



ENHANCING POSITIVE SOCIAL OUTCOMES FROM WIND FARM DEVELOPMENT

Evaluating community engagement and benefit-sharing in Australia

GUIDANCE FOR DEVELOPERS: IMPROVING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES

> **PRIORITISING FACE-TO-FACE ENGAGEMENT AND BUILDING LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS IS KEY.**

Effective community engagement practices have been found to increase societal acceptance of wind developments, creating a win-win for the developer and the local community. This briefing paper outlines how community engagement practices can be improved, drawing on the key findings from the research report *Enhancing Positive Social Outcomes from Wind Farm Development*.

> **UNDERSTANDING LOCAL CONTEXT AND BEING FLEXIBLE IS FUNDAMENTAL.**

PRIORITISE FACE-TO-FACE ENGAGEMENT AND BUILD LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS

Good community engagement builds relationships, increases people's understanding of the project and technology, manages expectations (e.g. the nature and timing of the project, the scope for community input) and facilitates feedback. Engagement that starts early, occurs often and emphasises face-to-face engagement is likely to yield the best outcomes.

> **GOOD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS OF VALUE TO DEVELOPERS AND COMMUNITIES.**

RESOURCE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ADEQUATELY

There is a strong link between effective engagement and positive outcomes for both developers and communities – that is, a happy community and a developer able to proceed with a project without excessive delays and cost overruns. This research identified the importance of having appropriately qualified staff, but also found a surprising lack of community-engagement training among community-engagement staff, indicating this is an area for improvement.

UNDERSTAND LOCAL CONTEXT AND BE FLEXIBLE

Community engagement approaches must be tailored to a community's needs and expectations. While having company processes, policies and plans is important, having experienced staff and flexibility in the approach is key to good outcomes. Understanding the local context well (e.g. history, demographics, land use, economy, culture, geography) and having a range of possible engagement options will assist in tailoring the approach.

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THERE IS CURRENTLY A RELIANCE ON ONE-WAY AND ONE-ON-ONE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

At present, there is a dominant reliance on one-on-one engagement and one-way information flows (e.g. newsletters) as the principal forms of community engagement. Much less used are opportunities for two-way dialogue (e.g. conversations, workshops, neighbourhood meeting) in public or group settings, and feedback mechanisms (e.g. workshops, polling or voting). Educational and experiential opportunities are also rarely used (e.g. wind farm tours, open days, advocate training, school programs). The research identified the value of increased use of two-way dialogue, feedback mechanisms and experiential engagement as being crucial for building social acceptance.

It is particularly important for hosts and neighbours to be engaged as a group. This was seen as being different from public meetings, as it is a smaller, defined group of people with a clear logic for who should attend and how they participate (e.g. providing input on specific things).

OPEN SOME DECISIONS UP FOR COMMUNITY INPUT

There remains scope for improving the approaches taken to better enable community input into decisions about the design of the wind farm, the community engagement approach and the benefit-sharing plans. This would involve identifying certain decisions that are open to community feedback, or even delegating certain decisions to the community.

THE TIMING AND REGULARITY OF ENGAGEMENT IS CRUCIAL

Many developers seek to start engagement 'early', but there is wide variation on what this means in practice (i.e. what activities are undertaken, who is involved and when they start). For example, it was unclear whether early engagement involved more than speaking with potential hosts during the site selection phase. Engagement during periods of project hiatus is generally very low, which can compound local people's fear of the unknown. Therefore, sustained engagement is encouraged, rather than just during the site selection and planning approval phases as is the most common practice.

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

