



*South Gippsland
Shire Council*

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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Offshore wind industry consultation process – South Gippsland Shire Council Submission

Thank you for the opportunity to participate and provide a submission in response to the Australian Government's Senate referred inquiry into the Offshore wind industry consultation process. South Gippsland Shire Council is pleased to provide a submission towards ensuring a meaningful consultation process is undertaken into the offshore wind industry.

South Gippsland Context

South Gippsland is part of Victoria's Gippsland Region. The Shire has a population of approximately 31,000 people which is projected to rise to 36,000 by 2036. Its major towns are Leongatha, Korumburra, Mirboo North and Foster. While hosting a relatively small population, South Gippsland has an economy of national significance in regard to food production and is home to one of Australia's most spectacular coastal National Parks, Wilsons Promontory.

South Gippsland is recognised for its rolling green hills, productive farmland and pristine coastline. Despite already being one of Victoria's key food production areas, the region will also have a new role in renewable energy as the industry develops, safeguarding our environment and moving us towards a zero emissions future.

Inquiry Position

The new renewables industry will help to build an innovative, skilled, and resilient economy. With Gippsland as the first area declared as suitable for offshore renewable energy in Australia and the two Ports at Barry Beach likely to play a



crucial role in this new industry, Council is eager to work with State and Federal Government to ensure success throughout each process.

The planning, development and operation of the offshore wind industry can be legacy building. Creating a platform of economic development opportunities including jobs, education, investment attraction, export opportunities and more. There are numerous benefits if the industry is introduced in a manner that fosters genuine partnerships with impacted and surrounding communities.

In response to the points of reference for the Inquiry, Council believes that the efficacy of community engagement is crucial to the successful establishment and acceptance of the offshore wind industry.

There should be appropriate community consultation during the development of the offshore wind projects; however, noting that with multiple similar projects underway at the same time, there will be overlap and duplication that may confuse or overwhelm community members, also cited as 'engagement fatigue'.

Council strongly believes that there must be a coordinated approach facilitated between government and the multiple proponents, to enable there to be an efficient process and this fatigue can be avoided.

This coordinated approach should be targeted to boost widespread community awareness and create a foundation for ongoing involvement. It is important, and ultimately beneficial, to work closely with local councils in affected areas to develop a good understanding of community interests, concerns and priorities when planning these consultations.

This will lead to the community having more acceptance if the engagement is perceived as genuine. Otherwise, it could be detrimental if the consultation process is seen as simply 'checking a box', or taking people by surprise, where social license could then be impacted, not just for one project but for the many that are proposed.

If additional consultation is required within the existing Australian Government offshore wind industry regulatory and legislative frameworks, this should be accurately represented within the coordinated consultation process.

Council supports establishing relationships with Registered Aboriginal Parties and the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council. South Gippsland has two recognised parties with Bunurong Land Council and Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC). There is also a large area of unallocated land in



South Gippsland that could require further engagement. GLaWAC Sea Country is likely be affected by the offshore wind industry, and engagement will be critical.

Council recognises that the coastal and marine environment must be protected and that any proposed developments do not have an adverse impact. Council's Coastal Strategy identifies there are significant pressures on our coastline already, with Port Welshpool identified as a site that would benefit from a detailed coastal hazard risk assessment.

The Strategy states the need to 'proactively work with, and advocate to, the State and Federal Government for the preparation and implementation of nature-based solutions to manage the impacts of environmental coastal hazard risks'. Engagement with Council and communities are therefore an important step in this process.

We trust the Minister's review and decisions on offshore wind project Environmental Effects Statements will achieve measured outcomes that balances the need to transition to renewable energy, while minimising impacts on environments and communities where new energy generation facilities and infrastructure are located.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide comment. If you would like further information, please contact Christian Stefani, Council's Manager Regional Partnerships

Yours sincerely

Kerryn Ellis
Chief Executive Officer