



CEC Best Practice Charter Report ACEN Australia

August 2025



A message from our Managing Director



Australia’s clean energy transition is as much a social transformation as it is a technical one – and unless we deliver on both, we won’t succeed at either. Infrastructure alone isn’t enough; long-term success depends on trust, inclusion, and the support of the communities we work with.

ACEN Australia has grown and delivered more than 1GW of new clean generation capacity in eight years. Our experience has highlighted strong social performance is not a sidebar to renewable energy project delivery. It is a critical enabler, and as vital to long-term commercial outcomes and organisational legitimacy as engineering and grid connection.

When social performance is done well, it de-risks projects, improves capital efficiency, and strengthens government and investor confidence. That’s why we’re working hard to strengthen the role of social performance within our business model.

This understanding has shaped how we structure our teams, assess project risk, and allocate resources. It’s also shaped how we listen – not just to what stakeholders say, but to what those signals reveal about system design, delivery culture, and long-term alignment.

This work isn’t easy. The questions are often complex, the timelines tight, and the stakes high. But if we are serious about delivering infrastructure that serves people and places for generations, we must also be serious about how we show up for those people and places across the project lifecycle.

The Clean Energy Council’s Best Practice Charter gives industry a shared reference point. This report outlines how we’re delivering on those commitments and how we’re working on lifting the bar through a deliberate, considered and agile approach.

David Pollington
Managing Director **ACEN Australia**

How we’ve approached this report

We approached this reporting milestone not as a compliance exercise, but as a reflective performance and delivery improvement tool.

In addition to reflecting on our social performance outcomes, we have analysed stakeholder feedback from our own projects and sentiment across the sector through insights captured in media coverage, public submissions, industry policy and formal community engagement. We then used these insights to identify where we can improve and how, and how we’ll know improvement measures are delivering on intended outcomes.

We asked:

- What themes are consistent across regional Australia?
- Where do trust gaps persist?
- What are we doing well, and where are we falling short?
- How can we align internal systems to deliver better outcomes?

Each Charter Principle is explored through three lenses:

- 01. Key stakeholder feedback and risk themes
- 02. Our current practices and responsive initiatives
- 03. Early progress of emerging practices, and targeted outcomes from which we build our own internal KPIs.

Some practices are already embedded. Others are being piloted, refined, or implemented at scale.

Across the board, we are investing in highly skilled subject matter experts (SMEs) including First Nations, Environment, Social and Governance (ESG), and consultation, communication and engagement specialists. These professionals are key members of our cross-functional project teams and a number live and work in the regions that host our projects. This is a critical part of our commitment, and ensures our approach is guided by those with deep domain knowledge and strong local intelligence.

This report provides a snapshot of our approach and investment in continuous improvement. It is not intended as a glossy corporate communication or retrospective tick-box exercise. It’s part strategic roadmap, part internal guide. It’s about being honest with ourselves – and clear with our partners – about what we’re doing, why we’re doing it, and what comes next.



How we're delivering against the Best Practice Charter

Charter Principle 1

Respectful early engagement with communities and Traditional Owners

CASE STUDY | NEXT PAGE

Key risks, opportunities and feedback themes

- Persistent frustration with late-stage or tokenistic engagement across the sector.
- Communities expect earlier visibility of projects and clear pathways for influence, not just input.
- First Nations groups seeking structured opportunities in ownership, equity, supply chain and workforce development.
- Trust deficit from legacy projects that over-promised and under-delivered.

Current practices and responsive initiatives

- Stakeholder Risk & Materiality Framework (2025) providing whole-of-company visibility of non-technical risks.
- Elevated internal delivery governance model operationalising the framework through stage-gates.
- Early integration of Social Performance, First Nations and ESG SMEs at feasibility.
- Alignment with Clean Energy Council Leading Practice Principles: First Nations and Renewable Energy Projects.
- Minimum First Nations supply chain and workforce commitments embedded into procurement.
- National Reconciliation Action Plan building workforce cultural competence.

Progress and outcomes

The elevated engagement framework adopted in 2025 is already supporting a more coordinated, rigorous approach to managing complexity across the stakeholder landscape.

We are already seeing stronger integration of community and stakeholder feedback into project design and delivery from early in the Development phase, and a more 'joined-up' approach to sharing lessons learned and solutions across the portfolio, helping us front-load risk and better manage project complexity.

Beyond project delivery outcomes, the improvements we have made are helping us build a more robust understanding of broad regional priorities and challenges. This has been critical in shaping long-term, far-reaching legacy – partnerships to address systemic challenges impacting host communities.

Examples include access to mental health support services, affordable housing and vocational and tertiary education opportunities. These initiatives have been established in close collaboration with local partners and strengthen regional resilience in ways that endure beyond the life of our projects.

As our frameworks and models mature, we expect to see more consistent, transparent pathways for communities to provide input that shapes project design, management, and community benefit sharing approaches.

Together, these initiatives will be instrumental for ensuring we deliver high value, responsible and balanced projects that meet the expectations of communities, and unlock meaningful, lasting benefits that make a difference in the lives of local people.



ABOVE
(FROM LEFT) LIFELINE CENTRAL WEST CEO STEPHANIE ROBINSON, ACEN AUSTRALIA MANAGER SOCIAL PERFORMANCE (CENTRAL WEST NSW) SARAH HAFEZ, AUSTRALIAN RUGBY LEGEND NICK- FARR JONES AM, AND ANDREW GEE MP, MEMBER FOR CALARE, NSW



ABOVE
ACEN AUSTRALIA'S PARTNERSHIP WITH LIFELINE IS BUILDING DEEP, LOCAL CAPACITY IN RESPONSE TO PRIORITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE SUPPORT NEEDS IN NSW'S CENTRAL-WEST

Case Study

Lifeline Mudgee Community Hub

Strengthening regional mental health resilience in the Central West Orana

In 2025, ACEN Australia co-invested in establishing a permanent Lifeline Mental Health and Crisis Support Hub in Mudgee – an anchor initiative designed to address the escalating mental health needs of the Central West Orana region. This investment was funded through project-specific allocations within ACEN's Social Investment Program and reflects a deliberate, data-informed commitment to regional resilience as a precondition for long-term infrastructure delivery.

CHARTER PRINCIPLE 1 | RESPECTFUL EARLY ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITIES AND TRADITIONAL OWNERS

Context

Mental health challenges in regional Australia are well documented – but their scale and systemic nature are often underappreciated. Rates of severe psychological distress in regional areas are more than double those of metropolitan counterparts, driven by a combination of geographic isolation, workforce shortages, high exposure to economic and environmental stressors, and limited access to professional care.

In the Central West Orana region:

- Wait times for public mental health services regularly exceed 6–12 months.
- Out-of-pocket costs for private psychologists often surpass \$200 per session, placing support out of reach for many.

- Service coverage is patchy – with no consistent presence of psychiatrists or mental health nurses in smaller towns.
- Stigma remains a barrier to help-seeking, particularly among men and young people.

These realities compound social and economic disadvantage – and present real risks for infrastructure developers reliant on regional workforce, cohesion, and capacity.

ACEN Australia's role

Our \$60,000 investment was targeted to support two foundational building blocks of the Lifeline model – each designed to build sustainable, community-based capacity while improving access to professional care:

1.

Crisis Support Workforce Development

(\$27,500)

We funded the professional training and national accreditation of five locally based volunteers to deliver:

- 24/7 crisis telephone counselling
- Bereavement and trauma support groups
- Community outreach sessions tailored to rural audiences

These roles are embedded within Lifeline's national framework and provide a trusted, accessible front line of support for people in distress – connecting them to additional care pathways when needed.

2.

Mental Health First Aid Network

(\$27,500)

We supported the training of 100 residents across Mudgee, Gulgong, Coolah, Dunedoo and Wellington in certified Mental Health First Aid – creating a region-wide peer support network. Participants include teachers, employers, sports coaches, small business owners and local volunteers. These individuals are now equipped to:

- Recognise signs of mental distress early
- Provide initial support and reassurance
- Connect people to appropriate services, from counselling to clinical intervention

This “joined-up” approach strengthens the region's informal and formal care systems simultaneously. It ensures that crisis points don't fall through the cracks – and that help is not just available, but visible, trusted, and embedded in everyday community life.

Why this partnership matters



It responds to structural need, not sentiment – Our investment is grounded in evidence from Lifeline, local health data, and SPI analysis – targeting root causes of system strain, not short-term fixes.



It builds regional capacity, not just services – By investing in people, not just programs, we're helping communities support themselves – increasing long-term resilience, retention and recovery.



It supports project delivery – Mental health strain affects construction safety, productivity, absenteeism, and workforce continuity. Strengthening the social foundations of the region supports project success and long-term licence to operate.

This initiative exemplifies ACEN's evolving approach to evidence-based, regionally embedded social investment. It reflects how well-structured infrastructure delivery can strengthen – not strain – the places that host it. By backing proven delivery partners and targeting systemic barriers, we're delivering measurable outcomes that improve lives, reduce risk, and help communities thrive.

Timely, responsive communication

Key risks, opportunities and feedback themes

- Confusion about planning processes and accountability.
- Misinformation filling the gaps left by unclear or delayed communication.
- Rising expectation for transparency and procedural fairness.

Current practices and responsive initiatives

- Tailored communication channels informed by regional insights.
- Communication strategies led by SMEs with cross-functional input.
- Dedicated community feedback lines and grievance mechanism embedded into governance for all major projects.
- Rollout of major Stakeholder Management System upgrade to capture, track and analyse all engagement activity portfolio-wide.
- Procedural fairness protocols embedded into feedback handling.

Progress and outcomes

Dedicated channels and grievance mechanisms are already improving responsiveness and fairness.

Our stakeholder management system upgrade now provides greater visibility of priorities and issues across the portfolio, helping support more coordinated engagement, more timely and effected responses to feedback, as well as elevating our reporting and analysis capability to drive continuous improvement.

As part of our growth and transformation, clear performance targets will be established to support rigour and accountability around our communication and response policies and protocols.



Sensitivity to biodiversity, culture and landscape

Key risks, opportunities and feedback themes

- Heightened scrutiny of biodiversity loss, cultural heritage protection and landscape values.
- Community fatigue with offsets that don't deliver visible local benefits.
- Expectation for renewables to demonstrate environmental enhancement, not just impact mitigation.

Current practices and responsive initiatives

- Early biodiversity and land-use constraints mapping guiding site selection.
- Impact management hierarchy applied rigorously, prioritising avoidance.
- Voluntary Cultural Values Assessments underway across four projects.
- Aboriginal suppliers prioritised for land management contracts.
- Joint science partnerships with CSIRO, universities and Traditional Owner groups.

Progress and outcomes

Early cultural values assessments and science partnerships are already shaping project design and strengthening cultural legitimacy.

These steps move us beyond compliance, toward projects that are co-designed with custodians and informed by credible data.

Over time, this will build stronger alignment with community expectations and reduce late-stage complexity and delay.

Going forward, rigorous verification of initiatives as part of delivering our ESG Strategy (in development), will underpin the integrity of beyond-compliance initiatives, with opportunities to share data to support the scientific knowledge base explored.

Agricultural coexistence

CASE STUDY | NEXT PAGE

Key risks, opportunities and feedback themes

- Persistent concerns that renewables displace agriculture.
- Strong demand for evidence that projects can coexist with, or enhance, farm productivity.
- Policy and planning frameworks looking for credible agrisolar models.

Current practices and responsive initiatives

- Agricultural coexistence treated as a core design parameter portfolio-wide.
- Partnership being finalised to deliver the first large scale, peer-reviewed agrisolar study in Australia.
- Landholder feedback formally integrated into design processes.
- Social Impact and ESG SMEs support continuity of landholder relationships.

Progress and outcomes

Outcomes at New England Solar show that solar and grazing can successfully co-exist, with 6,500 sheep now grazing between panels and clear, positive results for both landholders and project operations.

This initiative has helped strengthen trust with farmers and demonstrates well designed renewable projects can support, rather than displace, productive land use.

Work is now underway to expand this study, with the goal of creating the evidence base needed to scale coexistence nationally.

Over time, this work is expected to deliver more resilient farming systems, reduced operational risks for ACEN, and increase community confidence in the long-term compatibility of renewables and agriculture, bolstering industry credibility.



New England Solar Grazing Study Extension

Scaling land use value stacking: From proof of concept to ongoing collaboration

In 2025, ACEN Australia and the University of New England (UNE) reached an in-principal agreement deliver the first formal, quantitative evidence in Australia on the productivity and environmental outcomes of grazing beneath utility-scale solar arrays, via a three-year, peer-reviewed research study.

The partnership builds on the successful Solar Grazing program delivered at NES in 2023. Since then, host landholders have observed strong pasture growth and healthy flock integration under and around solar panels.

What began as a practical land-use trial with local graziers is now scaling into a structured research program designed to provide robust evidence and create a replicable model for agrisolar practice across Australia.

CHARTER PRINCIPLE 4 | AGRICULTURAL COEXISTENCE

Context

Agricultural land use remains a contested issue in the planning and delivery of large-scale renewable projects. While landholder experience since 2023 has been positive, the sector lacks peer-reviewed data to demonstrate coexistence at scale.

Key challenges:

- Ongoing scrutiny over whether solar farms displace agricultural production.
- Need for credible, independent research to shape policy and planning frameworks.
- Industry appetite for replicable models that can balance renewable generation with regional livelihoods..

The 2025 study extension responds to these pressures by moving from anecdote to evidence, and from site-specific success to a scalable framework.

ACEN Australia’s role

This initiative reflects ACEN’s approach to scaling successful local practices into national impact. Through an in-principal partnership with UNE and host landholder Richard Munsie, ACEN is supporting the study design, equipment, and on-site management, while UNE contributes academic expertise and PhD student engagement.

Key features:

- Scaling what works – Building on two years of grazing at NES to formalise data collection across paired test (under panels) and control (outside panels) sites.
- Collaborative delivery – Co-designed with landholders, UNE, and ACEN operations to ensure rigour and relevance.
- Future applicability – Methodology designed to extend to NES Stage 2 and other ACEN projects nationally.

This shared-value model helps ACEN de-risk future projects, strengthens its ESG profile, and demonstrates leadership in agrisolar innovation.

Projected outcomes

Operational performance

Landholders will gain practical insights into stock rotation, pasture health, and wool yields that directly inform farm management, while ACEN benefits from data that improves vegetation management, reduces maintenance costs, and supports long-term operational efficiency.

Community and landholder relationships

By embedding landholder experience in formal research, the project elevates farmers as active partners in shaping agrisolar practice, while reinforcing ACEN’s role as a collaborative developer that invests in long-term, shared value for its host regions.

Market differentiation

The study offers farmers a pathway to diversify and strengthen their incomes through dual land use, while positioning ACEN as a leader in agrisolar innovation with enhanced ESG credentials to attract investors and PPA customers.

Scalability

The research will generate a replicable model that farmers, industry, and ACEN alike can draw on to extend agrisolar practices beyond New England Solar, strengthening agricultural resilience while enabling ACEN to deliver projects more consistently across its portfolio.

Regulatory and policy influence

Peer-reviewed data will provide landholders and the agricultural sector with credible evidence that grazing remains viable under solar arrays, while giving ACEN stronger footing in project approvals and planning processes where land use is contested.

Why this partnership matters

- ✓ **It scales a proven practice** – What began as a practical grazing initiative at NES in 2023 now matures into a formal research program. This shift signals more than continuity – it demonstrates how lived landholder experience can evolve into evidence that shapes national practice.
- ✓ **It reflects long-term collaboration** – The partnership isn’t transactional; it’s a model for how landholders, academia, and industry can co-design solutions that are rigorous, locally relevant, and replicable. That alignment is what gives the study credibility across agriculture, energy, and policy circles.
- ✓ **It shifts the conversation** – The debate over whether solar “takes farmland out of production” is one of the most contested narratives facing the industry. This project provides the evidence base to move beyond speculation and position agrisolar as a resilience strategy for farming, not a threat to it.
- ✓ **It strengthens resilience** – At its core, the study isn’t just about sheep and solar panels. It’s about demonstrating that renewable energy can enhance, not undermine, the agricultural backbone of regional economies. That proof is essential to sustaining community trust, industry legitimacy, and the long-term social licence of the clean energy transition.



CASE STUDY | NEXT PAGE

Key risks, opportunities and feedback themes

- Communities may feel excluded from key design decisions around noise, traffic and visual impacts.
- Experience of feedback loops undermines trust.

Current practices and responsive initiatives

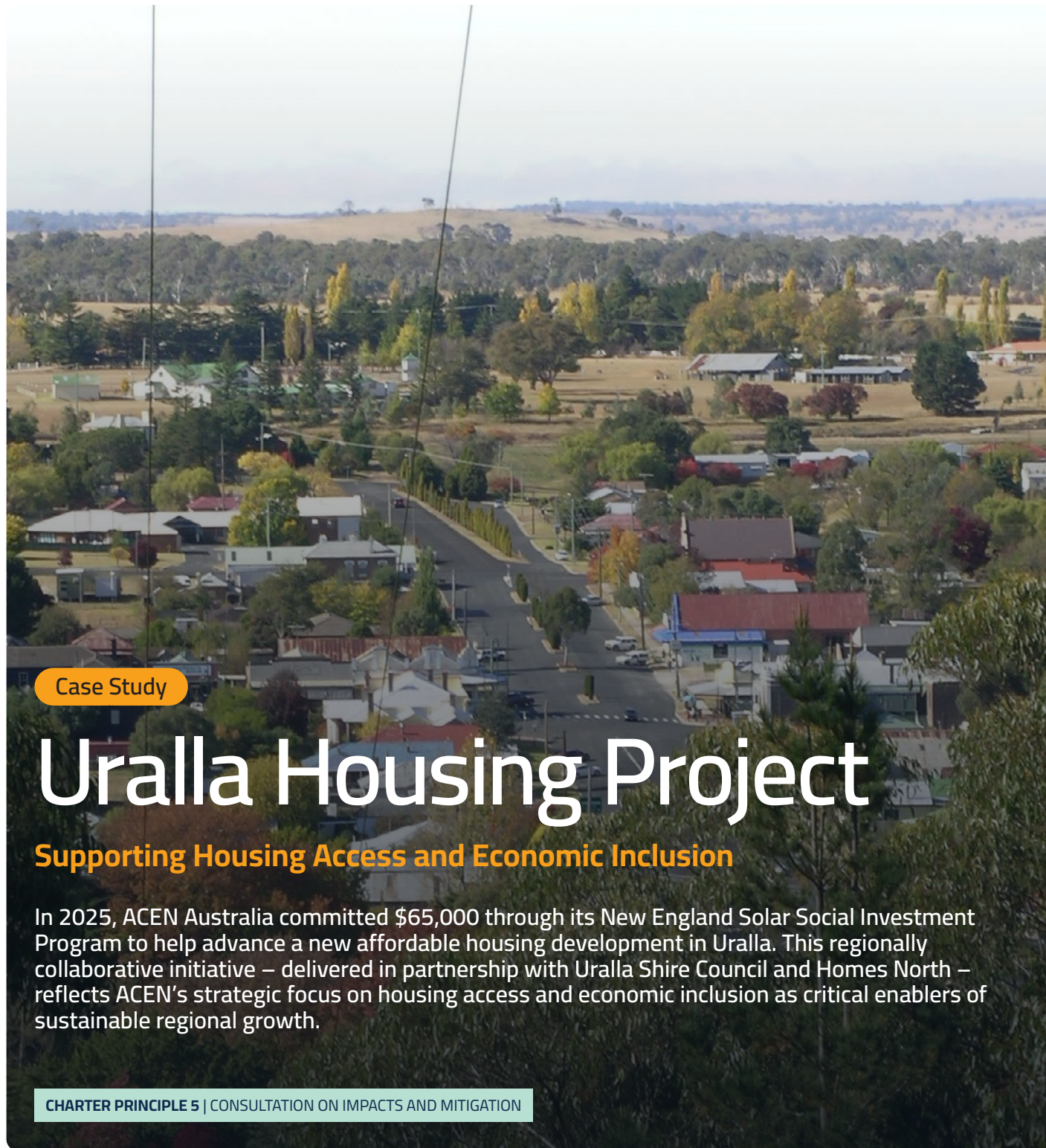
- Visual, noise and traffic assessments scoped early.
- Mitigation co-designed where feasible based on local knowledge gathered through consultation, expert advice and regulator feedback.
- Embedded SMEs ensure feedback is linked to response, not just noted.

Progress and outcomes

Removal of multiple turbines, revisions to layout design and changes to site access at Valley of the Winds, site access route revisions at Birriwa Solar, and planting of 160+ native trees at New England are just a handful of examples of how community input is shaping project design.

Our focus from here is on ensuring clear and timely feedback loops for communities and stakeholders, clearly articulating how input was incorporated into design review, as well limitations associated with other design constraints. This may include development of “what we heard/what we changed” summaries as part of project communications.

Together, these steps reflect a shift from procedural consultation to consultation as a strategic asset and genuine driver of improved social, project and commercial outcomes. In this way, we aim to bolster meaningful participation in the development process, reduce conflict, and deliver projects that are not only technically viable but socially grounded.



Case Study

Uralla Housing Project

Supporting Housing Access and Economic Inclusion

In 2025, ACEN Australia committed \$65,000 through its New England Solar Social Investment Program to help advance a new affordable housing development in Uralla. This regionally collaborative initiative – delivered in partnership with Uralla Shire Council and Homes North – reflects ACEN's strategic focus on housing access and economic inclusion as critical enablers of sustainable regional growth.

CHARTER PRINCIPLE 5 | CONSULTATION ON IMPACTS AND MITIGATION

Context

Across regional NSW, access to affordable housing is fast becoming a pressure point for workforce attraction, retention, and community cohesion. In towns like Uralla, demand has steadily increased – shaped by population growth, regional migration, and economic investment in sectors such as renewable energy, agriculture, and tourism.

- Property values have risen, reflecting growing investor confidence – a strong signal of regional economic potential.
- Vacancy rates have remained below 1% – well under the 3% benchmark for a balanced housing market.
- But supply hasn't kept pace, creating challenges for renters and lower-income workers, particularly those in essential services.
- The 2024 Uralla Draft Housing Strategy identified a need for more diverse, affordable housing to reduce pressure on local services and infrastructure.

ACEN Australia's role

This is a legacy project made possible by three parties playing their part: Uralla Shire Council contributed the land, Homes North will manage delivery, and ACEN Australia provided the catalytic early-stage funding needed to convert strategy into action.

Our \$65,000 investment supported detailed site layout and engineering plans, architectural design, and essential documentation to progress the site to shovel-readiness – a foundational step toward securing capital funding and delivery partnerships. By contributing early, we helped de-risk the project and strengthen its case for future investment.

It's a strong example of place-based collaboration done well: each partner leaning into their strengths, using the tools and levers available to them, and working collectively to create long-term value for the community.

Projected outcomes



Workforce access and retention

Affordable housing close to jobs enables essential workers to stay local, sustaining critical services like healthcare, education, and hospitality.



Reduced delivery risk

Early technical work increases project eligibility for government and private capital support.



Market stability

Adding supply in the affordable rental segment eases pressure across the broader housing system.



Replicable approach

The initiative aligns with Council strategy and draws on lessons from similar regional models – offering a framework for broader uptake.

Why this partnership matters



It strengthens regional liveability – Growth isn't sustainable unless communities remain places where people can afford to live and work.



It addresses structural causes – Rather than reacting to housing strain with short-term measures, this partnership invests in a systemic solution: supply.



It reflects shared responsibility – Delivering long-term value requires each partner to play a role. This project demonstrates what's possible when local government, community housing, and the private sector work together to unlock regional opportunity.



Charter Principle 6

Support for local jobs and procurement

CASE STUDY | NEXT PAGE

Key risks, opportunities and feedback themes

- Concern about imported labour and fly-in-fly-out workforces.
- Need for visibility and capability building in regional supply chains to ensure regional suppliers can participate in project delivery.
- Growing workforce competition in Renewable Energy Zones (REZs).

Current practices and responsive initiatives

- Local procurement plans mandated for principal contractors.
- Regional employment and accommodation strategies informed by Social Impact Assessment findings and co-designed with councils.
- Local skills and capacity development, and enterprise creation prioritised under regional Social Investment Programs.
- Communications and locally based project leadership staff support visibility of opportunities.
- Targets and engagement commitments for regional and Australian procurement.

Progress and outcomes

Data collated in 2025 for the Construction phase of our Stubbo Solar project demonstrates early outcomes of our first-principles approach. Almost 15% of the project workforce are permanent residents of the local government area (LGA) that hosts the project (NSW Mid-Western Regional Council), or its immediate neighbouring LGAs.

We also invested \$3.2M in procurement from Indigenous businesses during Stubbo Solar construction and engaged an Indigenous-led land management crew through operations at New England. These are early signals of the more systematic change we are embedding through

development and project procurement, and we expect to see strong results of this work as our near-term development projects transition into construction between now and 2030.

Through partnerships with regional education and training organisation, we are working to increasing access to learning, skills development and capacity building programs critical for supporting specialist skills capacity and long-term local talent pipelines into the sector and other vital regional industries.

These include our Max Potential skills and coaching partnership delivered through

the Dubbo TAFE, and our partnership with the Country University Centre.

Next, aggregated reporting across the project lifecycle will set benchmarks by which we can measure effectiveness of strategies and identify opportunities for improvement. Further, collaboration with industry peers and government bodies in Renewable Energy Zones will support greater clarity on regional delivery pipelines, with the view of achieving a more coordinated approach to training, procurement and long-term employment regionally.



ABOVE

(FROM LEFT) MID-WESTERN REGIONAL COUNCIL GENERAL MANAGER BRAD CAM, ACEN AUSTRALIA MANAGING DIRECTOR DAVID POLLINGTON, AND CUC MUDGEE CENTRE MANAGER (FORMER) KIM EDWARDS



ABOVE

THROUGH ACEN AUSTRALIA'S INVESTMENT IN THE CUC MUDGEE, STUDENTS HAVE ACCESS TO A FULLY EQUIPPED STUDENT SERVICES FACILITY WHERE THEY CAN ACCESS A RANGE OF SUPPORTS TO KEEP THEM ON TRACK

Case Study

Country Universities Centre, Mudggee

Powering pathways, anchoring talent

In 2024, ACEN Australia entered a five-year partnership with the Country Universities Centre (CUC) Mudggee Region – a strategic investment in local capability, education equity, and long-term regional resilience.

CHARTER PRINCIPLE 6 | SUPPORT FOR LOCAL JOBS AND PROCUREMENT

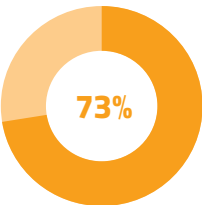
For decades, students in regional Australia have faced systemic barriers to tertiary education:

- Limited access to reliable digital infrastructure
- Financial pressure from relocation and living costs
- Lack of local academic support
- Isolation from campus life and peer networks

As a result, young people have often been forced to leave home to study and research shows many don't return. This trend has historically accelerated regional skill shortages in health, education, and professional services. The economic and social consequences are far-reaching – weakening local economies, deepening inequity, and entrenching gendered workforce gaps. CUC Mudggee was designed to change that.

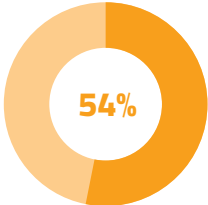
The Centre provides free, high-quality learning space and wraparound academic support for students enrolled at any Australian university, without students needing to leave home.

By July 2025, CUC Mudgee celebrated its 200th student enrolment, with measurable outcomes showing the transformative potential of this model:



73% of students are women.

A sign the model is actively dismantling long-standing barriers to education and professional growth for women in regional Australia, especially those balancing caregiving roles or re-entering the workforce. Enabling more women to complete tertiary education is one of the most effective ways to increase labour force participation, reduce poverty, and uplift entire communities, both socially and economically.



54% are first-in-family to attend university

This represents significant intergenerational impact. First-generation students who have to relocate to pursue their education are much more likely to experience financial hardship, self-doubt, and limited career exposure, yet their success statistically improves outcomes for their families and communities for generations.



43 institutions, 15 fields of study

The breadth of academic programs accessed through the Centre shows that regional students are not just pursuing education – they’re expanding their career horizons. Local industries stand to benefit from this increasingly diverse, skilled pipeline.



Top areas of study: Health, Education, Psychology

These are frontline service sectors currently facing workforce crises across rural and regional Australia. Local students trained in these disciplines are more likely to stay, work, and lead in their communities – strengthening critical infrastructure and care systems.

Why this partnership matters

- ✔ Slows regional talent drain and builds place-based workforce capability
- ✔ Drives gender equity in workforce participation and education access
- ✔ Supports national service system resilience through local training pipelines
- ✔ Increase economic mobility for low-income and first-generation families
- ✔ Anchors human capital in regional areas – a foundational ingredient for sustainable economic development.



Charter Principle 7

Community benefit sharing

Key risks, opportunities and feedback themes

- Disillusionment with perception of tokenistic or one-off contributions, particularly in Renewable Energy Zones.
- Perceptions of community grants being used by some proponents in lieu of good engagement practices.
- Expectation for strategic, long-term place-based investment.

Current practices and responsive initiatives

- Industry-leading Social Investment Program (SIP), triggered in early development.
- Robust SIP Framework.
- Regional governance and impact reporting frameworks.
- Social Impact SMEs lead strategy and visibility managed in line with cross functional internal delivery governance model.
- Elevated Social Value Creation framework mapped to Social Performance Index and aligned with global Sustainable Development Goals established, with whole of portfolio integration from 2026.

Progress and outcomes

By the end of 2025, we will have invested close to \$1 million across the regional communities that host our development and construction projects through our Social Investment Program.

In addition, as of July 2025 we have committed about \$2 billion towards regional benefits through planning agreements with local governments and REZ access contracts. This investment will support community development, local skills and capacity building, and local supply and contracting opportunities over the life of our three near-term development projects.

Industry benchmarking demonstrates our ‘pre-financial close’ approach to social investment is delivering significantly more funding into regional communities than our competitors, particularly in REZ’s where we have multiple projects in development.

From here, our improved social value creation framework and integrated reporting mechanisms will allow us to better map and track impact over time, rather than simply spend. This will allow us to report transparently on outcomes, while continuing to monitor and refine our approach through community feedback.

Educational and tourism opportunities

Key risks, opportunities and feedback themes

- Communities want renewables to enhance regional identity and pride, not create uncertainty.
- There is strong demand for credible, accessible information that explains what projects mean locally.
- Persistent misinformation and myths about technology, impacts, and benefits risk undermining trust and delaying acceptance.
- People value opportunities to see, touch and learn from real-world examples rather than abstract debate.

Current practices and responsive initiatives

- Providing a reference point in the REZ for sector learning and community engagement.
- Regional offices and local staff in key areas where we operate.
- Regular site visits for schools, community groups, officials and industry peers, led in collaboration with project teams and landholders.
- Public events linked to construction and BESS milestones, turning delivery into opportunities for technology demonstration and knowledge sharing.
- Project updates, open days, and local media content framing renewables as part of regional identity and opportunity, not abstract policy.
- On-ground hosting and direct conversations building comfort and familiarity with sector technologies, countering misinformation and speculation.



ABOVE
IN 2025, NSW AGRICULTURE COMMISSIONER ALISON SONE VISITED OUR NEW ENGLAND SOLAR SITE TO MEET WITH OUR PROJECT TEAM AND HOST LANDHOLDERS, AND LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR SOLAR GRAZING PROGRAM.

Progress and outcomes

With established and near-operational projects already underway in regions now declared as Renewable Energy Zones (REZs), we have played a central role in demonstrating the realities of project delivery in host communities. These projects have given us a unique platform to share knowledge and lessons learned, open our sites to stakeholders and community members, and provide first-hand experiences that reduce uncertainty about what renewable energy projects mean in practice.

As one of the first large-scale renewable projects in the New England region, New England Solar has become a visible reference point for regional communities. Since the declaration of the New

England REZ, we have played a central role in supporting sector education by welcoming land holders considering hosting renewable energy infrastructure on their properties, community groups, schools, government officials and strategic partners to the site. These visits, alongside our ongoing collaborative work with local stakeholders, have helped to dispel myths, collaborate on practical solutions, and build familiarity with renewable technologies.

Across all our projects, we maintain a local presence, with staff who live and work in the regions throughout the project lifecycle. This creates regular opportunities for community members to connect with our people, ask questions,

provide feedback, and participate actively in regional initiatives. These interactions are strengthening public confidence and ensuring community perspectives remain at the heart of our decision-making. We see particular value in this presence as it builds sector literacy, interrupts flows of misinformation, and fosters long-term trust.

We are also collaborating with industry peers, particularly across REZs, to share lessons learned and effective approaches. Our goal is to contribute to place-based, reliable and consistent resources that reflect community needs and support the broader renewable energy transition.

Responsible land stewardship

Key risks, opportunities and feedback themes

- Concerns over dust, weeds and land degradation.
- Expectation for renewables to enhance land health and align with regenerative outcomes.

Current practices and responsive initiatives

- Rigorous weed, seed and fire management processes in line with biosecurity and bushfire management protocols across all projects.
- Land management initiatives to address existing ecological threats and control incursion of weeds and feral predators delivered at scale across project areas through construction and operational life of projects.
- Land use and biodiversity trials underway at New England in partnership with CSIRO.
- Landscape scale regeneration alongside project delivery agriculture pilots scoped.
- Shared stewardship projects funded through SIP.
- Environment and Sustainability SMEs oversee alignment of design with stewardship requirements.

Progress and outcomes

Early partnerships are producing data on soil and pasture quality, and threat abatement outcomes. Over time, stewardship will extend into regenerative trials and landscape-scale restoration, building confidence that renewables can deliver overall improved outcomes for ecology.

Next, commitments will be codified into our ESG Strategy (in development), with trust in stewardship tested through the Community Perceptions Survey.

Responsible decommissioning and recycling

Key risks, opportunities and feedback themes

- Limited understanding among communities about end-of-life obligations and processes.
- Distrust that costs and responsibilities will be managed fairly, rather than left to landholders or governments.
- Lack of scalable, proven recycling pathways for solar, wind and battery components.
- Opportunity to leverage decommissioning as a new regional economic industry, especially in Renewable Energy Zones (REZs).
- Expectation that developers will demonstrate financial responsibility from the outset.

Current practices and responsive initiatives

- End-of-life decommissioning plans embedded from Stage 1 across all new projects.
- Financial assurance mechanisms incorporated into land access and host agreements, ensuring future decommissioning costs are covered under multiple scenarios.
- Circular economy pilots underway with two waste-innovation partners to trial recycling and re-use of PV modules and battery components.
- Transparent information shared through FAQs and community briefings on decommissioning obligations and processes.
- Engagement with industry peers, regulators, and regional stakeholders to shape collaborative solutions and explore new industries linked to circular economy practices.

Progress and outcomes

Building awareness around decommissioning planning requirements under development consents, and financial assurance mechanisms embedded into landholder agreements has already provided stakeholders with greater confidence. Additionally, early outcomes of pilot programs with recycling innovators demonstrate our commitment to planning for legacy from the outset and provide confidence that scalable solutions are on the horizon.

As these approaches mature, we expect to see stronger investor confidence, lower long-term risk, and practical opportunities for re-use and recycling.

Looking ahead, we plan to work with our industry peers, governments, and regional stakeholders to identify and scale workable solutions, potentially establishing new industries and economic diversification opportunities.

These commitments will be codified into our ESG Strategy and tracked through our Community Perceptions Survey to ensure communities recognise the benefits of our approach.



Looking ahead

This work isn’t peripheral. It’s central to how we deliver projects that are credible, investable, and built to last.

We’re clear-eyed about the complexity and about the cost of not getting it right. Sub-par engagement outcomes and weak social value frameworks slow down projects, increase risk, and erode trust in the industry.

That’s why we’re investing in systems, capability, and governance that treat engagement and social performance as essential disciplines – not afterthoughts.

There’s still work to do. But we’re not waiting. We’re building the internal muscle to do this well, and embedding that thinking across our portfolio. Because when these practices are applied seriously and consistently, the outcomes are better – for communities, governments, and project delivery alike.

