



Submission to the Senate Economics Legislation Committee for Inquiry into the *National Energy Transition Authority Bill 2022*

About the Australian Renewables Academy

The Australian Renewables Academy welcomes the opportunity to make this submission on the *National Energy Transition Authority Bill 2022*.

The Australian Renewables Academy (ARA) is a partnership between Gippsland businesses established to develop a renewable energy workforce with the right skills for the pipeline of renewable energy projects being delivered across Gippsland.

ARA is working with local stakeholders to

- Identify and promote careers in the renewable energy industry and provide a direct skills and workforce development channel for people looking to enter the industry.
- Develop and deliver skills training for employees transitioning into the renewable energy industry.
- Provide advice to individual job seekers on translating their skills and qualifications to available jobs within the industry.
- Connect job seekers to relevant education and training providers as well as direct jobs within the renewable energy sector.
- Engage schools, higher and tertiary education providers, employment services and the community in the growth and development of the renewable energy industry in Gippsland.
- Facilitate industry-led action research to foster innovation and strengthen local economies and communities.

In December 2021, ARA hosted the inaugural Activating Gippsland's Renewable Energy Workforce Forum in Sale. The purpose of the Forum was two-fold: firstly, to explore the opportunities emerging from the rapid scale-up of the renewable energy sector in Gippsland, and secondly, to agree on actions that industry, businesses and community stakeholders can take together, with the support of governments, to grow a local renewable energy workforce for the Gippsland region.

Forum participants identified themes, opportunities and challenges as critical for consideration in activating Gippsland's renewable energy workforce and were reflected in ARA's *Activating Gippsland's Renewable Energy Workforce Action Plan 2022 – 2025*, which is attached with this submission.

On 22 November 2022, ARA held its second Forum in Sale, Victoria. The Forum's purpose was to provide an opportunity for key stakeholders to review the key agreed actions, share information on workforce initiatives, identify gaps and opportunities and harness commitment and resources so that together, the Gippsland community can take a coordinated approach to activating the renewable energy industry and supply chain workforce in Gippsland and the Latrobe Valley.



At the time of providing this submission, the revised Action Plan has not been finalised; however, we will ensure the Committee is provided with a copy of the revised Plan before the Inquiry's conclusion.

In 2023, ARA will be undertaking a range of initiatives, from advocacy, locally and nationally, providing a suite of webinars to support leadership growth and innovation in the renewable energy sector, and delivering certificated New Energy Leadership and Management Training.

The National Energy Transition Authority Bill 2022

ARA commends the Bill to the Committee and, in doing so, provides the following commentary:

The transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy is a nation-building initiative that demands a national approach to its implementation. We support the establishment of a national Authority to guide the development of plans at a state and regional level by the affected communities, including the Gippsland region. This said, its establishment should have a strong local presence in each state and territory where this transition occurs, preferably in each of the Renewable Energy Zones (REZs).

ARA believes the Authority should have the capacity to lead a collaborative national conversation around workforce development issues. This conversation should take account of the need for worker mobility and the minimising of barriers to entry for new energy economy workers moving from one state to another. The conversation should also include how the benefits of the New Energy economy can be delivered for regional communities making the transition

ARA is keen to ensure that local jobs in the sector are being made available for local people to the greatest extent possible. Our experience of the FIFO model of workforce engagement has been that it often produces community dysfunction and disharmony. Our preference, therefore, is that the Authority is focused on working with local communities to promote appropriate regional community growth.

The Authority will have a critical role in promoting public and private investment in job-creating industries and community infrastructure in the affected regions to ensure the provision of ongoing employment and social services. Our experience in the Gippsland Region leads ARA to the view that priority areas for the Authority's attention should include measures to attract workers to live in regional communities around Australia, providing appropriate housing for these workers and their families and supporting the development of a commensurate level of new health and human services and education in these regions.

Working with affected regional communities, the Authority should also be engaged with all levels of government to increase access to and uptake of VET and tertiary studies in local institutions/providers in the regions and improve access to options for online learning.

The Authority should also have a national and regional role in influencing the development of transport infrastructure for the affected regions and ensuring new energy infrastructure is linked to the grid.



Governance issues

As drafted, the Bill proposes creating a National Energy Transition Authority Board, through which a CEO will report. Part 3, Division 1 of the Bill establishes the Board (comprised of not more than six individuals), outlines its functions and powers and prescribes its membership.

Given the importance of community support in affected regions, there is a case to be made for the eligibility criteria in clause 22(2) to be expanded to include 'community engagement' or similar language. And while we appreciate that all Bills have limitations that the making of regulations and codes may overcome, consideration should be given to expressly enabling the Board to establish a Stakeholder Reference Group or similar body. The membership of this body could be appointed by the Minister on the recommendation of the relevant State or Territory Government and comprised of key stakeholders in affected regions.

In conclusion

The Australian Renewables Academy (ARA) is committed to supporting the development of a workforce and regional communities capable of delivering the expected benefits of the New Energy Economy for these regions and all Australians.

ARA would welcome the opportunity to address the Inquiry on our experience in driving this conversation in Victoria's Gippsland region, the proposed actions for implementation we have already identified, and how these could be scaled up through a National Energy Transition Authority.

Bernadette O'Connor

President, Australian Renewables Academy

November 2022

Attachments

Attachment 1: *Activating Gippsland's Renewable Energy Workforce Action Plan 2022 – 2025*