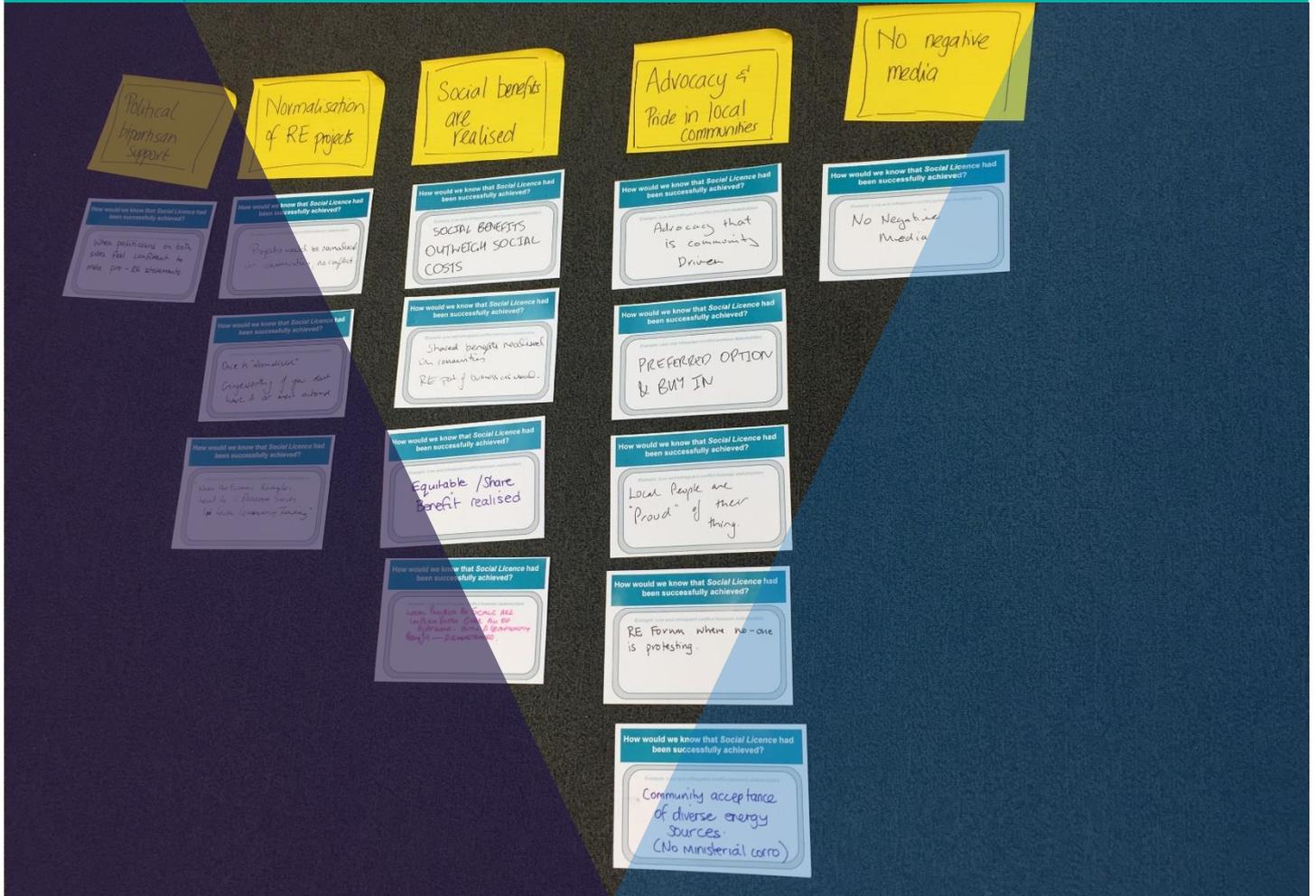


# Building social acceptance and community trust in renewable energy

Report on stakeholder consultation



# Overview of project

## Rationale

The Victorian Government has set ambitious renewable energy generation targets of 25 per cent by 2020 and 40 per cent by 2025. Building social acceptance and community trust in large scale renewable energy developments will be critical to a successful transition to a more affordable, reliable and clean energy system.

Large scale renewable energy developments will be located in regional Victoria, bringing benefits and impacts.

The focus of this project has been to learn from the past and identify priority areas where actions could be undertaken to build social acceptance and community trust in large scale renewable energy.

## Who we interviewed

Phone Interviews	
Australian Wind Alliance	Buloke Shire Council
Clean Energy Council	Committee for Ballarat
DELWP	Embank / Hepburn Wind
Moyne Shire Council	Municipal Association of Victoria
National Wind Farm Commissioner	Pacific Hydro
Pyrenees Shire Council	Sustainability Victoria
Tilt Renewables	Victorian Renewable Energy Advocate
Waubra Foundation	Western Alliance for Greenhouse Action

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) undertook a facilitated process to engage with external stakeholders to better understand the factors that build social acceptance and community trust in renewable energy. External stakeholders included local government, regional agencies, renewable energy developers and community groups.

MosaicLab was engaged to undertake a desktop review, targeted stakeholder interviews and seven 'social licence' workshops in regional Victoria between August to October 2017. Twenty-two stakeholders were interviewed in the first stage of this project. The data gathered from these phone interviews and desktop research were compiled into an Insights Report, which was used as an input to seven workshops. The second stage involved seven collaborative workshops where groups of stakeholders identified barriers to social licence for renewable energy, and possible actions that could be undertaken collectively to overcome those barriers.

Workshops were held in various locations across Victoria to access a wide range of stakeholders. To learn from past experiences and identify priorities for the future, workshop participants were asked a series of questions:

- what didn't work well in the past and what can we learn?
- what has been working well and how can we build on it?
- what still exists as a barrier or issue today and needs to be addressed?
- what are the areas that require our priority focus and would make the most difference?
- who needs to lead these actions?
- how should they be implemented and when?
- how should we measure success?

Stakeholder Workshop Participants			
Industry	Community groups	Local Government	State / Clth Government
Acciona Energy	Alternative Technology Association	Ballarat City Council	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
AGL	Committee for Ballarat	Gannawarra Shire Council	Latrobe Valley Authority
Alinta Energy	Ecohub	Grampians Central West Waste and Resource Recovery Group	North East Water
Downer Group	Gippsland Goulburn Valley Community Energy	Greater Bendigo City Council	Office of the National Wind Farm Commissioner
FRV	Totally Renewable Yackandandah	Greater Shepparton City Council	Regional Development Victoria
Gippsland Solar	Voices of the Valley	Horsham Rural City Council	Sustainability Victoria
Goldwind Australia		Loddon Shire Council	
Jacobs		Mildura Rural City Council	
Lyon Group		Moorabool Shire Council	
NRG Wise		Moyne Shire Council	
Pacific Hydro		Shire of Glenelg	
Powercor		Strathbogie Shire Council	
Powervault Global		Swan Hill Rural City Council	
REC Group		City of Wodonga	
RES Australia			
Tilt Renewables			
Windlab			
Wind Farm Developments			

Participants at these workshops developed recommendations for actions that could be undertaken to address barriers to social acceptance and community trust in renewable energy. These recommendations were grouped under the following themes or key areas for action.

Figure 1: Key areas for action proposed by workshop participants



## What we learnt

Priorities for building social acceptance and community trust in renewable energy varied across different regions but some common themes emerged.

The need for better communications and information was raised in every workshop. Stakeholders sought information from government on a range of levels – from overarching policy narrative explaining why government has set renewable energy targets to information about specific technologies. Different regions and communities have varying needs, which can be best understood by staff in those regions.

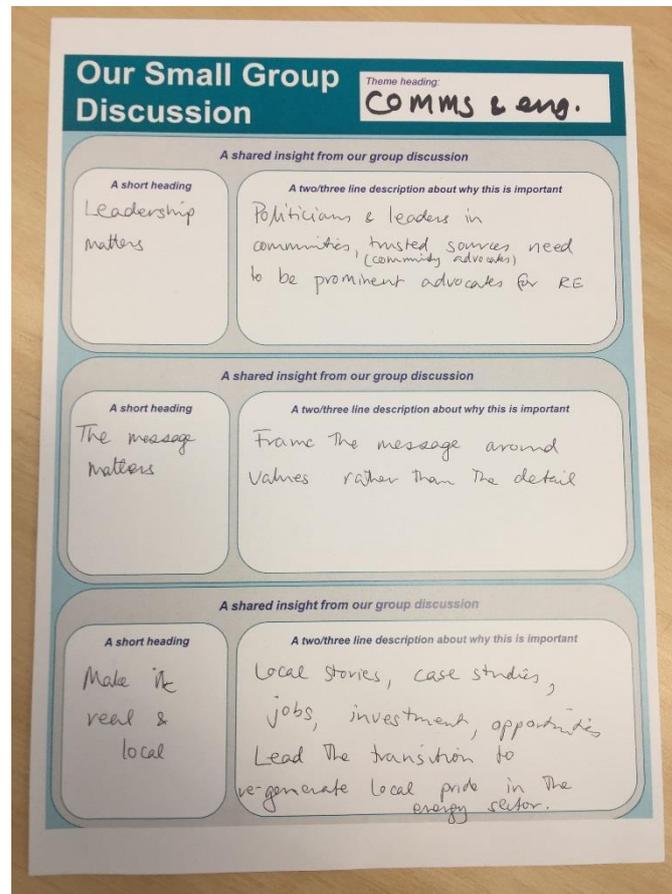
Some participants expressed a strong enthusiasm and impatience for renewable energy projects in their region. Others were wary because of past experiences.

Areas with a concentration of developments within close proximity present particular challenges. Additional guidance on how to take account of cumulative impacts in the planning process may be useful.

### Clear and consistent state-wide communications messages

Stakeholders suggested developing of communications materials that articulate the vision for renewable energy across Victoria. Stakeholders believe that information is needed to help the community understand what Victoria’s energy future may look like, including how it will change the regional landscape, and potentially benefit local communities.

Figure 2: Stakeholder workings on communications and engagement



### Government policy and leadership

Stakeholders in the workshops and interviews discussed the need for a strong state policy framework for renewable energy to help achieve Victoria's renewable energy targets (VRET). Bipartisan support for renewable energy would provide investment certainty for industry.

### Strengthening regional coordination and local government decision making

Participants recommended a range of initiatives to build capacity, networks, expertise and coordination at a local level. These initiatives would provide a more coordinated approach across government and facilitate sharing of knowledge and learnings between key stakeholders within and between regions.

### Best practice standards for industry and government community engagement

Stakeholders reported that standards of community engagement practice across the renewable energy industry are varied. Poor community engagement and complaints handling practices have led to outrage, local opposition and negative media coverage. One example of poor practice can affect the whole industry.

Stakeholders also called for a guiding document to inform community engagement over the life of a project. VRET offers an opportunity for government to work collaboratively with local councils, developers and community groups to facilitate Victoria's transition to a new energy system. Setting and abiding by good practice standards may go some way to building trust and confidence in the industry.

### Enabling community action in support of renewables

Stakeholders noted that in the past some communities haven't been able to see the direct local benefit from renewable energy in their region. There have also been concerns that communities have had little control or influence over local projects. Some communities may have a strong enthusiasm for supporting renewable energy but lack access to knowledge, funding or networks to progress a community led project.

### **Building energy literacy amongst the Victorian community**

A lack of community understanding about energy in general, and renewable energy in particular, has been a barrier to social acceptance in the past. Communities have received conflicting information from groups with different agendas, which has bred mistrust. Stakeholders recommended developing an energy education program, with a focus on the whole energy system, including the role of renewables.

This key area of action is closely linked to the call for clear and consistent state-wide communication messages.

### **Equitable benefit sharing amongst the community**

Stakeholders suggested the need for benefit sharing guidance materials that outline general principles, potential mechanisms, and case studies that include considerations for host landowners, neighbouring landowners and the broader community.

### **Clarity around responsible authorities and improvements to planning guidance**

Stakeholders were of the view that Victoria has a complex system of requirements for planning approval. These stakeholders reported that in the past they had found the processes confusing, lengthy and difficult to navigate.

Workshop participants were also concerned that cumulative impacts of multiple renewable energy developments in an area be taken into account and inform future decision making. Some stakeholders also expressed the desire to have the Minister for Planning as the sole designated responsible authority for planning applications and for the Environment Protection Authority to take a stronger role in noise compliance.

## **What happens now?**

### **The following existing policies and initiatives respond to concerns raised by stakeholders:**

*Guide to Community-Owned Renewable Energy for Victorians*

<https://www.energy.vic.gov.au/renewable-energy/community-energy>

The New Energy Jobs Fund is a \$20 million grants program has provided grants to support 33 community projects.

Three community-owned and operated Community Power Hubs in Bendigo, Ballarat and the Latrobe Valley will support the development of renewable energy projects by providing legal and technical expertise, as well as start-up funding.

Community engagement officers have been recruited to specifically focus on engaging with local government and communities to support the delivery of the government's renewable energy targets

### **Since the workshops were held in September – October 2017**

In November 2017, DELWP released *Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing in Renewable Energy Development; A Guide for Renewable Energy Developers* (the Guide). This Guide set high expectations for the standard of community engagement and benefit sharing for projects funded through the Victorian Renewable Energy Auction (VREA). Community engagement and benefit sharing were both an eligibility and evaluation criteria for projects bidding into the VREA.

The Guide is available on the DELWP website, has been distributed to a range of stakeholders, and can be used as a resource by industry, local government and communities.

[https://www.energy.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0027/91377/Community-Engagement-and-Benefit-Sharing-in-Renewable-Energy-Development.pdf](https://www.energy.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0027/91377/Community-Engagement-and-Benefit-Sharing-in-Renewable-Energy-Development.pdf)

Regional DELWP staff are supporting local government in identifying opportunities and challenges for renewable energy in their region through forums held in Ararat (October 2017), Hume (June 2018).

DELWP regional staff are implementing process improvements to streamline the way that DELWP provides environmental advice on planning permit applications.

### **Currently in progress**

A state-wide strategy for engagement on renewable energy will be finalised by the end of August 2018 and will provide an overarching, consistent approach to engagement. Regional engagement plans will tailor the state-wide strategy to the circumstances of each region. Communication materials including fact sheets and frequently asked questions will also be developed to support engagement efforts across regional Victoria. Materials will be progressively delivered over 12 months to June 2019.

DELWP regional staff will be a key source of knowledge community can draw on. Fact sheets, case studies etc will be developed where needs are identified and will support regional engagement activities. A capacity building forum for DELWP regional staff is proposed for August 2018.

DELWP is preparing planning guidance to support future development of the solar industry that strikes a sensible balance between agriculture and renewable energy generation. A draft will be available for public comment by September 2018.

DELWP is considering improvements to the regulation and compliance of wind farm noise.

The *Policy and Planning Guidelines for the Development of Wind Energy Facilities in Victoria* will be updated by July 2018 to include references to the Guide. Planning guidance on power lines for energy facilities is also under development.

DELWP will continue work with the renewable energy industry to support industry leadership in raising the standard of community engagement and benefit sharing (ongoing).