

Pathways Call for Evidence Submission

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14 August 2026

Decarbonisation Pathways for NSW

Call for Evidence: June-July 2026

Submitted to

NSW Net Zero Commission

Via online form:

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For more information, contact:

Dr Megan Kessler



www.re-alliance.org.au

About RE-Alliance

The Renewable Energy Alliance (RE-Alliance) is working to secure a responsible and rapid shift to renewable energy that actively contributes to the strength of our regions. We do this by working with and listening to the communities most impacted by renewable energy and grid projects, and facilitating collaboration across industry, government and civil society to deliver meaningful outcomes and lasting benefits for regions.

RE-Alliance has been working for over 13 years across Australia to build collaborations, learn into and learn from community and regional leaders. We work to ensure better policy from governments and better practice from industry that meet the needs, expectations and ambition of the regions. We are recognised as a leading voice on community engagement, benefit sharing and social licence in Australia. We play a unique role, as allies of and advocates for renewable energy host communities and assisting renewable energy developers seeking to deliver best practice community engagement, community funds and to build social licence.

Introduction

RE-Alliance appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Call for Evidence for the NSW Net Zero Commission's (Commission's) Decarbonisation Pathways for NSW. Consistent with our focus on working to deliver a responsible shift to renewable energy that actively contributes to the strength of our regions, we have limited our comments to issues related to addressing socio-economic priorities for a just transition, including equitable outcomes for First Nations peoples and regional, rural, and remote communities.

It is increasingly recognised that the main barriers to a successful shift to renewable energy are not technical ones but social ones – concerns from community that they are not being included in decisions about how the transition will be achieved, and that regional and rural communities are being expected to accept the impact of new large-scale development without sufficient benefits being accrued locally. Appropriately responding to these concerns must be considered a core element of planning decarbonisation pathways for NSW.

In this submission our responses relate to large-scale renewable energy development and the communities that host them. Rather than go into extensive detail on the matters we raise, we instead refer the Commission to existing RE-Alliance and partner resources that respond to the questions in the Call for Evidence paper. We are concerned that, to some degree, socio-economic issues are being treated as secondary outcomes of decarbonisation and instead encourage the Commission to fully incorporate these issues into the development of the different net zero pathways.

We are happy to discuss any of the matters raised in this submission further.

Policies and market mechanisms

Policies or market mechanisms that could accelerate emissions reductions in specific sectors or communities

Rural and regional electrification

A key frustration we hear in relation to regional communities' experience of renewable energy is that the development of large-scale renewable energy projects in their region does not lead to improved energy reliability or security locally. At the same time, many rural and regional businesses fall into the category of what is increasingly being called the 'missing middle' - those businesses that are too large to benefit from programs aimed at supporting renewable energy uptake in households and too small to benefit from large commercial support programs. We welcome recent government announcements of financial support for electrification of this 'missing middle', but it is equally important that the technical and social barriers to electrification in this cohort are addressed. RE-Alliance is currently undertaking a project looking at barriers to electrification and renewable energy uptake for regional rural households and small businesses. We will share the findings of this research with the Commission in due course, but raise this issue now because it is important that the various sector pathways consider the unique barriers rural and regional communities face in electrifying and increasing uptake of renewable energy.

Drivers and risks to reaching NSW's interim targets in 2030 and 2035, and net zero by 2050

Social licence

The lack of social licence is increasingly recognised as a key barrier to a rapid shift to renewable energy. RE-Alliance therefore recommends that the Commission treat social acceptance, regional capacity and community participation as enabling conditions and potential constraints on the pace of renewable energy and transmission deployment when developing the assumptions that distinguish its Delayed, Balanced and Fast-tracked pathways. For example, a faster pathway should not simply assume lower technological or behavioural barriers; it should also consider what improved regional planning, community participation, institutional capacity and benefit sharing would be needed to support faster infrastructure deployment.

[AEMO's 2026 Integrated System Plan](#) (2026 ISP) provides a useful precedent for incorporating social licence considerations into strategic energy planning, and demonstrates the limitations of electricity-system modelling alone. The Commission's economy-wide decarbonisation pathways provide an important opportunity to consider how costs, benefits and impacts are distributed across communities and regions, alongside emissions and technology outcomes. To support this work, we also refer this [paper](#) on the societal acceptance of wind farms, and

this [paper](#) on multi-country evidence on societal factors to include in energy transition modelling to the Commission for consideration.

Misinformation and disinformation

Misinformation and disinformation are increasingly putting social licence at risk, making this a key consideration on the barriers to the effectiveness of NSW's transition to net zero. Access to trusted, independent and locally relevant information should be considered an enabling condition for the transition, supporting action that addresses misinformation and disinformation about renewable energy and transmission infrastructure.

This issue was explored in detail in a submission from RE-Alliance and our colleagues at Community Power Agency and Friends of the Earth to the Select Committee on Information Integrity on Climate Change and Energy (Select Committee). In that submission we stated:

Australia requires rapid deployment of renewable energy projects, including 5,000km of new transmission infrastructure this decade, to meet our 2030 target of 82% renewable energy and to reach net-zero by 2050.

However, the rise of mis- and dis-information about renewable energy and transmission projects is undermining public confidence, risking the pace and scale of the renewable energy build-out required to meet Australia's growing energy needs.

Communities hosting projects often have legitimate questions but lack trusted, locally relevant and independent information. Without credible answers, public trust erodes, laying fertile ground for the spread of mis- and dis-information and making it harder to secure and maintain social licence for the shift to renewables.

Our submission is available [here](#). Our submission was supported by the following additional documents - [Polling Summary](#), [Case Study](#), and [Network Survey](#).

The importance of trusted, locally relevant information was recognised by the Select Committee in its final report, [The Integrity Gap: Restoring Trust in the Climate and Energy Debate](#), which highlighted evidence that declining news-gathering resources, particularly in rural and regional areas, can create an "information vacuum that can be easily filled by misinformation". The Select Committee concluded that a "whole system approach" to information integrity should include a strong media ecosystem and stronger public-interest journalism, particularly at the local level, and recommended continued government funding for regional and independent media. Ensuring renewable-energy-hosting communities have access to credible local journalism and other trusted, independent sources of information should similarly be considered part of the enabling environment for NSW's transition.

The Select Committee also recommended (Recommendation 21) - "...the Australian Government resource community led engagement driven by organisations with proven track records in local communities. These models may include capacity building for local leaders in

rural and regional areas, support for local governments that are contingent on their engagement with community organisations or groups with a proven track record.” The Commission should also consider how to support community led engagement as an enabler for the shift to renewable energy.

Resourcing local government participation

A vital element in achieving the NSW renewable energy targets and the goal of net zero emissions, is the role of local government. While not a decision-making entity for state significant developments, Councils are required to assess planning documentation and provide input and feedback to NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) - an incredibly and increasingly resource-intensive activity. They are also called on to provide high quality, independent information to local communities, and when they are able, play a role leveraging renewables investment into long-term positive outcomes for the region. This can include by building local skills and economic development and ensuring legacy community benefits are delivered. These requirements are putting strain on already under-resourced regional and rural NSW Councils, and Councils need to be better supported to deliver these activities to ensure this does not become a significant barrier to the transition to net zero.

For more information on these issues we refer the Commission to our submission to the [NSW 2026/27 Budget](#) process and our submission to [Submission to the Inquiry on Local Government Funding and Fiscal Sustainability](#).

Decommissioning requirements

A 2025 analysis by RE-Alliance found that by 2045, 12.5 GW of renewables across the country could be approaching the age of retirement. Our report went on to say:

As a greater number of projects approach retirement, the way that project owners plan, manage and complete end-of-life processes is coming under increased public scrutiny. In light of previous recycling industry failures and poor decommissioning practices in extractive industries, such as mining and oil and gas, communities are looking for evidence that the renewables industry will ‘do right’ by them, and that Australia will have enough capacity and expertise to reuse, recycle and recover materials from retiring renewable sites...

While we have heard that many individual landholders are confident with how their agreements with project owners deal with decommissioning, some potential host landholders have cited a lack of confidence in decommissioning commitments as a reason not to host renewables on their land.

A 2024 report from Farmers for Climate Action identified such concerns among their membership, stating that there were “no clear regulations on decommissioning”, and noted a perception that this could leave renewable energy landholders with liability

for any environmental damage caused. The lack of publicly accessible information means that despite many mitigations, there are still concerns that the asset owner could 'go bust', be unable to fund and manage their decommissioning obligations, and leave this burden to the host landholder, or relevant state or territory authority.

Ensuring a robust decommissioning process is in place, is an opportunity to facilitate greater acceptance of large-scale renewable energy projects. Long-term pathway planning should consider decommissioning, recycling, material recovery and repowering capacity as part of an orderly electricity-sector transition. We refer the Commission to our full report on this issue, [Retirement Aged Renewables](#).

Opportunities or barriers for collaboration across sectors

Managing cumulative impacts

Another major challenge facing the generation, storage and transmission elements of the shift to renewable energy is ensuring that regional infrastructure is adequate to support the planned development and that cumulative impacts are addressed. A collaborative and coordinated approach between the NSW Government, developers, Councils and the communities they serve is needed, and the NSW Government must increase its investment to ensure this can be delivered.

As one example, the workforce required for the energy transition needs to be considered alongside the capacity of renewable-energy-hosting regions to accommodate it. Pathway modelling should consider whether the scale, timing and geographic concentration of development under each pathway is consistent with regional workforce, housing and service capacity, and where additional government investment or coordination may be needed.

For more information on these issues we refer the Commission to our submission to the [NSW 2026/27 Budget](#) process.

Economic impacts and just transition

Addressing socio-economic priorities for a just transition

Ensuring First Nations equity and justice

A fundamental consideration for ensuring First Nations equity and justice is the need for Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) in the development of large-scale renewable energy development. This must be accompanied by measures that enable First Nations peoples to play a central role in, and share in the opportunities created by, the transition. We refer the Commission to the resources available from the [First Nations Clean Energy Network](#) on how these considerations should be embedded in pathway planning. The 2026 ISP [Appendix A8 Social licence](#), also provides guidance on how these matters can be incorporated into energy planning.

Improving community benefit sharing

[Striking a new deal for renewables in regions](#) explores issues associated with support for renewable energy development in regional areas being strongly conditional. While the potential benefits associated with new jobs, local investment and opportunities are attractive, there is genuine fear that renewables will be imposed in ways that ignore local needs and concerns. The report notes that:

Locals want to confirm there will be genuine local benefits, input from the community, access to energy locally and proper protection of the local environment, agriculture and community values.

The report makes recommendations for initiatives that should be embedded in NSW's pathway to net zero if community support for the transition is to be maintained. Additional resources that explore the importance of building in community-led planning and implementation of community benefits to maintain social licence for the shift to renewable energy include the Community Power Agency's report [Guide to Regional Benefit Sharing](#), and the RE-Alliance report, [Building Stronger Communities report – Community benefit funds](#).

Other considerations

Outcomes beyond emissions reduction

Regional planning

Treating issues such as impacts on business, jobs, land-use, water and biodiversity as an 'other consideration' rather than integral to the shift to renewable energy is a barrier in itself. Communities perceive and experience these impacts as an integrated whole and, as such, planning to minimise and mitigate these impacts should be considered in an integrated way.

The development of regional energy strategies - a clear articulation of a community-informed place-based roadmap and vision, which is unique to each locale and associated represented communities - means that opportunities that come with the shift to renewable energy can be shaped to enable or strengthen specific components of the community's vision, like reliable and cheap electricity for all or legacy affordable housing. We refer the Commission to our submission on the NSW Government's proposed [new approach to strategic planning](#) and how it relates to regional energy strategies.

Regardless of the planning framework used, issues such as employment, housing and biodiversity should all be considered as integral to ensuring the success of the shift to renewable energy. In this regard, we refer the Commission to our specific reports on [housing](#) and [biodiversity](#).

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