

Pathways Call for Evidence Submission

18 July – 14 August 2026

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31 July 2026

Submission lodged via Net Zero Commission website

Dear Net Zero Commissioner

Re: Call for Evidence – Decarbonisation Pathways for NSW

The ten Member Councils of the Hunter Joint Organisation (JO) welcome the opportunity provided by the NSW Net Zero Commission to provide input to the Net Zero Commission's 2026 consultation and call for evidence on Decarbonisation Pathways for NSW.

The Hunter Joint Organisation is the statutory local government entity established by the NSW Government, through the *NSW Local Government Act 1993*, to support the ten member Councils of the Hunter Region to work together for better rural and regional outcomes, and to enhance the way local and state governments work together to plan and deliver important regional infrastructure and investment.

Member Councils of the Hunter JO include:

- Cessnock City Council
- Dungog Shire Council
- Lake Macquarie City Council
- Maitland City Council
- MidCoast Council
- Muswellbrook Shire Council
- City of Newcastle
- Port Stephens Council
- Singleton Council
- Upper Hunter Shire Council

The core statutory functions established by the NSW Government for the Hunter JO and joint organisations more broadly across NSW include:

1. Strategic planning and priority setting
2. Intergovernmental collaboration
3. Shared leadership and advocacy

The Hunter Region is the largest regional economy in Australia, driving around 28% of regional NSW's total economic output, of which coal exports contribute around a third (\$24 billion) and approaching a population of one million people by 2040. The ten Mayors of the Region, through the Hunter Joint Organisation, are strongly aligned in recognising the economic challenges facing the region, and on the priorities and actions needed to evolve the Hunter's economy toward net zero. Local government has a critical role in achieving NSW's net zero objectives due to its strong relationships with communities, responsibility for land-use planning, ownership of significant infrastructure assets, and leadership in local economic development.

In line with our shared commitment to meet net zero, the Hunter JO welcomes the opportunity to provide the recommendations included in the following submission, summarised below.

Summary of recommendations

1. Local Government as a critical and innovative delivery partner

- Councils are well placed to drive and deliver substantial net zero outcomes through land-use planning, infrastructure and facilities management, waste services, fleet management, community education and engagement and economic development.
- Local communities, towns and cities are ideal testbeds for net zero innovation, with the scale, agility and community connections needed to rapidly trial, demonstrate and scale emerging decarbonisation solutions.
- The Hunter's local communities, towns and cities are uniquely positioned to pilot and commercialise emerging climate technologies, leveraging existing infrastructure, research capability and transition-driven economic opportunities.
- Greater recognition, resourcing and coordination of local government and Joint Organisations (JOs) efforts to support net zero action is needed.

2. Opportunity for regional collaboration

- Long-term and coordinated funding is required to support council and community net zero efforts instead of short-term grant programs.
- Interest-free loans, co-investment funding and revolving energy funds could accelerate emissions reduction projects.
- Clear and aligned direction, supported by improved collaboration and coordination between and across government agencies would improve delivery.

3. Regional collaboration and Joint Organisations

- JOs provide an effective structure for regional planning, coordination and implementation.
- Regional net zero action plans could align priorities, investment and project delivery across councils, industry and government.

4. Community support for renewable energy

- Renewable Energy Zones are an important driver of emissions reduction. The Commission should investigate the role of urban renewable energy zones and local energy networks in major regional towns and cities, recognising that urban areas face different opportunities and constraints to traditional regional REZs.
- Community concerns about consultation, local impacts and benefits may reduce social licence if not addressed.
- Community Benefit Schemes can help ensure local communities share in project benefits and facilitate legacy outcomes for communities across regional NSW.
- Councils should be funded as trusted intermediaries to deliver large-scale community behaviour change programs focused on electrification, energy efficiency, transport mode shift and waste reduction.

5. Technology and innovation

- The Hunter should be recognised not only as an energy producer, but as a global testbed for port decarbonisation, industrial electrification, clean manufacturing, clean exports and climate-positive urban renewal.
- Other key technologies include solar, community batteries, EVs, landfill gas capture, circular economy infrastructure, hydrogen and Sustainable Aviation Fuel.
- Deployment is often constrained by funding, infrastructure gaps and regulatory barriers.

6. Circular economy and waste decarbonisation

- Waste diversion, methane reduction and circular economy initiatives offer significant emissions reduction opportunities.
- Investment in waste processing, recycling and resource recovery infrastructure is required.
- Circular Economy Precincts have significant potential to deliver net zero objectives, while also generating substantial jobs and economic value.

7. Economic transition and post-mining land reuse

- A strategic approach to reusing former mining land can attract clean industries, create jobs and support regional economic diversification.
- Workforce retraining, skills development and investment attraction are critical to a just transition to net zero.
- The Commission and NSW Government more broadly should support capacity and capability in Council to engage with Climate-risk disclosure and to participate as a core partner (i.e. as the third level of government) in energy / economic transition planning, as enabling mechanisms for new investment attraction and emissions reduction.

8. Transport decarbonisation

- Fleet electrification, EV charging infrastructure, public transport improvements and active transport can significantly reduce emissions.
- Emerging opportunities include heavy vehicle charging hubs, freight rail electrification and Sustainable Aviation Fuel development.

9. Climate adaptation and community resilience

- Councils play an essential role in climate adaptation and disaster preparedness, which should be considered alongside mitigation as a core component of the net zero transition.
- Regional NSW Councils require greater funding, capacity and long-term support to plan and respond to climate risks effectively, specifically for addressing impacts of heat, flood, coastal adaptation, climate risk assessment and resilience planning.

10. Broader outcomes beyond emissions reduction

- Success should be measured not only by emissions reductions but also by economic diversification, job creation, housing affordability, biodiversity outcomes, climate resilience and community wellbeing.
- Stronger place-based planning and community-led implementation will improve long-term outcomes for NSW.
- NSW should establish a regional household electrification and energy equity program focused on renters, social housing tenants, apartment dwellers and low-income households, delivered through local government partnerships.

I encourage you to consider our recommendations to inform the Decarbonisation Pathways for NSW and would welcome the opportunity to further discuss our ideas with NSW Government, given the enormous opportunities and impacts facing the Hunter region and NSW economies more broadly.

Should you have any further queries please don't hesitate to contact

Yours Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

[Redacted Name]

[Redacted Title]

[Redacted Contact Information]

Submission to the NSW Net Zero Commission

Response to the Commission's Questions

Organisation: Hunter Joint Organisation

Date: July 2026

Policies and market mechanisms

1. What opportunities or barriers could improve the effectiveness of NSW's transition to net zero?

Local government has a critical role in achieving NSW's net zero objectives due to its strong relationships with communities, responsibility for land-use planning, ownership of significant infrastructure assets, and leadership in local economic development. Councils are uniquely positioned to integrate emissions reduction and climate adaptation into community planning processes and drive behaviour change at a local level. However, the current role of local government is insufficiently recognised within the NSW Net Zero Plan, limiting the effectiveness of this delivery pathway. Greater support for councils and Joint Organisations (JOs), combined with long-term funding and stronger coordination across government agencies, would significantly improve the effectiveness of the transition.

Regional communities, towns and cities are ideal testbeds for net zero innovation, providing the scale, agility and community connections needed to trial, demonstrate and scale emerging decarbonisation solutions. Across the Hunter, councils and their communities are already demonstrating approaches including renewable energy procurement, large-scale solar and battery deployment, fleet electrification, community energy programs and circular economy initiatives that can be replicated across NSW.

Key barriers include:

- Fragmented and duplicated programs across government agencies.
- Short-term grant funding that limits long-term planning and delivery.
- Limited council capacity and resourcing, particularly in regional NSW.
- Growing community concerns regarding Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) and perceived lack of enduring local benefits.

a. What policies or market mechanisms could accelerate emissions reductions in specific sectors or communities?

A range of policies and market mechanisms could accelerate emissions reduction across NSW. In the energy sector, these include interest-free loans and co-investment funding for council-led projects, regional revolving energy funds, and support for community energy programs such as rooftop solar bulk buys, community batteries and electrification initiatives. In the waste sector, incentives for landfill methane capture, stronger support for circular economy infrastructure, and reinvestment of waste levy

revenue into regional projects would help reduce emissions while creating jobs and economic opportunities. Community Benefit Schemes linked to renewable energy developments would also help maintain community support and accelerate project delivery.

The NSW Government should establish a regional electrification and energy equity program, delivered through local government partnerships, to support renters, apartment residents, low-income households and culturally diverse communities who are often unable to access the benefits of rooftop solar, batteries and electrification. Programs should support community energy models, shared solar arrangements, virtual power plants and tailored energy advice services.

Barriers to adoption include:

- Infrastructure gaps, particularly organic waste processing capacity.
- Funding limitations and investment uncertainty.
- Regulatory and planning barriers.
- Community opposition where consultation and benefit sharing are inadequate.

b. How could the NSW Government better stimulate private finance at the scale and pace needed for the net zero transition?

By establishing dedicated funds that provide interest-free loans or matched co-investment opportunities for emissions reduction projects, the NSW Government could stimulate council and private investment. Government support is also needed to de-risk investment in the redevelopment of post-mining lands and infrastructure, particularly in regions undergoing economic transition away from coal. [Post Mining Land Use in the Hunter](#)

Supporting Circular Economy Precincts, Futures Hubs and community benefit programs would further improve investment confidence while creating stronger economic outcomes for regional communities. Joint Organisations can also help aggregate projects and improve regional investment readiness. [Circular Economy Futures Hub video](#)

Innovative financing models such as revolving energy funds, community energy investment models and public-private partnerships can help accelerate deployment of distributed renewable energy infrastructure, batteries, electrification projects and circular economy initiatives. Local government can play an important role as both a project proponent and trusted community partner.

c. What are the drivers and risks to reaching NSW's interim targets in 2030 and 2035, and net zero by 2050?

Important drivers include:

- Local government leadership and community engagement.
- Large-scale household and business electrification programs that reduce electricity demand, gas consumption and energy costs while improving energy resilience and affordability.
- Fleet electrification, EV infrastructure and public transport improvements.
- Growth in renewable energy and Renewable Energy Zones.
- Circular economy initiatives and landfill diversion.
- Repurposing mining lands for clean industries and renewable energy projects.

Key risks include:

- Declining social licence for renewable energy development.
- Failure to ensure equitable access to the benefits of the energy transition, particularly for renters, low-income households and vulnerable communities.
- Insufficient regional infrastructure and workforce transition planning.
- Funding constraints for councils to deliver emissions reduction and climate adaptation activities.
- Ongoing landfill emissions and waste infrastructure deficiencies.

d. What are the opportunities or barriers for collaboration across sectors to support the transition?

Joint Organisations provide an established statutory governance structure that enables collaboration between local government, state agencies, industry and communities. Existing examples such as the Joint Organisation Net Zero Acceleration (JONZA) Program demonstrate the benefits of collaborative, coordinated and place-based approaches that improve information sharing and project delivery. Regional net zero plans could further strengthen collaboration by aligning priorities, funding and implementation across sectors.

Barriers to collaboration include:

- Program duplication across agencies.
- Inconsistent funding arrangements.
- Lack of coordinated regional planning and delivery frameworks.

Technology and behaviour change

2. What are the opportunities and barriers to technology development, deployment for each sector? This may include:**a. What technologies are available or emerging in your sector, and what is their current state of readiness?**

Technologies that are either commercially available or emerging include renewable energy generation, rooftop solar, community batteries, EV charging infrastructure, electric vehicle fleets, landfill gas capture systems and circular economy processing technologies. Emerging opportunities include Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF), hydrogen-related industries and freight rail electrification, which are at varying stages of development and deployment.

Examples include:

- Community batteries and household electrification programs.
- Heavy vehicle EV charging infrastructure.
- Sustainable Aviation Fuel and biofuel production.
- Hydrogen industry development in the Hunter region.
- Landfill methane capture systems.
- Community Energy Precincts that combine renewable energy generation, battery storage, community energy sharing models

b. What constraints exist around technology uptake and deployment?

Technology uptake is often constrained by limited funding, regulatory barriers and infrastructure shortages. Smaller councils frequently lack the purchasing power and technical resources needed to implement new technologies. In addition, waste processing infrastructure, EV charging networks and supporting energy infrastructure remain underdeveloped in some regional areas due to a lack of strategic regional planning around the location of charging infrastructure, financial constraints and available resourcing. While EV fleets offer a lower total cost of ownership over their operational life, the substantial upfront capital investment required can be prohibitive, limiting the rate of adoption.

Community resistance can also slow implementation where engagement processes are not effective.

c. What does the evidence say about current and future costs?

Evidence demonstrates that emissions reduction technologies can deliver significant long-term benefits but often require upfront investment support. Larger landfill gas projects may be financially viable, but smaller landfill operators struggle to justify investment without government assistance. The Circular Economy Precincts and Futures Hub business case estimated that diverting 80% of regional waste from landfill could generate approximately 1,020 jobs and \$1.1 billion in economic value. Repurposing existing mining infrastructure can also substantially reduce development costs relative to developing new industrial sites.

d. What role could the NSW Government play in strengthening technology development and deployment?

The NSW Government could:

- Provide long-term, predictable funding programs.
- Reinvest the regional waste levy into local infrastructure and job creation.
- Support pilot and demonstration projects.
- Streamline planning and approvals processes.
- Fund regional coordination and technical support roles through Joint Organisations.
- Support group procurement and shared service models for smaller councils.
- Support regional city-town – community scale demonstration projects and innovation precincts that enable testing and deployment of new technologies in real-world environments.
- Develop frameworks that support urban renewable energy zones, local energy sharing and community energy projects.
- Support consistent approaches, capacity and capability for measuring and reducing Scope 3 emissions in local government operations and procurement.

3. What are the opportunities to foster demand reduction and behaviour change?

Councils are well positioned to drive community behavioural changes because of their trusted relationships with residents and businesses. Empower councils to lead demand reduction and behavioural change initiatives. Councils have established community trust, local knowledge, and are able to collaborate to lead change beyond the LGA and across the region.

Councils are uniquely positioned as trusted intermediaries between governments, industry and communities and should be recognised and resourced as delivery partners for behaviour change

programs. Evidence from community-led initiatives demonstrates that electrification, renewable energy uptake and resource recovery are accelerated when residents receive trusted local advice, peer-to-peer learning opportunities and practical implementation support.

Examples include:

- Community climate leadership programs
- Household electrification support services
- Solar and battery bulk-buy programs
- Community grants and local climate action projects
- Business decarbonisation programs

Embedding climate considerations into strategic planning frameworks, improving coordination of government communications, and supporting community-based energy programs can all encourage behavioural shifts. Expanding active transport infrastructure, public transport services and household electrification programs can further reduce emissions while providing broader community benefits.

Economic impacts and just transition

4. What are the likely economic effects on NSW of different emissions pathways to net zero, relative to NSW's current level of ambition?

A well-planned transition to net zero presents substantial economic opportunities for NSW, particularly in regional areas. Opportunities include creating jobs in renewable energy, circular economy industries and clean manufacturing, while attracting investment and diversifying economies currently dependent on coal and other emissions-intensive sectors. The redevelopment of post-mining lands offers a significant opportunity to support these outcomes while reducing transition impacts on affected communities.

A successful transition should also improve energy affordability, access to clean energy, public health outcomes and community wellbeing. Ensuring that all households can participate in and benefit from the transition will be critical to maintaining long-term public support and social licence.

Equally, if economic transition planning does not keep pace with emissions reduction efforts, regions may experience workforce disruption, reduced investment confidence and growing community resistance to decarbonisation initiatives.

a. What are the most significant economic or workforce pressures the pathways should account for in your sector or community?

Key pressures include:

- Coal mine closures (both domestic and export markets) and associated job losses.
- Workforce retraining and skills development requirements.
- Demand for new employment lands and industrial opportunities.
- Housing and infrastructure pressures (e.g. roads and water services) resulting from renewable energy developments.
- Financial constraints faced by regional councils.

5. What are the opportunities and barriers to addressing socio-economic priorities for a just transition?

The reuse of former mining lands, development of clean industries and implementation of Community Benefit Schemes provide important opportunities to create jobs and ensure communities directly benefit from the transition. Integrating housing, infrastructure and workforce planning into major renewable energy developments will also improve social outcomes and support regional growth.

Barriers include:

- Inadequate funding for local and regional transition support.
- Community concerns regarding transparency and equity.
- Limited long-term and integrated government planning for economic diversification.
- Fragmented (siloed) approach across government agencies to actions to support economic transition

Evidence and other considerations

6. What evidence can you provide to inform pathway inputs and assumptions?

The submission provides several examples of evidence that can inform pathway modelling and assumptions:

- Oxford Economics, Regional Economic Transition Analysis – Hunter Region <https://www.nzea.gov.au/regional-transition-independent-analysis-hunter>
- The Joint Organisation Net Zero Acceleration (JONZA) Program and associated council capacity-building activities.
- Modelling indicating that the Summerhill Waste Management Centre, the largest council owned landfill facility in the Hunter, may continue to emit more than 80,000 tonnes of CO₂-e annually despite existing mitigation measures. (Source: Hunter JO Circular Economy website) [Hunter JO Landfill Emission Dashboard.png](#)
- Landfill Gas Emissions Management Issues and Opportunities – Report by 100% Renewables identifies the challenges and barriers to effective measurement and reduction of landfill gas (LFG) emissions in regional councils. https://hunterjo.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/100-RE-Hunter-JO-LFG-management-opportunities-report_final-3.pdf
- The Circular Economy Precincts and Futures Hub business case, identifying the potential creation of approximately 1,020 jobs and \$1.1 billion in economic value.
- Findings from the NSW Local Government Climate Change Action Survey highlighting adaptation funding and capacity challenges.
- Post mining land use pilots – Lake Macquarie and Muswellbrook Councils <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/news/securing-the-hunters-future-jobs-and-investment-from-mining-land-reuse>
- City of Newcastle's (CN) recently adopted 5-year pathway towards net zero targets for both operations and community, using a holistic framework to achieve climate action while also creating flourishing lives.

<https://newcastle.nsw.gov.au/getmedia/657eebee-086d-416f-b296-ba7ab454e6b4/Climate-Action-Plan-2030.pdf>

- The CN Climate Action plan specifically details points raised in this submission including:
 - CNs transition to 100% renewable electricity through a long-term power purchase agreement and council-owned solar generation.
 - Solar Neighbourhoods community solar and battery bulk-buy program.
 - Empowering Newcastle electrification and behaviour change programs.
 - Designing a solar farm and battery project on a capped landfill that incorporates a community benefit sharing model.
 - Public EV charging network deployment and fleet electrification initiatives, including developing a large-scale garbage truck charging facility.
 - Landfill gas reduction initiatives including bioenergy generation
 - A Climate Positive target that combines local carbon sequestration and renewable energy generation.
 - A 'flourishing lives' framework to integrate climate action across all areas of community, such as arts, culture, tourism and finance.

7. Beyond emissions reduction, what outcomes should be considered?

Net zero transition should be assessed against a broader range of social, economic and environmental outcomes. These include regional economic development, workforce transition, housing affordability, community resilience, adaptation to climate change, biodiversity protection and social licence for major infrastructure projects. A successful transition should support both emissions reduction and stronger, more resilient regional communities.

Success should also be measured through indicators such as energy affordability, energy equity, workforce transition outcomes, climate resilience, community wellbeing, biodiversity enhancement, public health outcomes, circular economy performance and local investment attraction. Net zero pathways should seek to improve quality of life as well as reduce emissions.

8. Do you have any other comments or information you would like to provide?

The submission strongly emphasises the importance of local government and Joint Organisations as delivery partners in achieving NSW's net zero goals. Strengthening place-based planning, providing long-term and coordinated funding, improving collaboration across agencies, and supporting community-led implementation will be critical to delivering emissions reductions while simultaneously supporting economic diversification, climate adaptation and community wellbeing across NSW.

Conclusion

The Hunter region is uniquely positioned to play a leading role in NSW's transition to net zero. As one of Australia's traditional energy and industrial regions, the Hunter faces significant challenges associated with economic transformation, workforce transition, and climate adaptation. At the same time, these challenges present substantial opportunities to drive innovation, attract new investment, create jobs, and build more resilient communities.

Success will depend on recognising local government and Joint Organisations as essential delivery partners. Councils have trusted community relationships, strategic planning responsibilities and local knowledge required to implement practical net zero actions that reflect regional needs. By strengthening place-based planning, improving coordination across government agencies, and providing sustained long-term funding, NSW can accelerate emissions reduction while supporting regional prosperity.

The Hunter's transition should be built on a combination of new industry development (including renewable energy development and circular economy), transport decarbonisation, climate adaptation and the productive reuse of former mining and industrial lands. These opportunities have the potential to diversify the regional economy, create new industries and jobs, and support communities currently affected by the transition away from coal.

Equally important is ensuring that communities experience tangible benefits from the transition. Strong community engagement, transparent decision-making, fair benefit-sharing arrangements, and investment in local infrastructure will be essential to maintaining social licence and building public confidence in net zero initiatives.

Achieving net zero is not simply an emissions reduction challenge; it is an opportunity to shape a more prosperous, resilient, and sustainable future. With the right policy settings, investment frameworks and regional partnerships, the Hunter can serve as a model for how NSW delivers a just transition that strengthens communities, supports economic growth and contributes meaningfully to the State's net zero objectives.