



Australian Government
Department of Climate Change, Energy,
the Environment and Water

FIRST NATIONS CLEAN ENERGY STRATEGY ROUNDTABLE – VICTORIA

27 – 28 NOVEMBER | GEELONG



Australian Government
National Indigenous
Australians Agency



First Nations Clean Energy Strategy | VIC Roundtable

Location: Geelong, VIC

Dates: 27 and 28 November 2023

Participants: 104

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 themes captured during the VIC Roundtable in Geelong:

1. **Capacity building and resourcing of First Nations organisations and communities required to enable effective participation in the energy transition**

- a) A common discussion point at the VIC Roundtable was the need for greater capacity building and resourcing of First Nations communities to effectively engage with government and industry. Roundtable participants expressed concerns about the volume of consultations they are requested to participate in, often without any perceived action taken on their feedback.
- b) VIC Roundtable participants raised various ideas to ensure their communities are adequately equipped to participate in the clean energy transition:
 - Access to basic information around clean energy concepts, such as the different types of renewable energy technologies, the benefits of clean energy, and the potential impacts of clean energy projects on communities
 - Training and scholarships towards First Nations people in clean energy fields, as well as opportunities to learn from/build upon traditional knowledge of land and sea management
 - Resourcing of Traditional Owner Corporations (TOCs), who play a critical role in representing First Nations peoples' interests in clean energy projects. However, they often lack the capacity to effectively advocate for their communities' interests
 - Access to legal expertise to support communities in negotiating fair agreements with developers and asserting their cultural rights across the lifecycle of clean energy projects
- c) Capacity building of First Nations communities will reduce consultation fatigue, enhance their ability to make informed decisions and ensure they benefit from clean energy projects, in the way they deem fit, through the principle of self-determination.



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2. Clean energy is seen as an opportunity to create inter-generational and inter-community wealth

- a) VIC Roundtable participants envision a different future for their communities – one which includes opportunities for intergenerational wealth building through ownership, shareholding, and equity stakes in clean energy projects.
- b) Participants called for a transparent and accountable clean energy transition, with greater transparency on funding flows and visibility of clean energy project opportunities on their lands.
- c) Dismissing tokenistic ‘crumb’ funding as inadequate, participants requested access to substantive funding which will assure First Nations people’s seat at the decision-making table on clean energy projects.
- d) An innovative proposal was tabled for further exploration: the establishment of a VIC Traditional Owners Renewable Energy Corporation, capacitated with renewable energy managers to navigate the clean energy landscape and ensure equitable benefits sharing on behalf of their communities.

3. Collaboration and partnerships mechanisms need to be developed to ensure equitable sharing of benefits – including non-recognised organisations

- a) First Nations communities want to be genuine partners in the development of Australia's clean energy future. This means having a real say in decision-making processes from the outset and collaboration across project lifecycles, not just being consulted after decisions have been made.
- b) Participants requested that all First Nations peoples, regardless of whether they have Native Title recognition or are part of a Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP), have the opportunity to participate in the clean energy transition. This includes ensuring that non-recognised groups also have access to resources, and that their voices are heard in decision-making processes.
- c) Various proposals were made to increase collaboration between First Nations communities, and to strengthen partnerships with government and industry:
 - Developing engagement standards which drive respectful engagement across the clean energy sector
 - Regionalising consultations to allow for tailored discussions which take communities’ specific needs and interests into account
 - Sharing lessons learnt and best practices for engagement across States and Territories
 - Centralised data sharing platforms to improve access to accessible, accurate and up-to-date information on clean energy projects and developers

4. Consultation protocols equally as important for clean energy projects on Sea Country, as on Land

- a) A large proportion of VIC Roundtable discussions focused Sea Country, and participants acknowledged the significant potential of offshore wind energy generation in the State.

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- b) Participants expressed a lack of clarity on the jurisdiction of projects impacting Sea Country, and were concerned that offshore wind project consultations to date have been too rushed and insufficient in its coverage of different communities.
- c) Government representatives clarified that offshore wind projects are typically implemented 20-30 miles off the coastline and are therefore led by the Commonwealth Government, who are also responsible for managing related consultation, procurement and project management processes.
- d) Participants reiterated that the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent extend towards projects on Sea Country as well as Land Country, and requested for engagement standards to reflect all types of clean energy.

5. Protection of nature and cultural heritage can be improved through comprehensive mapping, fit-for-purpose policy and an uplift in cultural acumen

- a) Participants at the VIC Roundtable explained that for First Nations people, nature is more than the environment—it's interwoven with their identity, setting the rhythm for life, and needs to be protected. The concept of "sovereign electrons" was introduced at the VIC Roundtable, emphasising First Nations' sense of responsibility over the lands and waters on which renewable energy is generated.
- b) Participants also emphasised the non-negotiable requirement for safeguarding First Nations lore, culture and way of life as clean energy infrastructure is built.
- c) Three key solutions were proposed to ensure nature and cultural heritage protection as Australia transitions to clean energy:
 - Comprehensive mapping of Land and Sea Country to support First Nations communities in their CBA analysis to determine where projects can be established themselves and to support cultural and environmental protection
 - Clean energy policies which recognise First Nations values and culture
- d) Cultural competency initiatives to uplift government and industry's understanding and respect for First Nations' sacred connections to the land and waters



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Organisations represented at the VIC Roundtable:

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| Agriculture Victoria | IEIA |
| Ausnet | Indigenous Business Australia |
| Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) | Indigenous Energy Australia |
| Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative | Jaramer Legal |
| Barwon Region Local Jobs | Korreen Enterprises |
| Beon Energy Solutions | Latji Latji Muthelang |
| CitiPower, Powercor and United Energy | Lifetime Renewable Energy Pty Ltd |
| Clean Energy Finance Corporation | National Indigenous Australians Agency |
| Climate Change Authority | Re-alliance |
| Cox Inall Ridgeway | Regional Development Victoria |
| Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) First Nations Clean Energy Strategy Taskforce | Resources Victoria |
| DCCEEW Offshore Renewables Branch | Solar Victoria |
| DEECA Water Resource Division | State Electricity Commission Implementation Office (VIC Gov) |
| Deloitte | Tati Tati Kaiejin |
| Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (VIC Gov) | VicGrid |
| Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (VIC Gov) | Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Corporations |
| Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (VIC Gov) | Wattle Fellowship |
| Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (VIC Gov) | Wiran Aboriginal Corporation |
| Department of Premier and Cabinet (VIC Gov) | Woolnorth Renewables |
| DTP | |
| Edl Energy | |
| Environment Victoria | |
| Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations | |
| Federation University | |
| First Nations Clean Energy and Emissions Reduction Advisory Committee | |
| First Nations Clean Energy Network | |
| Greenwood Solutions | |
| Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation | |