



**Australian Government**

**Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner**

**Supplementary Budget Estimates (Monday 1 December 2025)**

**Environment and Communications Legislation Committee**

**Opening Statement – Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner**

Good afternoon, Senators. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee. I'd like to make a brief opening statement which I have provided to the Committee.

I have been in the role of Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner for almost 12 months to the day.

It has been an interesting period and I have learnt a lot about both (a) what is going on in the community in relation to the deployment of energy infrastructure and (b) about the energy sector itself.

My assessment after 1 year is that's they are both complex and challenging.

I have participated in well over 300 engagements so far this year. On average - that's about 3 per day. A lot have been on the ground with effected communities in the regions where the energy infrastructure is being either considered or built – it's been with individuals, with community groups, with councils. I have also met a lot of energy industry stakeholders and state government representatives.

The AEIC takes complaints and enquiries from community related to large scale renewable energy proposals and new transmission infrastructure.

As at 30 November, 197 new cases have been opened this year. By comparison, the office logged 155 cases for the whole of 2024.

Wind installations remain the highest cause of complaints, but solar, transmission and batteries have also generated a higher number of cases this year.

The nature and complexity of cases remains varied, with some taking a very short time to resolve and others taking weeks or months to work through.



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The AEIC office has made 9 submissions to public consultations this year to date, ensuring the voice of community is amplified in these processes and best practices are promoted in relation to planning, safety, productivity and community benefits.

I have attended industry and regional conferences to both listen and learn but also to deliver clear messages to the energy industry and to governments of all persuasions that things need to improve

I have published a Position Statement on Decommissioning and am about to publish a position paper on public liability insurance – the rationale here is to be a trusted source of information to address some of the dis/mis information and associated confusion around some issues.

My view is we need to improve clarity and accountability on issues that I have seen and heard are of concern to the community.

My agenda and intentions are clear and that is to do what I can within my remit to improve the situation in terms of the energy transition for regional communities.

Because this energy transition is large, it's long term, it's challenging. It's a disruption, a change and change of this magnitude is never going to be easy.

Unfortunately there are no simple answers with this challenge. While I'm far from being an energy industry expert – my view after having hundreds of conversations and seeing both the impact and the complexity of the task, is that if anyone tells you there are simple solutions to this challenge then they don't understand the task.

So as part of the energy transition I've seen some good constructive partnerships where communities have benefitted from things like water treatment plants, improved healthcare facilities and local sourcing that has benefitted local businesses and communities.

Encouragingly I see more recognition and inclination from the energy sector and state governments to do more – and so they should.

My view is we should continue to strive to put the right infrastructure in the right place.

We should recognise communities that have already done heavy lifting like places in South West Victoria, parts of Southern NSW like the Yass Valley and Crookwell regions



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We should be increasingly conscious and better assess the cumulative impact of energy infrastructure.

We need to make sure we have the planning assessments right and that there is improved transparency of that process.

We need to review and assess things like setbacks – to ensure guidelines and regulations are moving with the technology and with the pace of the transition and not lagging, leaving a negative impact for communities.

We should identify what communities want and where, and we should ensure there is long lasting tangible benefits.

So in short some of the priorities I think need to be pursued by government and industry include things like...

Free or low cost energy to those communities that are hosting the infrastructure.

Better support for the community / councils to enable them to deal with and manage the impact and identify where and how they can benefit .

More accountability and more communication as to why, when and how the energy transition is occurring including more research into the health and social impacts of energy infrastructure to give the community confidence that the impacts are being assessed and recognised.

These sorts of initiatives that are pursued in a cooperative and constructive way can help even up the playing field and help make this transition smoother and fairer.

I'd am happy to take questions.

Thanks

Tony Mahar

1/12/2025