

Voices of the Valley

Voicing the concerns of the Latrobe Valley community

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Voices of the

Incorporated Association



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Support for the proposed National Energy Transition Authority Bill 2022

Voices of the Valley, a community advocacy group based in the Latrobe Valley, in Victoria, supports the proposed Bill to establish a National Energy Transition Authority to guide the energy transition and support workers and their communities.

In common with coal communities in New South Wales and Queensland, the Latrobe Valley has undergone massive changes as the electricity industry based on coal fired power stations has gone through downsizing due to privatisation and technological change. The abrupt closure of Hazelwood power station, within months of assurances given to the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry that the power station would continue to function for a number of years, was a stark lesson in the vulnerability of Australian industries to economic decisions made by overseas owners.

The Victorian government established the Latrobe Valley Authority to support power industry workers, their families and the community. However, it is only now, five years after the LVA was set up, that there is serious talk of planning for transition.

Members of Voices of the Valley have been in contact with community organisations in other, interstate, coal communities facing the decline of their industries and have consulted with them on the challenges faced by all these communities. A common feature is failure by authorities to recognise the inevitable decline of fossil fuel based industries and the consequent lack of planning for transition to renewables and needs of communities living through the transition.

Australia needs a national plan for the transition to a renewable energy economy. Currently the transition to shift to renewable energy is taking place in a piecemeal fashion; for instance, householders and businesses install rooftop solar arrays as permitted by grid operators and limited by grid capacity. Local and regional communities talk about what will happen in their regions without reference to other areas. Some states have established targets for renewables based on political considerations rather than national priorities. Australia also needs a national authority to develop and implement planning so that local communities are not left vulnerable to the economic decisions of transnational corporations and haphazard responses at the local level. It needs a national authority, able to consider the bigger picture and the national interest in transition to coordinate with local authorities, to ensure that local interests are working consistently with national policy on climate change and economic transition.

A national authority should take a broader view to enable regional planning to consider what is happening in other regions rather than each competing for scarce resources to the detriment of all, and to ensure that regional plans can be implemented to complete the national picture. As we learned in discussions with coal communities in New South Wales and Queensland, local communities want to be involved in planning for their futures. However, it requires a national authority to develop an innovative view of the whole jigsaw puzzle of local needs, local and regional resources, national infrastructure and planning a transition of the electricity industry on a national basis, not the 'business as usual' we have experienced in the last decade.

Wendy Farmer, President

Marianne Robinson, Secretary

