



# ENHANCING POSITIVE SOCIAL OUTCOMES FROM WIND FARM DEVELOPMENT

## Evaluating community engagement and benefit-sharing in Australia

### GUIDANCE FOR STATE AND FEDERAL AGENCIES: ENCOURAGING POSITIVE SOCIAL OUTCOMES FROM WIND DEVELOPMENT

- > **THERE ARE MIXED ATTITUDES TOWARDS WHAT POLICIES WORK BEST TO INCENTIVISE BETTER PRACTICE.**
- > **POLICIES NEED TO ALLOW FLEXIBILITY TO TAILOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND BENEFIT-SHARING TO LOCAL CONTEXT.**
- > **INCENTIVES, PROMOTING POSITIVE PRACTICE AND TRAINING WERE IDENTIFIED AS EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES.**

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 the key findings relating to the role of policy and regulation in influencing the effectiveness of community engagement and benefit-sharing activities.

#### **POLICY AND REGULATORY CHALLENGES**

The changeable policy and market environment for renewable energy and wind energy has caused significant uncertainty for developers and delays for projects. In some instances, it has also led to cuts to community engagement budgets and staffing.

Providing clear, neutral and consistent messaging around wind energy technology – including wording in standards, processes, policy and regulation – will help to alleviate this uncertainty.

#### **MIXED PERSPECTIVES ON THE ROLE OF REGULATION**

The research revealed divergent attitudes to regulation. While some saw regulation as being necessary to encourage certain engagement or benefit-sharing practices, others felt that regulation could stifle the ability for developers to tailor approaches to local contexts.

An overarching finding from the research was that community engagement and benefit-sharing approaches should be tailored to a community's needs and expectations, and be built on face-to-face engagement carried out by suitably experienced and/or qualified practitioners. This responsiveness was found to be more important than using any particular methods. As such, there is no single 'silver-bullet' approach that is guaranteed to consistently create positive social outcomes. Rather, better practice requires moving away from one-size-fits-all approaches and considering each community as its own context with its own challenges and opportunities.

#### **POLICY REQUIREMENTS FOR CERTAIN PRACTICES OF ENGAGEMENT OR BENEFIT-SHARING WITHOUT ADEQUATE PROVISIONS FOR CONSIDERING LOCAL CONTEXTUAL FACTORS SHOULD BE TREATED WITH CAUTION**

The research revealed criticism of what were seen to be increasingly prescriptive guidelines for community engagement and benefit-sharing. This was explained as being inappropriate because the scope, activities and budget for effective engagement are affected by the history and process of the community engagement and wind farm development. Instead, some research participants suggested either a very flexible and contingent process for engagement, or alternative measures. For example, practice change driven by transparency (e.g. public reporting), incentives and the promotion (and associated increased expectations) of positive case studies.

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## THE USE OF INCENTIVES

The research found high levels of support for the incentives for quality engagement and good social outcomes embedded in the ACT's Renewable Energy Reverse Auction. Such incentives are seen to be changing the culture and attitudes towards community engagement and benefit-sharing in Australia.

Where local, state and federal governments are implementing renewable energy policies or power purchase agreements, include positive social contributions as assessment criteria. Such contributions could consider the local economy and industry, the future welfare of the community and the environment.

## PROMOTING POSITIVE PRACTICES

Training in community engagement and benefit-sharing was widely supported as a way to encourage better practice, as was providing support and encouragement for industry to learn from each other regarding what is working effectively and what is not. Sharing information such as guidelines, template packs, surveys, questionnaires and educational resources is fundamental.

## BUILDING LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAPACITY

At a local government level, the interview analysis and survey responses identified that local government (councils) can play an informal yet critical role in wind farm development. However, local government, who are often constrained by limited resources, are not always aware of best practice and may be timid in their dealings with wind developers, partly as a result of concerns regarding conflicts of interest. Interviewees suggested that local government could benefit from support (e.g. training, resources, advice) to help ensure they are able to negotiate best practice community engagement and reasonable local benefits from developments.

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](http://cleanenergycouncil.org.au/windreport).

