

A UNIFIED VOICE
FOR THE HUNTER

COMMITTEE
FOR THE
HUNTER

OFFSHORE RENEWABLE ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE AREA PROPOSAL

APRIL 25TH
2023





27 April 2023

OFFSHORE RENEWABLE ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE AREA PROPOSAL Pacific Ocean off Hunter

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this consultation process.

The Hunter is Australia's energy capital, providing essential energy to the domestic and global economy.

The Hunter is a \$65 billion economy entering transition as the world shifts to net-zero and renewable energy. With the world's largest coal export port and home to the largest emitters and energy users in the nation, Hunter businesses and communities are affected more than most. We also have the most to gain from the opportunities offered by the emerging clean economy.

It is in this context that the Committee for the Hunter strongly supports the proposal to create an offshore renewable energy infrastructure area in the Pacific Ocean off Hunter.

The Committee, our members and partners are aligning on a vision for the Hunter's transformation

A future where the level of jobs, Gross Regional Product and energy currently provided by coal industries are maintained, if not exceeded by new business and enterprise, as our economy changes. We know that zero emissions must be built into our development trajectory to remain competitive and safe.

A large, thriving offshore renewable energy industry and associated value chains offers an at scale opportunity to replace jobs, economic activity, energy generation and reduce emissions as the contribution of coal to the regional economy declines.

The Committee supports our partner HunterNet's recommendation for an Offshore Wind Industry Cluster, to grow local business capacity to participate in value chains and attract investment and jobs.

The Hunter's heavy emitting and energy intensive industries are key assets for growth in the clean economy and need support

Capabilities include aluminium, ammonia and chemicals, metal fabrication and advanced manufacturing including clean energy industries. Businesses are already experiencing pressures from high energy prices, supply chain issues and workforce shortages. Renewable electricity options are challenging for these businesses given their large and consistent energy demand profile.

Offshore wind energy offers solutions into the network at scale, including for hydrogen generation, to provide clean, secure and reliable energy for these operations and reduce costs over time.

It is critical to sustain these industries in the region and support them to transform to net zero, building competitive advantage in clean manufacturing and the future benefits this will bring to the Hunter. We continue to advocate support to reduce risk for the capital investments necessary to transition these businesses, including facilitating cheap, reliable renewable energy.

The development of the Hunter Hydrogen Hub will require additional energy above current generation capacity, and it must be green to be competitive

Consultations on the Hunter Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone highlight a looming challenge to provide enough clean energy to power the current economy and population, let alone growth.

Hydrogen has been identified as an engine of growth where the Hunter has competitive advantage. This will be eroded unless clean energy generation capacity increases to accommodate this emerging industry and the unique opportunities it brings to decarbonise hard to abate sectors like heavy industry and transport.

Offshore wind energy proximate to users, as proposed in the Pacific Ocean off Hunter, will be a critical part of the solution noting that land for renewables in the region is constrained and expensive.

Work constructively with local communities to address issues around visual amenity and other impacts to reduce barriers to offshore wind and clean energy infrastructure

The impacts of offshore renewable energy development on Hunter communities should not be viewed in isolation of other energy infrastructure projects. These include the Hunter Transmission Project, Hunter Central Coast Renewable Energy Zone proposals, the Hunter Gas Pipeline, Kurri Kurri gas peaking plant and pipeline proposals for hydrogen.

While the community at large understand the need for renewable energy, the cumulative impact of proposals on their place stands to be significant and will drive trade-offs and divisions between fragile alliances.

A joined-up approach, rather than project by project, will be important in managing cumulative impacts and fostering community support for vital renewable energy infrastructure in the Hunter.

The footprint of the proposed area should be amended

This includes pushing the north-west tip further into the ocean beyond the proposed 10km setback to avoid visual amenity impacts and disruption of tourism activities at Port Stephens and the Barrington Coast. The subsequent loss of area could be compensated by extending the proposed area to the South, which also opens up more seabed at shallower depths closer to landside transmission links helping reduce development costs.

We encourage a long-term view to the size and capacity of the proposed area to enable future growth for offshore renewable energy and provide certainty on where development will be, and where it won't.



The offshore energy area must be planned and operated to enable rather than impede the future growth of defence and international gateways

These include the Williamstown RAAF, the Port of Newcastle and Newcastle Airport. We note the importance of the Port of Newcastle in the delivery and maintenance of offshore energy infrastructure. We encourage deep engagement with landowners, authorities and stakeholders to understand and address issues over the consultation period so that all these functions so important to the region can co-locate.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alice Thompson'.

Alice Thompson
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About the Committee for the Hunter

The Committee for the Hunter (the Committee) is an independent and inclusive champion for the people of the Greater Hunter and their enterprises. Representing over 65 organisations including some of the largest employers and institutions in the region, we provide a unified voice for the Hunter. Our members are drawn from the private and community sectors and all three levels of government. We come together with a shared interest in building a sustainable, prosperous and equitable future for our region. The Committee delivers on that promise through advocacy on regionally-significant priorities, thought leadership and partnerships.

The diversification of the Hunter economy is the most significant priority of the Committee and our members.

More information about the Committee can be found at www.hunter.org.au