



Submission to the Inquiry into the Australian Local Power Agency Bill 2021 and Australian Local Power Agency (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2021

This is a submission to the Australian House of Representatives Inquiry by Community Energy for Goulburn, an incorporated community renewable energy association based in Goulburn NSW.

Who is Community Energy for Goulburn?

CE4G was incorporated as an association in 2016 following three years of investigation by The Goulburn Group¹ who held several community events to assess the viability of building a community owned solar farm in the region. The inaugural event featured Dr John Hewson as the keynote speaker at a business breakfast at which over 250 people attended. Dr Hewson continues to support the project².

Following extensive collaboration with a number of renewable development companies, and after several attempts to secure support from the Federal Government and its agencies, CE4G applied to the NSW Department of Planning Industry and Environment for a grant under its Regional Community Energy Fund.

In February 2020 we were successful in securing a grant of \$2.1M to build a 1.5 MW AC solar farm, with battery, at a total cost of \$4.2M.

In July 2020 CE4G formed Goulburn Community Energy Cooperative³ to take over construction and ownership of the project and subsequently raised over \$1.8M from 230 local community investors. The project will be 100% community owned.

Without the grant from the NSW Government the project would not have been possible. When completed later this year it will be the first community owned solar farm with battery in Australia.

As the project has developed and our experience has broadened, new projects have emerged that will benefit other community groups attempting to enter this sector.

Our submission.

Without a grant from the NSW Government this project would not have been possible. In the early stages of any new community based initiative such as community energy, the international experience is such that communities need external assistance, at least in the initial stages.

¹ www.goulburngroup.com.au

² See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7dNNtZVPEY&t=13s>

³ www.goulburnsolarfarm.com.au

It is clear that most energy projects, be they large commercial fossil fuel generators or large scale renewable projects, require some sort of government assistance one way or another – subsidies, RETs, grants, legislative protection, etc.

Smaller community owned projects are no different in their need for assistance, even more so because they rely so heavily on volunteer labour. Without assistance most community groups attempting to contribute to their communities would not be able to achieve their goals, be it for sports groups needing change rooms, or charities needing tax relief, etc. The list is extensive.

For those reasons, we strongly support the proposed legislation, and in particular the establishment of regional energy hubs that specifically target community owned renewable projects. More specifically we support the establishment of a Federal Government fund to provide grants to community energy groups to enable them to proceed with their projects with a reasonable level of financial security.

Any financial support must include:

- A rigorous but not crippling assessment process, bearing in mind the voluntary nature of most community groups
- A relatively simple method of reporting and administering any grants
- Flexibility to enable the project to develop with changing technologies over its lifetime
- Financial support for staffing to relieve some of the burden on volunteers
- Support for community part ownership of large scale renewable projects.

Thank you for considering our submission.

The Committee, CE4G

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www.ce4g.org.au

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