



Glen Innes and District Community Centre Inc

SUBMISSION TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY ON Australian Local Power Agency Bill 2021 and Australian Local Power Agency (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2021

Submitted by

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Dear Committee members

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission in support of this bill.

The bill, if passed, represents an extremely significant and important initiative to support local communities to take greater control of, and benefit directly from, renewable energy projects.

The Glen Innes and District Community Centre Inc has been operating for over 40 years and has a proud history of being at the leading edge of community development and support.

For instance, the Centre developed and hosted the first Home and Community Care service (HACC) in NSW.

More recently we have, with funding support from the Commonwealth through Glen Innes Severn Council, employed a Project officer to lead a Community Building Project in response to local drought conditions. This project has seen the implementation of a local Outreach Program to surrounding villages and support for a more collaborative approach to community support programs by local agencies and organisations.

Following the Glen Innes Severn Council's declaration of a climate emergency in late 2019, we undertook an informal social media based research survey and addressed local community groups to identify community support for a Community Owned Renewable Energy (CORE) project. The results (Attachment 1) were extremely supportive. This survey, in a relatively short time frame, attracted 198 responses which represents approximately 2% of the adult population of the Local Government Area (LGA). Respondee were broadly representative of the demographics of the LGA.

In early 2020 I met with the Mayor and General Manager to present to them our proposal to support the development of a CORE project. They were supportive, and the presentation (Attachment 2) fed into the Council's deliberations about how they should respond to their declaration of a climate emergency.

In the view of the Glen Innes and District Community Centre Inc, not only is action needed to address climate change, but also, communities desperately need support to take control of ever-increasing energy costs. The best way to do this, in our view, is to support communities to better exercise control over the development of renewable energy projects so that communities directly benefit from those projects. These projects need to address the interests and needs of both homeowners and renters.

In the Glen Innes area, we currently have two wind farm developments and a solar farm development associated with one of them.

The purpose of these power generators is to supply (under contract) power to the Australian Capital Territory over the next 20 years.

The only financial benefits, currently, to the local community are:

- One of the wind farms has developed a community investment facility by which individual community members can invest in an entity that receives dividends from the wind farm, which are then distributed to individual investors.
- The other wind farm has a community grants fund under which small grants are made annually to community grounds for projects considered worthwhile. The local council is involved in the organisation and assessment of grant applications. I acknowledge that the Community Centre has, in the past, been a recipient of a grant.
- Some individual landholders receive ongoing payments because the wind turbines are situated on their land.

There has been little, if any, local employment generated by the wind farms. In the construction phase firms from as far away as Perth sent workers to undertake various roles.

The projects do not supply power to the Glen Innes area.

As may be seen from the presentation attached, in many instances some level of government has provided financial assistance or incentives to the development of community-based projects. This support has, in our view and unfortunately, been ad-hoc and reactive rather than strategic and proactive. Some examples (but by no means all) are:

- The NSW government recently trialled (and anticipates extending) a zero-interest loan scheme to assist homeowners install solar panels and batteries.
- There have been previous ad-hoc grants programs at state and Commonwealth levels targeting community-based renewable energy projects.
- Local councils have prioritised purchase of their power needs from locally developed renewable energy projects.

In other words, it is not a new idea for government to financially support community development.

What is new is the proposal for far more strategic and targeted support for communities, not only to implement, and benefit from, such schemes, but also, to undertake the preparation and development work that underpins a successful project.

The Australian Local Power Agency Bill and consequential amendments constitute a framework and strategy for providing that support.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to make a submission in support of these bills.

ATTACHED:

Attachment 1: Results of Survey

Attachment 2: Presentation to Council

END OF SUBMISSION