



# ENHANCING POSITIVE SOCIAL OUTCOMES FROM WIND FARM DEVELOPMENT

## Evaluating community engagement and benefit-sharing in Australia

### KEY FACTORS IN UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE AND ATTITUDES TO WIND DEVELOPMENT

> **SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE IS CRUCIAL TO SUCCESSFUL DEVELOPMENT AND OPERATION OF WIND FARMS.**

> **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MUST BE TAILORED TO A COMMUNITY'S UNIQUE NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS.**

> **SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE IS BUILT ON FACE-TO-FACE ENGAGEMENT CARRIED OUT BY SUITABLY EXPERIENCED AND/OR QUALIFIED PRACTITIONERS ABLE TO BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH LOCAL PEOPLE.**

> **SHARING THE BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY INCREASES SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE.**

Effective community engagement and benefit sharing practices increase social acceptance of wind developments, creating a win-win for developers and the local community. Drawn from the research report Enhancing Positive Social Outcomes from Wind Farm Development, this briefing paper summarises key factors found to influence the effectiveness of community-developer relationships.

#### **SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE IS CRUCIAL TO THE SUCCESSFUL DEVELOPMENT AND OPERATION OF WIND FARMS**

The expansion of renewable energy and the ongoing viability of the wind industry in Australia will require strong social support. Positive relations with nearby communities can reduce overall project costs and enhance benefits to the local community.

#### **MANY FACTORS INFLUENCE PEOPLE'S RESPONSES TO WIND FARMS**

Research reveals that many factors influence people's responses to, and relationships with, a wind farm development in their local area (see Table 1). Thus, community engagement and benefit-sharing must be tailored to a community's unique needs and expectations, and be built on face-to-face engagement carried out by suitably experienced and/or qualified practitioners able to build strong relationships with local people. It is important that local people see that the development is contributing to the local area and that this is proportionate with the level of change and disturbance the development creates. Community participation in decision-making processes can also increase support for nearby wind developments.

**Table 1:** Factors contributing to positive social outcomes from wind development

FACTOR
Community engagement is carried out by suitably qualified/experienced staff, starts early, is sustained over time and is participatory.
Community engagement and benefit-sharing are tailored to local context.
Emphasis is placed on building trust and long-term relationships.
The presence of advocates from within the community.
Local community members are (co)owners (implies that community has both investment and a role in decision-making) or co-investors (implies investment opportunities, but not necessarily a decision-making role) in the wind farm.
There are opportunities for group-based input and discussion including community participation in some decisions around wind farm and/or turbines siting.
Benefit-sharing (of various types) within local neighbourhood and local community (beyond turbine hosts).

# KEY FACTORS IN UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE AND ATTITUDES TO WIND

## **UNDERSTANDING THE REASONS BEHIND PEOPLE'S CONCERNS IS IMPORTANT**

A common explanation for opposition is NIMBYism (not in my back yard). But rather than defaulting to NIMBYism, it is important to understand why local people express more concern once a specific development is announced. People's perceptions of the equity and fairness of both the development process and its outcomes play an integral role in informing the people's conditional support.

## **CHALLENGING POLITICAL CONTEXTS MEAN INCREASED COMMUNITY SUPPORT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER**

In Australia, given the unstable policy environment for renewable energy, there is a need to build stronger and more active support for wind farms. In responding to opposition, the research recommends the value of normalising a degree of opposition (rather than attempting to neutralise it completely) in order to encourage respectful debate and deliberation.

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

To read the full report visit [cleanenergycouncil.org.au/windreport](https://cleanenergycouncil.org.au/windreport)

