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## Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Information Integrity on Climate Change and Energy

The [Climate Capital Forum](#) submits this evidence to the Senate Inquiry into Information Integrity on Climate Change and Energy under Term of Reference (a): *the prevalence of, motivations behind and impacts of misinformation and disinformation*.

**We demonstrate that organised disinformation campaigns have significantly undermined community confidence in the establishment of an offshore wind industry in the Hunter, Illawarra, Bunbury, and Southern Ocean regions.** These campaigns have circulated fabricated claims — most notably the false assertion that offshore wind projects kill whales — amplified through emotive imagery, billboards, social media, fake reports and coordinated astroturfing activity. Media investigations and expert testimony have confirmed that these claims are without scientific basis, yet they continue to be used to negatively influence local debates.

This offshore wind energy disinformation has had three clear impacts:

1. **Negative community sentiment:** Local residents, particularly in fishing and tourism industries, report heightened fear, anger, and distrust. Opposition groups have formed on the basis of misinformation, skewing public debate and eroding trust in government and industry.
2. **Hampered the establishment of industry:** The resulting social licence challenges have impacted decision making. In the Hunter NSW, only one offshore wind licence was awarded despite strong industry interest, and the winning proponent subsequently withdrew. New South Wales remains without an offshore wind project in development, despite world-class resources. In the Southern Ocean, pressure from the fishing industry, based on the misconception that areas of interest would exclude fishing, contributed to the significant reduction in the available declared area. In Bunbury, there are three projects in receipt of a preliminary notice of seabed licence award, however the process of award has already seen the formation of anti-groups and there will likely be significant social licence challenges to overcome in the future.
3. **Economic opportunity cost:** The consequences of delay are severe.
  - In the Illawarra, offshore wind could deliver 10,000–15,000 jobs, AU\$2.5–3.0 billion in construction spending, and \$300–500 million per year in ongoing operations, along with 1.5–2% annual GDP growth and \$100–200 million in extra tax revenue (Business Illawarra & University of Wollongong, 2025);
  - In the Hunter, a Renewable Energy Industrial Precinct could support 34,000 jobs, \$28 billion in investment, and \$11 billion per year in revenue (Beyond Zero Emissions, 2022/2025);
  - In Bunbury, offshore wind has the potential to create ~7,000 construction jobs and ~3,500 ongoing jobs, anchoring new industries such as hydrogen and advanced manufacturing (NZE, 2025).

Disinformation is not only misleading communities — it is **delaying the nation's clean energy transition and denying regional Australia thousands of jobs, billions in investment, and the chance to build new industries that can replace declining fossil fuel exports.**



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## 1. Disinformation about Offshore Wind

Organised disinformation campaigns have circulated false claims linking offshore wind projects to whale deaths in the Hunter and Illawarra regions.

### Misinformation about Whales

This includes fabricated and emotive imagery. As *The Guardian* (Taylor, 2023) reported:

- “Some pictures show a whale lifeless on a beach. In others, the whale is on fire, jumping from the ocean, as wind turbines loom behind it;”
- “For weeks, an image of a beached whale with turbines in the background has appeared on a roadside billboard in Port Stephens, north of Newcastle, under the words ‘Stop Port Stephens Offshore Wind Farms;’”
- The billboard campaign was deliberately designed to provoke fear, with one organiser admitting: “It needed to be high impact and visual, and that sums up the information that we’ve got at the time on the potential whale deaths.”

Despite these claims, marine experts have been clear that no evidence exists to support a link between offshore wind and whale deaths. As Professor Quentin Hanich explained: “There’s been a whole bunch of continuing dialogue that suggests that windfarms kill whales without any actual evidence to demonstrate that that’s the case.”

In addition, investigative reporting has exposed attempts to give legitimacy to these false claims. For example, ABC News reported on a so-called “scientific study” circulated by anti-wind groups that falsely linked whale deaths to offshore wind projects, which was later condemned by editors as a “fake study” designed to mislead the public (ABC News, 2023). This demonstrates the deliberate use of fabricated research to bolster emotive imagery and narratives that have no scientific basis.

These false claims have been amplified via social media, where local groups share “Fox News clips and emotive images of dead whales on the New Jersey coast,” and even US President Donald Trump has made baseless claims that “windmills” were driving whales “a little batty.” According to union leader Arthur Rorris, this represents the “importation of some of the absolute worst tactics of Donald Trump and others who use deliberate misinformation ... It’s become very, very emotive and politicised.”

### Astroturfing in the Illawarra

In the Illawarra, the group *Responsible Future Illawarra (RFI)* has been accused of running what media reports describe as “Trumpian-style” campaigns against offshore wind. According to ABC News, RFI has spread misinformation, attacked experts, and misrepresented the scale of community opposition by amplifying narratives imported from the United States (ABC News, 2025). For example, the group promoted a false claim that government-funded seabed surveys were linked to offshore wind projects, despite these being unrelated defence studies (ABC News, 2025). These tactics reflect classic astroturfing methods: creating the illusion of widespread grassroots outrage through deliberate distortion of facts.



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## 2. Impact on Community Support

The spread of these falsehoods has had a profound impact on local communities.

- In the Hunter and Illawarra, community members report heightened fear and anger, particularly among those working in industries tied to fishing and whale tourism. Locals expressed deep anxiety that offshore wind would harm whales and destroy their livelihoods, despite these claims being unfounded.
- Residents have organised opposition groups based on this disinformation. Some community members described people “crying” over fears for whales and jobs, showing the emotional toll of these false claims.

As a result, legitimate public debate has been skewed by misleading narratives, creating a hostile environment for open discussion and eroding trust between communities, industry, and government.

## 3. Impact on Industry Establishment

Community opposition — fuelled by disinformation — has had a palpable chilling effect on the development of Australia’s offshore wind industry.

The reduction of potential offshore wind zones — and the associated seabed — has been driven largely by concerns over visual amenity. The most developable areas, where fixed-bottom technology can be deployed at lower cost, are typically located closer to shore. It is these nearshore areas that have been excluded from the declared areas in response to such concerns.

Public sentiment, as a key factor in government decision-making, has directly limited investment in certain declared offshore wind areas.

In the Hunter region of New South Wales, for example, strong opposition to wind farms coincided with only one feasibility licence being awarded, despite several highly capable developers applying. This outcome has dampened confidence in the Australian market, with industry stakeholders expressing concern about perceived inconsistencies in the government’s licensing process. New South Wales remains without an offshore wind project in development, despite world-class resources. In the Southern Ocean, pressure from the fishing industry, based on the misconception that areas of interest would exclude fishing, contributed to the significant reduction in the available declared area.

In Bunbury (WA), several major international developers decided against bidding for licenses, with one explicitly identifying *social licence concerns arising from disinformation* as one of the top three reasons for their withdrawal<sup>1</sup>.

In Bunbury, there are three projects in receipt of a preliminary notice of seabed licence award, however the process of award has already seen the formation of anti-groups and there will likely be significant social licence challenges to overcome in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Conversation with a proponent who wishes to stay anonymous.



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## 4. Economic Opportunity Cost of Disinformation

Disinformation about offshore wind is not only eroding public trust but also imposing a **significant economic opportunity cost**. If industry is delayed or derailed due to misinformation, communities stand to lose tens of thousands of jobs, billions of dollars in investment, and long-term growth in regional incomes.

Globally, offshore wind energy is rapidly expanding, with nearly 85 gigawatts (GW) of installed capacity now in operation, enough to power more than 73 million households. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), ~120–220 million tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions per year are avoided by today's offshore wind energy generation.

China leads the world producing around 64 TWh of energy through offshore wind. The UK set a domestic record in 2023 with 49 TWh, supplying almost half the nation's households and contributing 17% of its total electricity. Other leading offshore wind energy producers include Germany, the Netherlands, Taiwan, Denmark, Belgium, France, Vietnam and Japan.

The global offshore wind sector now supports more than 40,000 workers, up from 32,000 in 2023. Employment is expected to grow sharply: Europe could see its offshore wind workforce triple to 350,000 by 2030, while the UK alone may require 10,000 new skilled workers every year this decade. Industry-wide, more than half a million new wind-related roles are projected worldwide by 2028.

### Illawarra (NSW)

In the Illawarra, modelling by Business Illawarra & University of Wollongong (2025) has shown that offshore wind development could underpin **10,000–15,000 total jobs** across direct, indirect and induced categories over the coming decade, along with a **\$2.5–3.0 billion one-off construction spend** and **\$300–500 million per year in ongoing operations** (Business Illawarra & University of Wollongong, 2025, pp. 21–22). The same roadmap estimates **regional GDP growth of 1.5–2% annually** and **\$100–200 million in additional annual tax revenue** if the industry proceeds (Business Illawarra & University of Wollongong, 2025).

The federal government's declaration of the Illawarra offshore wind zone highlights its potential to generate **2.9 GW of clean power** and support **~1,740 construction jobs** and **~870 ongoing jobs** (DCCEE, 2025). If offshore wind becomes integrated into emerging green steel or hydrogen production markets, Port Kembla and BlueScope Steel's landholdings in the Illawarra have the potential to accommodate associated manufacturing and supply-chain activities (Business Illawarra & University of Wollongong, 2025, p. 21).

**Opportunity cost if derailed by disinformation:** the Illawarra risks missing out on thousands of skilled jobs, billions in capital inflows, and permanent new industries tied to port, fabrication and advanced manufacturing.

### Hunter (NSW)



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The Hunter has been identified as one of Australia's most promising industrial transformation hubs. ACIL Allen modelling for Beyond Zero Emissions and WWF estimates that a Renewable Energy Industrial Precinct in the Hunter could deliver **34,000 new ongoing jobs by 2032**, attract **\$28 billion in new capital investment**, and generate **\$11 billion per year in revenue** (Beyond Zero Emissions, 2022/2025).

In parallel, the Hunter declared area could potentially support **>3,000 construction jobs** and **~1,560 ongoing jobs** in offshore wind (Minister for Climate Change & Energy, 2023). NSW EnergyCo identified **~24.5 GW of commercial interest** in offshore wind across the Hunter–Central Coast, signalling enormous private-sector readiness to invest (EnergyCo, 2024/25).

**Opportunity cost if derailed by disinformation:** the Hunter risks forgoing tens of thousands of long-term jobs, billions in investment, and an entire ecosystem of advanced manufacturing and clean-tech exports.

## **Bunbury / South-West WA**

The offshore wind opportunity off the coast of Bunbury risks becoming another major missed development if social licence is not secured. The Net Zero Economy Authority estimates the declared area could support **~11.4 GW of capacity**, creating **~7,000 construction jobs** and **~3,500 ongoing jobs** (NZEA, 2025). DCCEEW notes the scale of potential multi-GW projects and the associated benefits for clean electricity supply and regional industry (DCCEEW, 2024/25).

The broader South-West WA industrial belt — including the Western Trade Coast — has been highlighted as a hub for renewable hydrogen, critical minerals processing and advanced industries, all of which could be supported by offshore wind power (WA Government, 2023).

**Opportunity cost if delayed by disinformation:** the South-West risks losing thousands of high-skill roles in construction, operations and manufacturing supply chains, as well as its chance to anchor new clean industries around its heavy-industry base.



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## **Climate Capital Forum and Submission Authors**

The Climate Capital Forum (CCF) is a network of investors, climate finance experts, decarbonising companies and philanthropists who came together to provide policy advice on how Australia can lead the world in decarbonising, renewable energy and cleantech innovation.

<https://www.climatecapitalforum.org>

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