2025 consultation

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HCA – Net Zero Commission Consultation 2025

Hunter Community Alliance
[redacted]

11 July 2025

Hunter Community Alliance – Net Zero Commission Consultation 2025.

Hunter Community Alliance

Organising for the common good of the Hunter Region

The Hunter Community Alliance (HCA) is a non-partisan coalition of faith groups, community organisations, NGOs, charities, and unions dedicated to making a real impact in the Hunter region.

HCA is a broad-based collaboration and is inclusive of community, environmental, ethnic and cultural groups, unions, and religious organisations. Its purpose is to build the power and influence of community organisations that share similar values and motivations.

The Alliance strengthens organisations, and the connectivity between them, through story, training and advocacy – for social and economic progress in the Hunter Region.

The Alliance was born in 2019 out of a need identified by several local, experienced community leaders and organisers who had seen the model work for Sydney Alliance and Queensland Community Alliance.

The Hunter Region has a tradition of action. Many gains have been made to improve the social, economic and natural environment. The challenge remains to transform activism that rises and falls around particular issues to a long-term broad-based community organising structure that continues beyond passing issues for the long-term pursuit of justice. That is the role of Hunter Community Alliance.

Our Mission

Our Alliance brings together diverse community and environmental groups, unions and religious organisations to advance the common good and achieve fair, just and sustainable Hunter region. We do this by providing opportunities for people to have a say in decisions that affect them, their families and neighbourhoods. We are a non-party political organisation. **Our membership represents over 250,000 people in the Hunter region.**

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Our membership organisations at March 2025 include the following:

HCA Assemblies

Our headline events have been full membership assemblies with invited political representatives from all levels of Government. HCA held a founding Assembly in 2024 (863 participants) and another General Assembly in 2025 (648 participants). At these assemblies, agreed key outcomes were presented to the politicians and various levels of commitments negotiated and secured in the areas of Housing and Energy.

HCA Research Action Teams

HCA has formed subgroups of Research Action Teams (RATs) to inform its policy request priorities. There are four RATs:

- Housing
- Climate
- Homelessness
- Isolation

We note the intersectionality of the issues these teams address.

We have elected to provide input into a limited range of questions included in the Consultation paper and these are addressed as follows.

Yours Sincerely,

[redacted]

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Response to Consultation Questions[1]

Climate Change

Question 1: What can you tell us about your experience of the impacts of climate change and how can the commission seek to reflect and respond to this in its work?

Although Newcastle and the Hunter Valley lie in a generally favourable temperate climate zone, we have experienced more frequent and severe rain events over the past few years. The mid-coastal area of NSW is a prime area for the development of "East Coast Lows"[2], which are low pressure cells that typically form over the ocean and head westwards, often becoming circular in motion (i.e. cyclonic) and resulting in extreme "dumps" of short-term high-level rain events. Our most recent event was in May 2025. While the worst of the flooding occurred in the Greater Manning/Taree NSW, approximately 150 kms north of Newcastle, many areas of the Hunter were flooded due to much of the peak rainfall to our north running into the tributaries of the Hunter River, with roads cut off and people, livestock and wildlife evacuated. Significant coastal erosion occurs regularly along our coastline beaches and has resulted in the closure and moving of facilities e.g. parklands, child care centre.

Much of Newcastle and Lake Macquarie are already being impacted by sea level rises caused by climate change.

The Hunter Valley flood mitigation scheme and Singleton's levy around the town were designed to withstand flooding in the Hunter river at the highest level experienced since colonisation - the 1955 flood. The levy at Maitland was designed to protect the town during flooding from tributaries further upriver in the Hunter, not local tributaries such as Wallis Creek. Since 2015 there have been multiple overland flooding events occurring at the same time as riverine flooding, leading to long periods of isolation for new suburbs around Maitland like Gillieston Heights. Furthermore, with more intensive rain periods due to climate change, the risk of a Probably Maximum Flood (PMF) occurring in the Hunter river is increased. A flooding event higher than 1955, but still lower than the PMF level, will breach the levees protecting Maitland CBD, Lorn and Singleton, causing widespread devastation. There is no high-level exit route from Singleton once the Hunter River reaches 12.5m at Dunnolly bridge, putting in excess of 6000 people's lives at risk.

Conversely, low rainfall can create very dry conditions over summer periods for farmers and wineries located there. The southern and western parts of the Hunter habitat were severely affected by the 2019-2020 summer bushfires, risking lives and livelihoods and stretching the resources of volunteer firefighters.

We consider that the Commission can work to ensure wider recognition in the region of the impacts of climate change, thereby helping to drive practical cultural community led change to both reduce the chances of further climate change and increase the implementation of timely mitigation works.

[1] Net Zero Commission Consultation Paper April 2025

[2] https://beta.bom.gov.au/news-and-media/east-coast-lows-and-other-lows

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Informing and empowering change

Question 2: What actions can the commission take to engage across the community to help drive the shifts needed for the net zero transition and for effective climate change mitigation and adaptation?

2.1. Identify and engage directly with broad-based community groups such as HCA. Inform itself about community needs and insights gathered in broad-based community listening events.
2.2. Advocate to extend the scope of the Net Zero Economy Authority to include workers in all coal mines (i.e. including those from export coal mines).
2.3. Assist local councils and the Hunter Joint Authority with preparation for extreme weather events.

Accelerating emissions reductions

Question 5: What additional information and evidence should the commission consider when assessing progress towards NSW's targets for reducing net greenhouse gas emissions?

5.1 Emissions associated with planned extensions / new coal mines should be included in assessments of progress towards NSW/s targets for reducing net greenhouse gas emissions, regardless of where the emissions occur i.e. include a Scope 3 emissions figure. NSW is affected by climate change that is generated both within and beyond our borders; the atmospheric environment is not aware of the source of the emissions. Coal emissions released by coal mined in NSW but burned elsewhere still have an impact on our population.
Electricity and Energy

Question 6: The speed of deployment of electricity generation and infrastructure is a key risk to emissions reduction targets. What more could be done to fast-track deployment?

6.1 Advocate for the awarding of more feasibility licenses for offshore wind farms off the coast of the Hunter.
6.2 Earlier and deeper engagement with communities in which electricity generation infrastructure is planned to be built.
6.3 Provide incentives for commercial and other businesses to install rooftop solar panels and batteries.
6.4 In widespread consultation identify community benefits that proponents can offer with their proposed development.

Question 7: Are the measures now in place sufficient to ensure community engagement and benefit sharing from the build out of infrastructure for the energy transition?

HCA does not believe that sufficient processes are in place for this to occur at present. Our observation is that there has been a disconnect between developers, landholders and the community which has seen the benefits of new energy infrastructure undertaken so far being limited to a few, with no benefits to others affected, or the community, and even disadvantages to some in impacted communities.

7.1 The HCA is commencing its own academically lead energy transition community engagement process, and would welcome the opportunity to work with the Commission in this regard.
7.2 There is an urgent need to address mis and dis information which is rampant in the region. Addressing this issue alone would considerable assist in working to construction community engagement and benefit sharing. The HCA has long been an advocate for 2 Local Energy Hubs in the Hunter region, to support the energy transition by empowering households and

businesses with the trusted, independent information they need to actively participate in and benefit from the energy transformation. The model would be expanded nationally.

7.3 In this regard the Commission must work urgently and in conjunction with the Future Jobs and Investment Authority.

Question 20: How could social equity be better addressed in the transition to an electrified built environment?

20.1 Advocate for all new social housing to be designed and built to be energy efficient, equipped with solar and battery installations and for all existing social housing to be retrofitted to achieve energy efficiency, and equipped with solar and battery.

20.2 Develop/support a scheme that enables renters to access solar and battery installations.

Net Zero Commission Monitoring framework

Question 22: What should be included in a monitoring framework for NSW in the context of the transition to net zero, including any specific metrics and indicators?

22.1 Processes for verification and reporting of nature retention, regeneration and rehabilitation actions committed to by developers.

22.2 Metrics to encapsulate nature positive actions and outcomes for renewable energy infrastructure developments.