

Pyrenees Shire Council

Doing Renewable Energy Development Well in Our Shire

Background

Pyrenees Shire Council is committed to ensuring the long-term vitality and prosperity of our shire. Australia's shift to renewable energy requires new generation, storage and transmission infrastructure to succeed and Pyrenees Shire is increasingly being asked to be a host to this new infrastructure. The Pyrenees Shire Council and community expect to be active participants in the design of new energy projects, have agency over how benefits are shared locally and be ready to take up jobs and business opportunities in the delivery.

The shire's strategic location and abundance of wind and solar resources has led to a number of projects being proposed and constructed in recent years. Currently in the Pyrenees Shire there are multiple projects that are both proposed and operational.

Technology	Proposed projects	Operational projects
Wind	Nyaninyuk Wind Farm Brewster Wind Farm	Stockyard Hill Wind Farm Waubra Wind farm Chepstowe Crowlands Ararat wind farm terminal station
Solar		
Storage	Waubra battery storage as part of VNI West	
Transmission	Western Renewables Link VNI West	

The scale and pace of change that is occurring in our shire has prompted Council to prepare this position statement to clearly articulate the Pyrenees community's expectations of how to develop new energy infrastructure well in our shire. If the energy shift in the Pyrenees Shire is left to roll out in an uncoordinated manner without excellent participation from our community in its design, we risk further escalating community division and distress as well as missing out on opportunities that have the potential to create legacy benefits for generations to come. This

position statement seeks to help address this risk by proactively advocating for renewables to be done well and by demonstrating what that looks like in our shire through clear expectations and recommendations.

The foundations of this position statement come from an extensive community engagement program delivery in 2021 with the Pyrenees community which has been built upon and tailored for the renewable energy context.

Pyrenees Community Vision

In 2021 Pyrenees Shire Council and the community worked together to create a Community Vision for 2031.

*“Our Vision is for inclusive, **happy** and **healthy connected** communities that create sustainable and **welcoming** townships, natural environments and rural areas.”*

The process of developing the community vision started with a postcard questionnaire that was mailed out to all households in the Pyrenees Shire. The postcard asked residents three questions:

- What are your hopes for the Pyrenees Shire for 2031?
- What do you love about your community?
- What would you change about your community?

Responses were received from 129 people in a number of age brackets and from places right across the shire. Some of their responses are shown throughout this position statement.

A Community Panel of 25 community representatives was formed through an expression of interest process. The Community Panel’s task was to develop a community vision, to describe what the Pyrenees region will be like as a place to live, play, work and visit in the future. A wide range of economic, social, demographic and environmental information was presented to the group to inform thinking. The Panel worked together to write the Community Vision starting from a blank page.

About this position statement

Pyrenees Shire Council used the community vision to develop a draft framework for this position statement along with a literature review of other local government leadership in strategic renewable energy planning.

The views expressed within this position statement are a true reflection of both the Pyrenees community and the Pyrenees Shire Council.

This position statement is intended for those who have influence over the design and implementation of new energy projects in our shire. These include:

1. Developers of renewable energy generation, storage and transmission projects
2. Engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) providers
3. Owners and operators of renewable energy generation and storage projects
4. State and Federal agencies responsible for Renewable Energy Zone delivery and project approvals

This position statement is also intended to be a strong and clear advocacy tool for the people of our shire including:

1. Councillors
2. Council staff
3. The Pyrenees community
4. Local businesses
5. Local training organisations

Guiding Principle

Pyrenees Shire Council is committed to ensuring the responsible development of renewable energy infrastructure in our community. We expect the renewables industry to engage proactively with Council and our community, prioritise sustainability, and collaborate on benefit sharing to ensure lasting positive impacts. Pyrenees Shire Council will actively participate in this process to contribute to a resilient, prosperous, and inclusive future for our region.

Engagement and Visibility

Open and respectful relationships need to be formed through excellent community engagement for the Pyrenees Shire to build trust in the renewable energy transition. A coordinated and adequately resourced approach to engagement is needed to support participation, reduce engagement fatigue and ensure that information is reaching all sectors of our community in an accessible way. Engagement strategies of developers and government agencies should be designed to start early, value residents and stakeholder's time, and be from the 'involve, collaborate or empower' categories of the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation¹. Additionally, for Council to facilitate effective community involvement in engagement activities, it is imperative that adequate resources from the State Government are allocated to Council to support this process. (See recommendations at end of this position statement).

¹ See for example: [https://iap2canada.ca/Resources/Documents/0702-Foundations-Spectrum-MW-rev2%20\(1\).pdf](https://iap2canada.ca/Resources/Documents/0702-Foundations-Spectrum-MW-rev2%20(1).pdf)

Great community engagement in our shire involves using multiple methods of reaching our residents in a variety of formats. For example, drop-in sessions, market stalls, print and online advertising, public forums and focused group sessions. The Pyrenees Shire boasts a vibrant array of community groups which are an excellent way to disseminate information to our residents (see appendix A for a list of some local groups). To be effective and allow for a greater level of participation, it is recommended that wherever possible a minimum of 14 days notice is given to the community prior to an engagement event.

People

The Pyrenees community has a strong vision for our future that is supported through partnerships and collaborations between government, business and community groups. Connected and sustainable towns require a suite of modern social infrastructure to flourish. The benefits that can come to a community from hosting renewable energy infrastructure have the potential to create lasting positive change in our region, if done thoughtfully and with close input from local stakeholders. This will require open mindedness to break out of business-as-usual community consultation patterns and embrace more inclusive and involved methods of participation and community benefit sharing design.

Community benefit sharing from energy projects has developed rapidly in the past 10 years in Australia. Benefit sharing programs which demonstrate the most meaningful long term outcomes have great community engagement and governance at their core. Our community is committed to finding new and tailored benefit sharing strategies that create legacy outcomes which achieve our vision for 2029 and beyond. We welcome industry and government agencies to join our local stakeholders in finding ways to do this together.

For people to flourish in our region the following key social themes need to be addressed:

- Community facilities
- Community services
- Health
- Culture
- Diversity
- Intergenerational connectivity
- Local governance

Coordination and local governance of community benefit sharing funds

Community benefit sharing (CBS) involves sharing the rewards of renewable energy developments with the communities that host them. It aims to integrate a project into the local community by contributing to the future vitality and success of the region. It is based on a desire to establish and maintain positive long-term connections to the area and to be a good

neighbour². Great benefit sharing programs are grounded in the understanding that the sun, wind and water are common resources and the proceeds of monetising these resources should be shared with communities that host them³.

The rise of multiple projects in common geographic areas has highlighted the need for thoughtful coordination of benefit sharing, noting that any attempts to pool community benefit funds should not be to the detriment of the immediate host neighbourhood of a project.

To be effective, coordinated benefit sharing needs to consider three levels of community:

- **Immediate neighbourhood** - neighbours to a project usually within 2-5 km of new energy infrastructure
- **Local community** - the nearest villages and towns surrounding a project. (The location of the project and remoteness of settlements will determine how this is defined).
- **Regional community** - the Pyrenees Shire as a whole or potentially multiple shires depending on the project. The regional benefit community may also be serviced by contributions from the Victorian Government's Renewable Energy Zone Community Benefits Plan.

Building /Planning /Residential Growth

The construction of new energy infrastructure will bring with it an influx of workers which will need accommodation and built services. Where and how this accommodation is planned will influence whether this negatively impacts our local housing and tourist accommodation, or sustainably enhances it for the longer-term.

We have a vision for sustainable growth in our region that is designed for universal connectivity of our people. We embrace innovation, growth and access to technology but want to protect the 'country charm' of our region as it is central to both our identity and our tourism economy.

Investment in housing and accommodation, stimulated by new energy projects, presents an opportunity to build a stable population base and promote growth, especially when planning includes a legacy aspect. Innovative responses and solutions to housing challenges can yield significant co-benefits for multiple parties when developed collaboratively with our shire's stakeholders. However, this process requires early intervention and time investment. Proactive planning for worker accommodation could also spur investment opportunities that contribute to

² T Lane & J Hicks (2019) A Guide to Benefit Sharing Options for Renewable Energy Projects Clean Energy Council, p. 3

³ Hicks, J & Mallee, K (2023) Regional Benefit Sharing - Creating strategic impacts for regions that host multiple renewable energy projects, Community Power Agency, Sydney

longer-term growth and address housing shortages across regional Victoria and the state as a whole⁴.

In addition to investment in housing, strengthening the resilience of our agricultural sector is highly important to the Pyrenees Shire. We encourage opportunities from the renewables industry to find ways to enhance agricultural enterprises through agrivoltaics, electrification of farm processes or other innovative solutions. We expect each new energy project to play its part in enhancing our local agricultural sector and production.

In striving for sustainable growth, Pyrenees Shire aims to maintain its country charm while embracing innovation and technological access. This includes ensuring sustainable education facilities are available to support the region's growth while preserving its identity. Additionally, careful consideration of cumulative impacts from multiple projects will be essential to mitigate any adverse effects on local housing, tourism, and infrastructure.

Environment

Protecting and enhancing our shire's biodiversity assets and natural resources is of significant importance to Pyrenees Shire Council and our communities. The shift to renewable energy needs to be done sensitively and in close collaboration with local environmental experts in order to find ways to not only protect but regenerate and improve our natural environment (see appendix B for a list of environmental groups and consultants in our shire). As outlined in the Building Better Biodiversity on Solar Farms Guide⁵ there are many ways that new energy projects can, through thoughtful design, create positive biodiversity outcomes. For example:

- Wildlife corridors
- Native animal friendly fencing
- Riparian restoration and water flow management

The change in land use that can occur through hosting new energy infrastructure represents an opportunity to enhance biodiversity outcomes and interconnectivity as well as connection to, and protection of, culturally significant indigenous sites.

Additionally, the increased demand for localised natural resources to construct new energy infrastructure (e.g.: water, sand and gravel) needs to be carefully planned to ensure that our shire's needs can be met now and long into the future.

⁴ H McElnea & A Mudford (2023) Short-term worker accommodation with long-term community benefits: Housing the New England Renewable Energy Zone, Community Power Agency & Orange Compass

⁵ D Carr & H McElnea (2024) Building Better Biodiversity on Solar Farms Guide

Encouraging Economic Development

Development of the Western Victoria Renewable Energy Zone, Western Renewables Link and VNI West transmission line, along with multiple new energy projects will simultaneously create pressure on community infrastructure (e.g.: water, sewer, roads, recreation facilities) whilst also providing opportunities to invest in renewal. Pyrenees Shire Council is aware of the 'boom and bust' nature of other industries in regional communities and is motivated to capitalise on the investment opportunity that presents itself to the shire in a sustainable way that can create lasting legacy outcomes for generations to come. It is crucial that renewable energy projects do not adversely impact existing services or place undue pressure on already stretched resources within our community. Pyrenees Shire Council expects a pro-active approach by energy developers to address the necessary service increases required by a short-term increase in population such as healthcare, accommodation, and transport.

The Pyrenees Shire expects to have a local economy that is more skilled, diverse and stronger from having been host to new energy development projects. Our people and businesses need to be involved early in the development process to understand what contract and job opportunities exist and the types of preparations that need to be made to capitalise on these opportunities.

Our Expectations of the Energy Shift

In summary, the Pyrenees Shire Council and community expect new energy development to be done well and prioritise the following:

Engagement and Visibility

- **Open and Respectful Engagement:** Prioritising open, respectful communication to build trust in the renewable energy transition.
- **Community Participation:** Encouraging active participation from residents by employing diverse engagement methods and providing adequate notice for engagement events.
- **Resource Allocation:** Resourcing from the State Government to support coordination of community engagement activities and ensure information reaches all sectors of the community.

People

- **Partnerships:** Fostering inclusive partnerships among government, businesses, training organisations and community groups to shape a future that prioritises inclusivity and connection.
- **Community-driven Vision:** Advocating for community benefit sharing programs grounded in active engagement and governance to ensure meaningful, long-lasting outcomes that reflect community needs.

- **Regional Benefit Sharing:** Highlighting the importance of coordinated benefit sharing programs across immediate neighbourhoods, local communities, and the broader region to maximise positive impacts and foster resilience.

Building /Planning /Residential Growth

- **Sustainable Growth:** Striving for sustainable growth while preserving the region's country charm and identity through innovative responses and solutions.
- **Investment in Housing:** Promoting investment in housing and accommodation to build a stable population base and address housing shortages.
- **Agricultural Enhancement:** Encouraging the enhancement of agricultural enterprises through innovative solutions such as agrivoltaics and electrification.

Environment

- **Biodiversity Protection:** Prioritising the protection and enhancement of biodiversity assets and natural resources through sensitive development and collaboration with local environmental experts.
- **Positive Biodiversity Outcomes:** Recognising the potential for new energy projects to enhance biodiversity outcomes through thoughtful design, such as wildlife corridors and riparian restoration.
- **Sustainable Resource Planning:** Carefully planning the increased demand for localised natural resources to ensure the shire's needs can be met now and in the future.

Encouraging Economic Development

- **Infrastructure Investment:** Recognising the need for modern facilities and infrastructure to meet the community's needs.
- **Strategic Collaboration:** Coordinating with the energy sector and government to align development projects with long-term shire goals for healthy communities.
- **Skilled Local Economy:** Involving local businesses and training organisations early in the development process to understand opportunities and prepare for local procurement and business development.

Recommendations to State and Federal Government

To effectively meet the expectations of the Pyrenees Shire Council and community, it is imperative for the Victorian State and Federal Government to take proactive steps and lead the way in facilitating robust coordination, engagement, and sustainable development practices within the renewable energy sector in Central Victoria. Below are recommendations for how this could be done:

1. Fund Council to keep an up-to-date map on our website of the proposed, operating and under construction energy projects with links to engagement opportunities and key

contact information. (See [Moyne Shire Council](#) as an example).

2. Establish a community centred local governance framework for benefit sharing, through a collaborative effort between the Pyrenees Shire Council, community representatives, and relevant stakeholders.
3. Resource Council to coordinate engagement activities and information locally and ensure that the community is accessing and participating in REZ roll out and energy projects sustainably.

Other optional inclusions:

- Decommissioning levy
- Air safety, firefighting and aerial spraying for agriculture
- Biodiversity offsets
- Additional recommendations as determined by Council

References

Armidale, Glen Innes Severn, Inverell, Uralla and Walcha Councils. (2022, June). Statement of expectations from New England Renewable Energy Zone Councils.

Hay Shire Council. (2024, February). Fundamental Principles for Successful Renewable Energy Development in the Hay LGA. Retrieved from www.hay.nsw.gov.au

Moyne Shire Council. (2022, September 6). Moyne Shire Council Wind Farm Position. Retrieved from www.engage.moyne.vic.gov.au

Wellington Shire Council. (2023, June 6). Position Statement – Renewable Energy. Retrieved from www.wellington.vic.gov.au/development/renewable-energy-planning

Appendices

1. List of community groups/stakeholders relevant for community engagement

Amphitheatre Progress Association
Avoca Shire Turf Club
Back Raglan Road Action Group
Beaufort Progress Assoc Inc
Business for Beaufort (B4B)
Carranballac Recreation Reserve and Carranballac Progress Association Inc
Landsborough Progress Association
Mt Cole - Pyrenees Nature Group
Pyrenees Grape Growers & Wine Makers
Pyrenees Victorian Farmers Federation
Skipton Progress Association
Snake Valley Progress Network
Snake Valley Youth Crew
Waterloo Community Group
Waubra and District Horticultural Society

Pyrenees Shire currently has approximately 240 local community groups on its contact register.

Other community groups such as sporting clubs, rural fire brigades, local Apex and Rotary groups, and business associations may also be identified relevant stakeholders.

2. List of environmental groups and consultants in the Pyrenees Shire

Central Victoria Biolinks Alliance
Upper Mount Emu Landcare Network
Upper Loddon and Avoca Landcare Network
Amphitheatre Landcare
Avoca & District Landcare
Landsborough Landcare Group
Lexton Landcare Group
Natte Yallock Landcare Group
Snake Valley Landcare Group

Highlands Landcare Foundation
Ballarat Environment Network
Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat
Birdlife Ballarat
Project Platypus
Wimmera CMA
Glenelg Hopkins CMA
Local ecologists