

FIRST NATIONS CLEAN ENERGY STRATEGY ROUNDTABLE – QUEENSLAND

28 & 29 AUGUST | CAIRNS



First Nations Clean Energy Strategy | QLD Roundtable

Location: Cairns, QLD

Dates: 28 and 29 August 2023

Participants: Approximately 100

What is the purpose of the Roundtables?

The First Nations Clean Energy Strategy (the Strategy) roundtables provide an opportunity for First Nations peoples and organisations to discuss what is important from their perspective and to outline the barriers and opportunities so they can meaningfully share in the benefits of the clean energy transition.

The roundtables also provide a forum for government and industry to better understand First Nations perspectives and collaborate on actions, policies, and programs that could be implemented as part of the Strategy.

Key emerging themes captured during the QLD Roundtable

1) Improve engagement with First Nations Communities by engaging earlier, obtaining consent and demonstrating a willingness to learn.

- a) First Nations representatives are calling for early and meaningful engagement on all clean energy projects, before pre-feasibility planning commences. There is a need to build trust and relationships between First Nations communities and government, industry and other stakeholders to ensure all parties are working together towards a just clean energy transition.
- b) Obtaining Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) from communities was highlighted on multiple occasions as a critical practice before any project commences.
- c) First Nations community members feel a deep connection to Country and are committed to managing and protecting their land, water, and cultural heritage, as they have done for thousands of years. They want government and industry to learn from them when being engaged to enhance the understanding the cultural and environmental impacts of clean energy projects.
- d) A key success factor for the First Nations Clean Energy Strategy will be to continuously communicate emerging insights, the draft strategy and timelines to community representatives, and to prove value early through pilot programs which benefit communities from Day 1.

2) Meaningful economic participation across the clean energy ecosystem

- a) Opportunities were identified for First Nations communities to participate in the clean energy transition on both a micro and macro level:
 - Community-owned microgrids, where tariffs could be set by communities.
 - Large-scale grid solar farms, where communities have a stake in ownership and operations. The Torres Strait Islands has come up as a key area potentially not adequately considered in the QLD REZ planning phase.

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- b) Multiple forms of economic participation were highlighted throughout the QLD roundtable, including:
- Ownership of clean energy projects
 - Employment within the clean energy sector
 - Contracting and procurement opportunities
 - Revenue-sharing arrangements
 - Income-generating training and education programs
 - Maintenance services
 - Business development support and/or advisory services
- c) Energy-adjacent opportunities should also be considered to stimulate economic activity within First Nations communities to ensure sustainability beyond installation of the infrastructure and equipment. Opportunities should be explored in the areas of home improvement towards climate resilience, telecommunications, digital businesses, energy trading and asset leasing (e.g., leasing poles to telcos or businesses) among others.

3) Key enablers to drive First Nations participation in the clean energy transition: policy, capability development and funding.

- a) Energy policy in Queensland, pertaining to the Renewable Energy Zones and state-ownership of assets, is perceived as prohibitive for First Nations communities to participate meaningfully in the clean energy transition. There is a call for clear and supportive policies that promote First Nations participation in the clean energy sector at the utility scale. These could potentially include enhanced First Nations procurement policies, project ownership policies and First Nations engagement policies.
- b) Capability and capacity building was highlighted multiple times as a key enabler, starting from early childhood development stage. This could include training programs, education initiatives and mentorship programs.
- c) Sufficient funding at various levels was identified as a key enabler for First Nations communities to execute clean energy projects end to end. This could be done through grants, loans, equity investments or other innovative funding models, with an attractive proposition that First Nations communities already own the land on which projects could be delivered, thereby effectively reducing total capital investments required.

4) The First Nations Clean Energy Strategy should drive equitable access of information and electricity.

- a) Ensure that First Nations communities have equitable access to information about clean energy projects. This includes introductions to basic electricity and renewables concepts, information about the potential impacts of projects on their land, water and cultural heritage, as well as information about the purpose of the First Nations Clean Energy Strategy and its intended outcomes.
- b) Work to ensure that First Nations communities have equitable access to electricity. Concerns with prepayment meters and associated disconnections were raised multiple times during the roundtable discussions and need to be further addressed.

5) A shift in power systems: not only 'beneficiaries' but also 'leaders'

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- a) Roundtable participants called for clarification of the benefits of clean energy among First Nations communities, including towards people placed in social housing. This will help to ensure that First Nations people buy into the clean energy transition taking place across Australia, where rebates typically benefit homeowners in metropolitan areas at present.
- b) First Nations community representatives felt strongly that the strategies, skills and desire exist within their communities to enable them to play a stronger leadership role in the clean energy transition. They don't want to be included 'after the fact', but to partner with government in the transition.
- c) Strong governance mechanisms should continue to be maintained where industry partners with government and First Nations communities in line with corporate reporting and financial disclosures requirements, as well as to ensure mutual trust between all parties.

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Appendix A: Attendee Organisations

ACCIONA

Alinga Energy

APA Group

Attexo Group

Black Pearl Holdings

Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation

Cleanco Queensland

Community Enterprise Queensland

CSIRO

Csky Global

Department of Energy and Public Works (QLD)

Department of Seniors, Disability Services and
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships
(QLD)

Dja Dja Wurrung

Ener-g Management Group

First Nations Clean Energy Network

Goodway Group

Gunggari Native Title Aboriginal Corporation

Mura Badugal Rntbc

National Indigenous Australians Agency

Original Power

Spirit Bird Creations

Thurri Energy

Torres Strait Regional Authority

Torres & Cape Solar

Unified Labour Hire Recruitment Pty Ltd