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The Senate  
Select Committee on Jobs for the Future in Regional Areas  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

By Email:

Re: Inquiry into Jobs for the Future in Regional Areas

Dear Committee Secretariat

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to the Select Committee on Jobs for the Future in Regional Areas.

EcoEnviro Pty Ltd has been consulting to the renewable energy industry sector in Australia since 2003. Its clients include major utilities, developers and engineering companies. EcoEnviro specialises in project development from greenfield development through to construction, operation and management of wind and solar projects. EcoEnviro is also developing its own wind and solar projects in Northern NSW and is contracting to Pilbara Solar in North West Western Australia.

Addressing the terms of reference:

- a. new industries and employment opportunities that can be created in the regions;

Clean energy opportunities abound in most regional areas of Australia. Wind and solar generation combined with battery storage is demonstrating its performance against the traditional generation sources through cost advantages, generation benefits and local community benefits. Renewable energy creates new industry opportunities, new jobs and new training and educational opportunities for the regions. The reducing cost of energy from renewables has the capacity to encourage the return of value adding manufacturing and develop energy intensive industries particularly in the data management industries.

- b. the number of existing jobs in regional areas in clean energy technology and ecological services and their future significance;

The Clean Energy Council and Bloomberg New Energy Finance have produced figures demonstrating the employment benefits of renewable energy over and above the incumbent energy production sources of coal, gas and diesel. In the US, there are now more people employed in the renewable energy sector than the coal industry, despite the attitude of the

federal government toward clean energy and emission reduction targets. With cheaper energy from clean energy, the opportunity to look toward alternative energy sources such as hydrogen will become apparent.

- c. lessons learned from structural adjustments in the automotive, manufacturing and forestry industries and energy privatisation and their impact on labour markets and local economies;

The lessons learned from structural adjustments to the automotive, manufacturing and forestry industries and energy privatisation include:

- the need for long term policy certainty from state and federal government
- the need for more investment certainty for higher risk projects and developments
- the failure of protectionist policies, tariffs and levies on imported goods

The demise of the Australian automotive industry through the decline in global labour costs and materials has now made way for a new transition into electric vehicles, with Australia now developing its own technologies for the local market (eg ACE EV vehicles). The ongoing success of these companies will be dependent upon high levels of automation and robotics with an ongoing commitment to improving automation and driverless technology.

The government should be committing to encouraging and incentivising research and development into these new technologies and markets.

The demise of the forestry industry in Australia was most recently thwarted when changes were made to the requirements for managed investment schemes (MIS) in the late 90s, which destroyed the private plantations industry overnight. Efforts should be made to rejuvenate private plantations and enhance native forest resource management to improve the Australian forest resource and prevent the importation of cheap and exotic timbers from unsustainably managed foreign industries.

Australia has the opportunity to grow and manage one of the best forest resources in the world, if we commit to the long-term sustainability and value of the resource.

Energy privatisation allowed the price gouging that we are experiencing in the marketplace today. Whilst the deployment of renewable energy has brought the wholesale price of power down, many retailers continue to charge high prices for power, service fees and connection provision. Efforts should be made to better police energy pricing by some of the current retailers.

Impacts on labour markets and local economies include:

- the significance of renewable energy projects in providing economic, social and environmental benefits to local communities is now well understood.
- These projects provide educational and employment opportunities to local communities, as well as indirect benefits to local economies
- During construction, local communities benefit from the heavy investment in people and resources to supply and install civil and

electrical infrastructure as well as sand, water concrete and a range of other local products.

- d. the importance of long-term planning to support the diversification of supply chain industries and local economies;
  - Australia has witnessed a lack of long term planning in the energy sector, and we are now suffering from the consequences
  - The need for a transition to clean energy technologies was identified in the 1990's yet no long -term transition policies were installed. Now we are faced with the growing pains of a rapidly moving industry at the expense of local communities and transmission.
  - Australia needs to develop a long term national strategy to move to 100% renewable energy and zero carbon emissions.
  - The deployment of distributed renewable generation will lead to new business opportunities in the regions which will exploit the low price of power.
  - These businesses will be able to thrive in lower cost regional centres and will assist in the spread of wealth to the regions.
  
- e. measures to guide the transition into new industries and employment, including:
  - i. community infrastructure to attract investment and job creation;
    - a. community infrastructure such as easy access to open innovation centres with wifi, power and the ability to interconnect locally will encourage the development of new ideas
    - b. charging facilities for electric vehicles and bicycles to improve the liveability of town centres
    - c. solar powered and smart building and offices to encourage a safe and productive work environment
    - d. co-location of TAFEs and Universities to allow interaction and innovation
    - e. investment in new transmission and distribution to encourage more renewables energy deployment
    - f. encouragement of local community renewable energy groups should be encouraged and funded
  - ii. the need for a public authority to manage the transition;
    - a. regional councils in combination with local community groups and educational facilities have a role to play in managing the transition
    - b. funding needs to be provided to those in need of retraining and reskilling
  - iii. meaningful community consultation to guide the transition;
    - a. the use of information and facilitation to guide the transition is critical
    - b. lessons are available from other countries which have already been through this transition eg Germany, USA, Spain
  - iv. the role of vocational education providers, including TAFE, in enabling reskilling and retraining;
    - a. Universities, TAFE are important in reskilling and retraining individuals seeking new employment opportunities

- f. the use of renewable resources in Northern Australia to build a clean energy export industry to export into Asia;
  - a. Many developers are now entering Northern Australia to develop renewable energy projects despite the lack of renewable energy targets in NT and WA
  - b. It is imperative that these developing projects encourage local indigenous equity participation and local community involvement
  - c. The projects need to be developed in a strategic way in order to bring communities along with them, rather than riding over them
  - d. These projects should be designed to provide local energy supply first
  - e. Export oriented projects need to undertake detailed feasibility studies
  - f. Opportunities to encourage intensive energy use industries to locate close to the power source should be examined
  - g. Renewable hydrogen and ammonia should be considered as an export fuel opportunity to ASEAN countries
  
- g. any related matters.
  - a. The impact of climate change is accelerating
  - b. Risk of catastrophic impacts from the changing weather is inevitable
  - c. Species extinction rates in Australia are already high and increasing
  - d. Current policies and government action is not fast enough
  - e. Australia needs a long-term target toward 100%+ local renewable energy generation and zero emission targets as soon as 2030 to assist in preventing further long term climate impacts

I trust that this information is of benefit

Yours sincerely

Richard Finlay-Jones

Dr Richard Finlay-Jones  
Director