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Select Committee on Information Integrity on Climate Change and Energy
Lodged via climateintegrity.sen@aph.gov.au

Clean Energy Council submission in response to Senate Select Committee on Information Integrity in Climate Change

The Clean Energy Council (CEC) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission as part of the Senate Select Committee (the Committees) inquiry into information integrity in climate change.

The CEC is the peak body for the clean energy industry in Australia, representing close to 1,000 of the leading businesses operating in renewable energy generation and storage and technology. We are committed to Australia's clean energy transformation and the critical role clean energy plays in decarbonising the nation's electricity network.

The proliferation of deliberately misleading claims about clean energy is contributing to a substantially increased level of hostility and fear within regional communities. The impact these claims are having on community cohesion are material and the CEC is deeply concerned about how these claims are being repeated and the tensions they are inflaming.

The outcome of these tensions has been increasingly distressing examples of escalating language and behaviour being directed towards landowners hosting assets. The normalisation of this behaviour, particularly where it is targeted towards farmers is something that should not be tolerated in any form.

Proliferation of misleading information at a community level particularly in the digital sphere is difficult to rectify. While specific origins can not always be determined, there are many instances where misinformation is being repeated, giving oxygen and the perception of credibility to these untruths .

The CEC respects the implied protections for political discourse within the constitution but wishes to use this committee as an opportunity to draw attention to the real consequences the debate is having on ordinary Australians.

While there is limited ability to take action against anonymous internet users its owed to the landowners and their families hosting projects that we take steps to de-escalate tensions within communities which are translating to threats of violence targeted at landowners.

Mis and disinformation in renewable energy

The below are several of the most common examples of mis and dis information found in Australia around the topic of clean energy. These topics have been comprehensively addressed to but continue to persist as means to undermine the legitimacy of clean energy technology.

Examples below are often repeated with variations on their delivery:

Misinformation Examples (inaccurate information or factually incorrect):

- **The energy transition will require Australia to be carpeted with new transmission lines:**
 - By 2030 Australia will require 4,500km of new transmission infrastructure.
 - Australia currently has 58,000km of transmission infrastructure currently in place.
 - Australia also has approximately 750,000km of electricity distribution infrastructure (low voltage poles and wires), 200,000km are estimated to be located in regional areas.
- **Clean energy projects are being forced upon farmers:**
 - Project hosts voluntarily enter into agreements with project proponents.
 - Unlike extractive industries where the resource is owned by the State, contractual arrangements for wind, solar and battery projects are voluntary agreements between the proponent and the land owner.
- **Clean energy can't be recycled and will all go to landfill.**
 - Industry in 2023 estimated that by 2034 there will be approximately 15,000 tonnes of turbine blade waste in Australia.
 - The report sought to promote responsible recycling and waste management by identifying existing pathways for decommissioned wind turbines as well as gaps in recycling capabilities that can be addressed.
 - The amount of waste in context of other industries is miniscule:
 - 12 million tonnes of coal ash are produced in 2019¹ 10 million tonnes in 2022/3.
 - 44% of the ash is diverted from ash dams with half of the diversion recycled into products such as concrete¹.
 - In 2022-23 Australia's waste stream was 76 million tonnes²
 - 100% of battery and storage technologies can be recycled – graphite, aluminium, copper, nickel, cobalt, lithium.
 - 90-95% of solar panels can be recycled – aluminium, glass, silicon, silver, copper, indium, germanium.
 - Some states such as Victoria, South Australia and ACT have banned solar panels from going to landfill and WA is introducing an approach through it's e-waste ban.

¹ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-03-10/coal-ash-has-become-one-of-australias-biggest-waste-problems/10886866>

² <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/protection/waste/publications/national-waste-resource-recovery-reporting/glance-2024>

- **Offshore wind farms could kill up to 400 whales per year:**
 - Posts on social media initially claimed the journal 'Marine Policy' had published an article estimating the impacts of whale deaths caused by offshore wind turbines.
 - After attracting attention the original post was deleted with the journal editor stating the article never existed³.

Disinformation Examples (false information intended to mislead):

- **Wind Turbines will be abandoned at the end of their operational lives leaving the landowner to pay for removal of the assets:**
 - There has never been an example of a wind turbine abandoned anywhere in Australia.
 - Permits conditions as part of approvals for construction granted by the State make clear operator obligations to decommission and rehabilitate the site at the end of its operational life.
 - In the event of a transfer of ownership of facility during the course of its operational life those obligations for decommissioning and rehabilitation transfer with it to the new owner.
- **Clean energy will cause food security challenges:**
 - Large scale wind projects hosted on farming properties generally use between 1-3% of a host's land.
 - Livestock operations (sheep or cattle) have no issues continuing to graze normally after the infrastructure is installed.
- **Clean energy infrastructure will contaminate food production and prevent livestock producers from receiving accreditation:**
 - Suggestions have circulated that the presence of wind farms or solar infrastructure on grazing land could "contaminate" livestock and threaten Australia's red-meat exports.
 - The Livestock Production Assurance Scheme operated by Meat and Livestock Australia in response to questions have addressed concerns on their website about hosting assets:
 - "Does LPA prohibit or restrict the installation of infrastructure including solar panels or wind turbines on land which is also used for livestock production and grazing? No. LPA does not prohibit or restrict the installation of equipment including solar panels, electrical transformers, capacitors, hydraulic equipment, coal seam gas structures or wind turbines on land which is also used for livestock production and grazing."
 - The website further explains: "While it is safe for livestock to graze in a paddock which also contains solar panels, wind turbines or other equipment producers need to be aware of the potential risk of contamination as equipment degrades or reaches end of life."
 - The LPA website makes clear that renewable energy infrastructure is not a food-safety barrier. Rather, producers are simply asked — as part of their broader Property

³ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-11-07/editor-blasts-fake-study-linking-whale-deaths-to-wind-farms/103069922>

Risk Assessment — to consider potential risks in the same way they would for any farm equipment.

- Importantly the full picture is that the declaration extends to other infrastructure including coal seam gas wells and other equipment.
- **Clean energy projects will make neighbouring farms uninsurable:**
 - A common claim in submissions is that landholders on properties adjacent to a proposed clean energy project cannot obtain public liability cover, or that neighbouring properties hosting energy infrastructure will increase third-party liability exposure.
 - The Insurance Council of Australia has confirmed:
 - “The Insurance Council is not aware of any instances where Insurance Council members have been unable to provide insurance or have increased premiums as a result of a farm (or a neighbouring property) hosting energy infrastructure.”⁴

Consequences of mis and dis-information:

The increasing mis- and disinformation circulating freely online is creating conditions that intensify psychosocial risk factors leading to unsafe environments for hosts, workers and members of communities in which clean energy projects are planned and operate in.

Campaigns that polarise public opinion and split local groups often translate into strained relationships and social hostility, producing anxiety, feelings of isolation, and an ongoing sense of conflict.

Inflamed tensions in communities unnecessarily fuels conflict between hosts of renewable projects and neighbouring landholders and community members. This has real and concerning consequences including bullying, intimidation, harassment, fear and confusion in communities, and even threats to the lives of those working in the sector. This can translate to job strain, absenteeism, presenteeism, and mental health issues.

Consequences to landowners:

Case Study 1: Lachlan Sullivan and the Kerrs Creek Wind Farm Proposal:

Lachlan Sullivan, a landholder from Boomey, NSW, has emerged as a vocal supporter of the Kerrs Creek Wind Farm proposal; a 63-turbine renewable energy project. Despite widespread opposition from the local community, anti-turbine group *Voice for Cabonne*, and political figures, Sullivan has consistently advocated for the project.

Community Backlash and Harassment

⁴ https://insurancecouncil.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Updated-ICA_Briefing_Farm-Insurance-and-Energy-Infrastructure_May-2024.pdf

At a community meeting on 19 February 2024, attended by over 110 residents and several politicians, Sullivan stood alone in voicing support for the wind farm. He described the experience as deeply nerve-wracking but felt compelled to speak out against misinformation. His stance has led to:

- **Social isolation:** Sullivan received congratulatory messages for his courage, but also faced criticism and alienation from community members.
- **Family division:** His brother is among the vocal opponents of the project, and their relationship has deteriorated to the point of no longer speaking.
- **Emotional toll:** Sullivan shared that the conflict has caused sleepless nights and emotional strain, especially given his past health challenges.

Lachlan's experience has been summarised in the Central Western Daily⁵.

Case Study 2: Asset host (name withheld):

Over a long weekend, the landowner's daughter (accompanied by her partner and cousin) was verbally assaulted at a local pub. An individual publicly identified her as "the daughter of the fu#&ing idiot hosting the wind turbines and transmission line" and continued to harass her throughout the evening.

The individual was later identified as a member of a local anti-renewables group known for opposing transmission projects and wind farms.

Escalation

When the landowner later confronted the individual:

- The person initially denied the comments.
- They then shifted to making false accusations, including:
 - Coercing other landowners into signing agreements.
 - Manipulating land titles to guarantee project approval.

Economic Impact

The landowner has also reported that individuals associated with anti-renewables groups have begun boycotting their business:

- Local buyers are no longer purchasing grain from the landowner.

⁵ Debate over Kerrs Creek Wind Farm: Lachlan Sullivan takes a stand | Central Western Daily | Orange, NSW

- Long-standing business relationships have been severed.
- There is a growing sense that opposition groups are coordinating efforts to economically isolate landowners who support renewable infrastructure.

Case Study 3: Vandalism and intimidation:

The below images have been shared and visualise the intimidation tactics landowners are being subjected to from hostile communities:

Stickers affixed to roadsigns:



Graffiti on roads:



Vandalism on street signs:



Efforts to combat mis- and disinformation

There is increasing experiences cited by Members of key messages, based on mis- and dis-information, being 'copy and pasted' and shared broadly through social media interactions, media engagement, letterbox drops, community meetings and environment and planning submissions, in what is a concerted effort to destabilise the industry.

False claims spread rapidly, often amplified through emotionally charged framing and social media algorithms. This fosters confusion and resentment within communities. Often, the exact same text can be observed across several anti-renewables Facebook groups.

The Clean Energy Council's public information campaign saw the establishment, in April 2025, of [Energy Fact Check](#), a website that helps to answer common questions that members of the community have about the energy transition and the role of renewable energy and storage. It provides evidence-based responses using plain language and is complemented by a set of social media channels, aimed at reaching as wide an audience as possible.

The CEC has also developed a series of fact sheets, available for [download on its website](#), and provided to community engagement professionals working within the sector, to help them cut-through the noise of mis- and disinformation.

Further, the Clean Energy Council seeks to brief and equip members of parliament from across all levels of government with accurate information and informed advice in relation to clean energy developments and has a strong focus on sharing insights and data through the release of reports and through engagement with a broad variety of national, state and regional media. The CEC has seen great success with this approach from our Members and from feedback within communities. We would welcome a similar format at a Federal level to see robust information readily available in regions where renewables are being considered or already operational.

Conclusion

Clean Energy Council Members are reporting a direct increase in the level of hostility and intimidation directed at farmers and their families that are hosting clean energy infrastructure. We believe this activity is directly correlated with the increase in misinformation and disinformation circulating through digital platforms and is playing a substantial role in driving community tensions.

These tensions are being inflamed on the basis of false information but are having a very real impact on people. We urge the Committee to consider what role the Parliament can play to reduce the spread of these sources of mis and dis-information.

Sincerely,

William Churchill
Chief Policy and Impact Officer
Clean Energy Council