

Opinion

We need to talk about renewable energy projects

By Satya Tanner, Naomi Campbell, Amy Boersma

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Gaining community acceptance and approval are essential steps for any infrastructure project, and renewable energy projects are no different.

The issue of securing community licence and developing responsible renewable energy projects in regional communities has been bubbling away for years, much like the energy transition itself.

The issues raised in [ABC's Four Corners program](#) this week let us consider how and why we got here.

The list is long and complex: rural communities concerned about project location, environmental groups anxious about continued and unchecked habitat clearing, coastal communities worried about marine life and impacts on marine tourism, the slow pace of planning processes, and a perception of unfair compensation payments to landholders; all of these concerns are legitimate and sincerely held no matter the location.

Now, though, we find communities are reacting against the rollout of responsible renewables developments, too, despite the potential role they can play in our continued prosperity and energy security.

But by being both reasonable and responsible, it is possible to find a balance to address many of the concerns that people have.

No doubt, some communities have been ridden over roughshod by developers and as the [Energy Infrastructure Commissioner's \(EIC\) review](#) found, there have at times been poor standards of community consultation under multiple and successive governments.

We must have effective and efficient planning processes with the right checks and balances to encourage developers to make good selections of potential renewable energy sites in the first place, and avoid environmentally sensitive areas.

Talking with communities first, to gain local knowledge and experience on the best locations - including dual purpose sites for combined agricultural initiatives - makes even more sense and brings economic security to farmers and their communities in times of extreme climate conditions.

In the place of best-practice guidance, discontent and disapproval has grown, encouraged by the rampant spread of misinformation.

Now we have short-sighted calls to dismantle the renewable energy targets which give industry and investors the certainty that ultimately drives the jobs so that young people will stay in regional communities where they grow up.

They also contribute to protecting our supply chain sovereignty, improving energy security, and ensure a future for agriculture and manufacturing.

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In the near future we will see increasing global demand for products made from low- and no-carbon sources and that will lead to the demise of Australia's fossil fuel exports and put the competitiveness of our iron ore at risk.

The tankers that leave Newcastle and Wollongong daily, full of coal, will slow and then stop, as global markets look for non-fossil fuel sources to meet their targets.

Australia needs something to replace that income, and soon. Our future economic security depends on producing goods with "green electrons" made from renewable sources supplied to local industrial centres that can make "green products" for export.

For example, Queensland alone is projected to gain 145,000 new jobs and \$350 billion in new exports from clean energy projects and their supply chains.

Reform of the electricity market would allow energy from rooftop solar and batteries to reduce the residential demand on the network and ensure energy security for households.



Having a reliable energy source is central to Australia's economic security and social fabric.

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However we need a good mix of large-scale renewables "behind and in front of the meter" to meet our future energy demand. At the moment, 90 per cent of our fuels are imported from the global north - an area of increasing tension. If that supply chain is disrupted - a real risk - we will run out of fuels in a matter of weeks. Therefore Australia needs to find self-sufficiency in its energy production, and fast.

Offshore wind, though new to Australia, is a mature technology and has been a key component of the energy mix in the UK and Europe, and now China, for many years.

It can play a significant role in supporting our industrial and energy security needs. With its greater reliability and consistent supply, it can be an essential component of our future economic security through the [Future Made in Australia Act](#).

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It's not a coincidence that offshore wind areas have been proposed and declared near regional centres with existing industrial opportunities and the potential for growth.

Onshore and offshore wind projects have both attracted criticism in this debate, but it's not the technologies that seem to be the problem here.

In most cases, it's poor community consultation practices exacerbated by a lack of communication about both the processes involved and the opportunities that will arise from the transition of our energy supply system.

During the feasibility process, offshore wind developers will typically take between four to seven years to continue consulting with communities, obtain critical site and environmental data, successfully navigate and complete the raft of approvals, including applying for a commercial licence to proceed, before any construction and operations can begin.

As with any new industry, the processes are evolving and governments are quickly adapting to community and industry feedback as they support the establishment of an entirely new sector.

Central to success will be opportunities for existing local suppliers to support the industry, giving them confidence to develop their businesses.

It is here where joint prosperity for local communities can be won; when they can see the potential for their own and the nation's future.

Having a reliable, secure energy supply system with offshore wind, solar, batteries, and onshore wind is central to Australia's economic security and social fabric. Taking care to do it responsibly is the only way, because our Future Made in Australia depends on it.

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