



ENHANCING POSITIVE SOCIAL OUTCOMES FROM WIND FARM DEVELOPMENT

Evaluating community engagement and benefit-sharing in Australia

GUIDANCE FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT: UNDERSTANDING WHAT TO EXPECT FROM COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND BENEFIT-SHARING

> COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAN WORK PROACTIVELY WITH DEVELOPERS TO DESIGN LOCALLY-APPROPRIATE AND LOCALLY-BENEFICIAL DEVELOPMENTS.

> THERE ARE DECISIONS IN WHICH COMMUNITY AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT INPUT IS USEFUL AND POSSIBLE.

> IT IS IMPORTANT TO ENHANCE LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAPACITY TO ENGAGE WITH WIND DEVELOPERS.

Drawn from the research report *Enhancing Positive Social Outcomes from Wind Farm Development*, this briefing paper summarises some of the key areas that influence the effectiveness of the community-developer relationship and what this means for communities and local government.

DEVELOPERS ARE SEEKING TO DELIVER BETTER PRACTICE

The research found that wind developers are seeking to undertake meaningful engagement while needing to address the commercial realities of developing large infrastructure projects. This includes balancing a range of stakeholder expectations alongside technical, finance, policy and timing pressures. Despite this complexity, a shift has begun in the Australian wind industry towards valuing and practicing better community engagement and benefit-sharing.

ENCOURAGING BETTER PRACTICE

Initiatives that encourage better community engagement and benefit-sharing practices help to attune investors to community acceptance issues, and increase the likelihood of power purchase agreements (that underpin investment in wind energy) being signed where there is evidence of positive social outcomes. Some local governments are now signing power purchase agreements to provide their electricity needs, and are including social outcomes as part of the selection criteria. Communities and local government are in a unique position to support a developer to deliver a successful and locally-beneficial development. Local stakeholders can also encourage and hold to account a developer's aims of improving their engagement and benefit-sharing practices.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MAKING DEVELOPMENT APPROPRIATE FOR THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Community engagement and benefit-sharing approach should be tailored to a community's needs and expectations, and be built on face-to-face engagement carried out by suitably experienced and/or qualified practitioners. This responsiveness was found to be more important than using any particular methods.

Community and local government members can work proactively with developers to help them understand the unique nature of the local community context and how to best fit the development into the local area.

Helping the developer understand local aspirations and plans can inform a benefit-sharing plan that will have a significant, lasting contribution. By understanding the opportunities for community engagement and benefit-sharing, better dialogue and opportunities for all parties can emerge.

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SEEK OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY INPUT

It is important for communities and local governments to know what different engagement and benefit-sharing options are in order to negotiate from an informed position. Equally, it is important to understand developer perspectives and limitations. The research identified several important opportunities for opening decision-making up to community input, particularly on non-technical, community-oriented aspects, such as:

- > the design and ongoing evaluation of the community engagement plan
- > the access to site and traffic routes during construction
- > influence on turbine number and placement in some instances
- > the structure of the benefit-sharing package, including potential for co-ownership/investment
- > off-site landscaping plans such as the design of screening for substations
- > viewing platform locations.

Where possible, the community could also provide early input into area mapping to identify any sensitive ecological, cultural or historical areas.

ENHANCING LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAPACITY TO ENGAGE WITH WIND DEVELOPERS

The research indicates that local governments, which are typically constrained by limited resources, are not always aware of best practice and can be timid in their dealings with wind developers, partly as a result of concerns regarding conflicts of interest. They may also be less well equipped to deal with large developments and be concerned about political considerations. As such, local government could benefit from enhancing in-house knowledge of, and capacity to, engage with wind developers. This would increase local government's ability to negotiate better outcomes for communities.

This research was conducted by Jarra Hicks, Nina Hall, Taryn Lane and Emily Wood and supported by the Clean Energy Council. It provides a snapshot of current community engagement and benefit-sharing practices in Australian wind farms, thus creating an evidence base for improving social outcomes.

To read the full report visit cleanenergycouncil.org.au/windreport.

