seeks to work with the Queensland Government on the development of further detail once the Bill is passed and enacted*

Theme 2 – Reduce and eliminate unnecessary community engagement by selecting the best project sites and avoiding poor and inappropriate sites.

The Review identifies the importance of proper site selection and the need to ensure that projects are located in areas that are best suited and most likely to succeed so as not to cause unnecessary community opposition and consultation fatigue.

Recommendation 3 – The States and Territories support and expedite sourcing information that is necessary for contemporary land use planning. Mapping is subsequently used to better identify preferred locations for new projects and provide confirmation of ‘no-go’ or inappropriate zones.

The recommendation seeks to address a concern that renewable energy developments are being pursued in marginal locations that may be subject to lengthy delays in the planning process and unnecessary engagement with stakeholders.

QREC recognises a long history in Queensland regarding the use of mapping products to inform land use planning and define the suitability of areas for various activities. Vegetation mapping, strategic cropping land and Queensland land use planning maps are some examples of products that have been used with varying levels of success.

QREC considers that mapping alone is not a suitable methodology to resolve potential land use conflicts and/or issues of coexistence between various operating entities as the nature of these is often highly dependent on the individual circumstances which apply to those specific activities in those specific locations.

It is recognised that potential competing land use priorities is an emerging and topical issue in relation to renewable energy development and it was a common theme and concern raised by multiple witnesses in the recent Transport and Resource Committee hearings on the *Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill*. However, it would seem beneficial to consider alternate methodologies for addressing potential land use conflicts rather than a strict mapping based approach.

As with other areas of the report, the intent is understood but the implementation and ramifications of such an approach could be significant. Land use mapping is inherently inaccurate and there are numerous examples where its use has caused greater uncertainty and conflict and resulted in onerous processes for both proponents and stakeholders alike. QREC believes the focus of industry should be on co-existence with existing land uses and is not in favour of a mapping approach that has the potential to prevent development on land on which co-existence is possible.

As such, while the sourcing of improved mapping data is encouraged, QREC does not support the detail of the recommendation in its current form. Our view is mapping alone is not a suitable methodology for the identification of no-go zones and resolution of potential land use conflicts.

QREC Response

The ability of a developer and landholders to reach agreement (or otherwise) should feature as a key element of any adopted approach. This is the best methodology to ensure that site specific considerations and circumstances are adequately considered.

QREC supports the sourcing of improved mapping data and land use planning instruments but believes that these are only tools that can be used as part of a solution rather than being a solution in their own right.

Land use conflicts and co-existence are complex topics and require a multi-level approach of which mapping is only one element. In Queensland, this has the potential to be actively considered as part of the REZ declaration process and the development of a variety of supporting instruments as currently proposed in the *Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill* as well as the (bio)Regional Planning approach currently being considered under the Nature Positive Plan (Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act). QREC would welcome the opportunity to work with the Queensland Government across all relevant agencies and other stakeholders in the development of subsequent detail in this regard.

There is also potential for the working group being established in reply to recommendation 1 to further consider this topic and provide recommendations to the renewable energy industry and the Queensland Government.

SUMMARY - Key Proposal Points

- *QREC supports the improvement of mapping data and land use planning instruments but believes this is only one element of a potential approach to the underlying issues identified in the report*
- *QREC supports the consideration of land use conflict and coexistence issues as part of the process of declaring and developing a REZ in accordance with the Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill*
- *QREC supports measures to improve co-existence between the renewable energy industry and existing land users and would welcome the opportunity to work with the Queensland Government and relevant stakeholders to develop further detail in relation to this approach.*
- *QREC would support further consideration of potential approaches to managing land use conflict and coexistence issues as part of the working group approach proposed in relation to recommendation 1*

Theme 3 – Reduce and minimise the need for elongated community engagement by re-engineering planning and environmental assessment and approval processes.

This section of the Review focusses on the need to materially improve planning and environmental approval processes, particularly for significant priority projects and points to recommendation 3 in relation to priority and no-go zone mapping as a methodology to assist with this.

Participants in the Review expressed frustration at the time taken for projects to progress and the uncertainty as to whether a project would actually proceed or not.

Recommendation 4 – To progress, complete and expedite the deployment of process reforms currently being contemplated by States and Territories, which will materially improve processes and help reduce the time needed to obtain planning and environmental approvals for projects. (integrating current work being undertaken on reforms to the EPBC Act)

The Review details the need to progress reforms, including those being undertaken by the Federal Government on reforms to the EPBC Act under the guise of the Nature Positive Plan, regarding assessment and approvals processes.

As per the commentary in relation to recommendation 3, QREC does not believe that the improved mapping proposed as part of recommendation 3 will lead to significant improvements in its own right and that further consideration of approval and assessment processes and timeframes is required in order to facilitate improvement.

QREC supports a fair and rigorous assessment and approvals process that is fit for purpose and practically addresses relevant concerns and issues in a manner to provide stakeholder and developer confidence. As such, QREC supports the recommendation in principle but recognises there is significant further work required over and above that outlined in the report recommendation in order to achieve the underlying objectives.

QREC Proposal

There is limited detail in this section of the report and it does not specifically point at any particular process or approval other than to mention the EPBC Act reform process and that the mapping from recommendation 3 should help with the issue.

It is reasonably safe to assume that the EPBC Act reform that is referred to relates directly to the current Federal Government development of a regional planning methodology which Queensland is already progressing through their pilot bio-regional planning sites (so as not to confuse it with other forms of regional plans).

While the principle of the recommendation is supported, it is felt that actual consideration of the existing planning and approvals framework in Queensland is required, particularly in relation to consistency across the various types of renewable energy development and where relevant matters cross jurisdictional boundaries between Federal, State and local governments.

QREC would further support the consideration of approval and assessment processes and methodologies that apply to other industries in Queensland and whether there are

learnings or elements of these that would assist in improving consistency, transparency and efficiency of the process that currently applies to the renewable energy industry.

QREC believes the appointment of a coordination and delivery authority for renewable energy could play a key role in coordinating delivery across Queensland Government departments in relation to the review of the assessment and approvals processes in addition to managing delivery of the renewable energy transformation within REZ's and considering potential competing priorities such as transport, other land uses and housing.

It is considered extremely unlikely that the mapping proposed in recommendation 3 will assist by itself to the level indicated in the report and the impact of other recommendations from the Review may actually increase approval and assessment timeframes for projects if not carefully considered.

SUMMARY - Key Proposal Points

- *QREC supports further consideration of the planning and approvals framework for renewable energy development in Queensland and would welcome the opportunity to continue to work with the Queensland Government in this regard, particularly as the Nature Positive Plan reforms proceed.*
- *QREC seeks the establishment of a coordination and delivery authority/entity for REZ development and delivery so as to manage cross departmental issues and competing priorities in a coordinated and effective manner.*

Theme 4 – Reduce unresolved and lengthy complaints by ensuring best practice complaint handling, backed up with a new, relevant ombudsman scheme in each state.

The Review notes significant dissatisfaction with the management of complaints and concerns raised with renewable energy developers. The role of local governments as a natural first point of contact is highlighted but notes there is limited visibility of projects and limited resources within local governments to adequately address concerns.

Recommendation 5 – State and Territory governments to establish and implement a new ombudsman function focussed on handling complaints about the prospecting, development, construction, operation and decommissioning of renewable energy generation, large scale storage and new transmission infrastructure

The detail in the Review surrounding this recommendation focusses on the establishment of an ombudsman like role at either State/Territory or Commonwealth levels to assist in addressing the underlying concerns highlighted in relation to this theme in the Review.

The Review notes that the jurisdiction of the ombudsman role should include:

- All aspects of the renewable energy development cycle including generation, storage and transmission
- Handling complaints throughout the project lifecycle
- Matters arising from private agreements
- Matters relating to opposed entry, compulsory easement/acquisition, property damage and payment disputes
- Sufficient powers to settle complaints

The report notes the work already completed or underway in this space by some States and Territories.

QREC believes that Queensland is already progressing reform in relation to this recommendation with the expansion of the role of the GasFields Commission Queensland (GFCQ) to encompass the renewable energy industry and be renamed Coexistence Queensland (or similar). These reforms were identified as part of the Queensland Resource Industry Development Plan and were the subject of a later review of coexistence institutions for the resources industry, conducted by the Department of Resources, the recommendations from which are currently being finalised.

However, in contrast to what is suggested in the AEIC Review, the GFCQ does not currently deal with individual landholder complaints and it is not proposed that any expansion of remit for the GFCQ would result in any change to this approach.

QREC is supportive of a focus on improved complaints handling for the renewable energy industry and to provide greater transparency and accountability in this regard. As such, QREC is supportive of the recommendation in principle.

QREC Proposal

QREC is supportive of the expansion to the remit of the GFCQ as currently proposed by the Queensland Government. In its submission to the *Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill 2023*, QREC suggested that the necessary amendments to enabling legislation

required to progress the expanded remit should be included as part of the Bill so as not to unnecessarily delay the ability for the renamed GFCQ to commence activities in relation to the renewable energy industry.

The GFCQ does not currently deal with individual landholder complaints and it is not proposed that any expansion of remit to renewable energy for the entity would change in this regard. Instead, the proposed remit of the expanded GFCQ is on providing education and information to stakeholders on matters related to coexistence and land access. QREC is supportive of the currently proposed approach.

Therefore, in relation to the ombudsman role and function proposed by AEIC, this would seem more aligned with the role of the existing Queensland Land Access Ombudsman (LAO). The Queensland LAO currently provides an independent service to investigate and resolve land access disputes related to CSG in Queensland. The current LAO service for CSG appears to be very similar to that proposed by the AEIC for renewables and this would seem a better alignment of existing function than the GFCQ with its proposed expanded remit.

If adopted, the scope and specific remit for the LAO would require consideration. Having an ombudsman consider any type of grievance or complaint is a very broad responsibility and it may be better to limit the scope of any such consideration to complaints associated with specific areas of renewable energy development, such as disputes surrounding agreements or neighbouring, non-compensated impacts.

SUMMARY - Key Proposal Points

- *QREC supports the expanded remit of the GFCQ as currently proposed by the Queensland Government and suggests the necessary legislative amendments are progressed as part of the Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill 2023*
- *QREC believes the function proposed in the AEIC review better aligns with the function of the existing Queensland Land Access Ombudsmen (LAO). If an expansion of the remit of the LAO to the renewable energy industry was to be considered, QREC requests further consultation on the proposed scope and remit for the expanded role.*

Theme 5 – Improve community understanding of the need for the transition including what is to be deployed in their region as well as where, when and why. Ensure appropriate governance is in place to manage the broader impacts of the transition as well as oversight of projects of national significance.

Recommendations in this section of the report focus on two key areas:

1. Review participant feedback regarding the lack of a national narrative for the renewable energy transition and the inability for stakeholders and communities to see themselves as part of the transition.
2. The need for two way communication with impacted communities and the potential cumulative impacts from multiple large projects in a region.

Recommendation 6 – The Federal Minister to initiate a process for the development and execution of a communications program that provides local communities with a clear narrative about the pragmatic reasons for the energy transition.

The recommendation focusses on the need to articulate why there is an urgent need for the renewable energy transition and provide better information to stakeholders as to the likely type, scale and location of development.

A number of communication mediums are identified as is the potential appointment of a suitable independent spokesperson. The suggestion primarily relates to a National level appointment but the Review also suggests that States and Territories may consider the value of establishing a similar role.

The concept of additional communication on the drivers and practicalities (as opposed to the ideology) of the renewable energy transition is supported by QREC. The communications program as outlined in the Review is a significant body of work in its own right but QREC supports the recommendation in principle.

QREC Proposal

Common feedback received by QREC from various stakeholder groups, local governments and communities is that there is a lack of understanding as to what is driving the energy transition and why various levels of government are pushing it to occur. An additional item of feedback has been that visibility on the pipeline of renewable energy developments is limited and it is hard to determine what area developers are working within, and what projects are being planned.

State and Federal governments would seem ideally positioned to lead the communication on the need and drivers for the energy transition and QREC is supportive of the establishment of a communications program in relation to this.

QREC would also support consideration of how to better improve project visibility specifically and seeks to work with the Queensland and relevant local governments in this regard.

SUMMARY – Key Proposal Points

- QREC supports the development of a State/Federal government led communications program on the need, drivers and practicalities of the renewable energy transition
- QREC seeks to discuss options with the Queensland and relevant local governments regarding ways to improve project pipeline visibility in order to better support the proposed communications program

Recommendation 7 – The Commonwealth to work with State and Territory governments to assist review and/or implement appropriate oversight governance arrangements that should be in place for transition projects of national significance.

The recommendation suggests that appropriate governance and leadership arrangements should exist nationally and at State/Territory level in order to provide a whole of government and cross discipline approach to deliver the infrastructure and resources required to support the energy transition.

Specific suggestions include:

- A State/Territory government executive should be appointed to lead an oversight advisory committee (or equivalent) to help oversee and provide advice to the major nationally significant transmission projects
- A State/Territory government executive should be appointed to lead and oversee the whole of government plan to enable and facilitate the transition. This should ideally be via an appropriate committee or taskforce with members who can execute on their part of the plan.
- Roads, bridges, maintenance of capital assets, transport volumes, housing, water, resource depletion, waste and skilled resources are all identified as potential issues and areas requiring consideration and management

Queensland is identified in the report as already significantly progressed down this pathway with the establishment of the Qld Energy System Advisory Board, Energy Industry Council and Renewable Energy Jobs Advocate in the *Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill* which is currently before parliamentary committee.

QREC is supportive of the recommendation but acknowledges the work already completed by the Queensland Government in relation to this recommendation.

QREC Proposal

QREC supports the governance bodies and approach contained in the *Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill* and believes this largely addresses this recommendation in the AEIC report.

As with the QREC proposal outlined in relation to recommendation 4 of the review, QREC believes Queensland would further benefit from an expanded role for a delivery body or authority to coordinate and drive delivery and execution of transmission and generation projects within, and in support of, an established REZ. QREC sees the absence of a

coordinating entity across the relevant government departments as an impediment to the development of the renewable energy industry in Queensland and believes such a body could be appropriately managed within the currently proposed governance framework in the *Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill*.

SUMMARY – Key Proposal Points

- *QREC supports the governance bodies and approach contained within the Energy (Renewable Transformation and Jobs) Bill.*
- *QREC seeks the establishment of a coordination and delivery authority/entity for REZ development and delivery so as to manage cross departmental issues and competing priorities in a coordinated and effective manner.*

Theme 6 – Improve acceptance of the transition changes and impacts by engaging the community to identify opportunities and enable sustainable benefit sharing through local economic development in conjunction with the numerous other opportunities that will benefit the broader community.

The report observes that there is a high level of scepticism regarding the potential benefits to local communities from large-scale renewable energy projects.

Concerns from participants included that without a holistic plan, communities would be left worse off after the development activity for renewable energy projects concluded.

Recommendation 8 – The Commonwealth to work with States/Territories to ensure appropriate arrangements exist to provide a cross-discipline, whole of government approach to identify, cultivate and generate tangible economic and investment attraction opportunities for regional businesses, including First Nations peoples and their enterprises

The recommendation details a suggestion to establish a leadership committee in each State/Territory to focus on social, economic development and investment attraction opportunities. It further suggests that work is required to:

- Engage and support local governments and regional development organisations
- Identify opportunities to accelerate local solutions by leveraging existing capabilities and skills
- Identify and support ‘regions of excellence’ which can act as hubs and play a major role in the energy transition from skilled worker training to major manufacturing and supply chain logistics centres

QREC supports the recommendation in principle.

QREC Proposal

The recommendation is largely consistent with the [feedback provided by QREC](#) in relation to aspects of the Queensland Regional Energy Transformation Partnership Framework and the QREZ roadmap. The exact methodology by which this should occur and whether it be on a Statewide or REZ basis (or a combination of both) requires consultation and determination. However, the cumulative and coordinated management of social investment and economic development is supported.

QREC acknowledges the current work and consultation that is being completed by the Department of Energy and Climate (DEC) in relation to community benefit models for the renewable energy industry. QREC will be providing a separate submission in relation to the work being completed by DEC and supports ongoing consultation on this issue.

SUMMARY – Key Proposal Points

- *QREC supports the cumulative and coordinate management of social investment and economic development across regions in which renewable energy development occurs.*
- *QREC will continue to support the current work being conducted by DEC in relation to community benefit models and encourages continued consultation on the issue.*

Recommendation 9 – States/Territories and local governments should encourage local community groups to proactively identify opportunities for the broader community's benefit as well as take ownership of sound opportunities to secure support and funding.

This recommendation highlights the importance of involving local governments in identifying local and regional opportunities arising from the energy transition and suggests ways in encouraging involvement with local government and community groups in identifying and owning opportunities to secure support and funding.

QREC is supportive of the recommendation in principle.

QREC Proposal

As per the commentary for recommendation 8, QREC is supportive of cumulative and coordinated management of social investment and economic development and believes that a similar mechanism could be used to achieve the intent of both Recommendation 8 & 9. QREC is currently engaging with members and DEC on available and preferred models.

SUMMARY - Key Proposal Points

- *As with recommendation 8, QREC supports the cumulative and coordinate management of social investment and economic development across regions in which renewable energy development occurs.*
- *QREC would support the establishment of a model and mechanism that addresses the intent and issues raised in relation to recommendations 8 and 9 in the Review*

The Queensland Renewable Energy Council works with industry, communities and all levels of government to deliver a thriving renewable energy sector for Queensland.

We are a not-for-profit industry body that represents solar, wind, pumped hydro, electricity transmission, battery storage and hydrogen proponents, operators and their suppliers.

Our role is to be a leader in policy development and connecting stakeholders to build a clean, reliable and affordable energy future where Queensland communities prosper.

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