



## **Australian Government**

Australian Government response to the Senate Standing  
Committees on Environment and Communications  
report:

Offshore wind industry consultation process

MARCH 2026

## Introduction

The Australian Government welcomes the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee Report from the Inquiry on the offshore wind industry consultation process.

Offshore wind provides reliable, large-scale generation at times of the day or night that complement onshore renewables, delivering a more consistent, cleaner energy supply. As well as providing reliable, renewable electricity throughout the day, offshore wind can keep generating into the evening, harnessing the consistent, high-speed winds of the Australian coastline. Harnessing our natural resources in wind means creating thousands of construction jobs and ongoing maintenance roles in local supply chains, ports and regional communities.

The Offshore Electricity Infrastructure Act 2021 (OEI Act) regulates the construction, installation, commissioning, operation, maintenance, and decommissioning of offshore electricity infrastructure (OEI) projects in the Commonwealth offshore area, such as offshore wind projects. The OEI Act operates under the principle of shared use of the offshore marine environment and aims to balance competing interests. Australia's marine waters are used for a diverse range of recreational and commercial activities. Understanding these activities and existing marine users in and near potential offshore wind areas is essential to enable co-existence.

As stated by the then Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction the Hon Angus Taylor MP in his second-reading speech:

*“International experience shows that offshore electricity sectors coexist with other offshore sectors and activities, such as fishing and shipping industries. This bill protects these maritime stakeholders by requiring developers to take into account the impacts that potential projects may have on existing users of the offshore area. Importantly, under the bill, areas will not be available for offshore electricity infrastructure projects if their impacts cannot be appropriately managed and enforcement action can be taken if licence holders interfere with existing users of a declared area”.*

While the Government has now concluded the declaration process for offshore wind zones in Australia, it continues to support good community engagement across the Energy and Climate portfolio:

- Establishment of Wind Industry Committees for areas where there are offshore feasibility licences
- Making regulatory amendments to the Offshore Electricity Infrastructure to strengthen community consultation
- Responding to the recommendations of the Community Engagement Review conducted by the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner,
- Establishment of a national Developer Rating Scheme

The Committee tabled its report on 5 June 2025, making five recommendations.

The Coalition Senators' Dissenting Report makes four recommendations.

The Government has provided a response to recommendations of the Committee below.

## Response

### Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEE) consider ways to improve engagement with relevant First Nations and Traditional Owner groups in areas declared suitable for offshore wind developments.

### Government Response: Agree

The Government recognises the importance of meaningful engagement with First Nations communities in the declared offshore wind areas. This engagement is essential to ensuring that offshore renewable energy development respects cultural heritage and delivers shared benefits.

In 2024, the department made regulatory amendments to the *Offshore Electricity Infrastructure Act 2021* (OEI Act 2021) embedding specific provisions for consultation with First Nations and Traditional Owner Groups. The Offshore Electricity Infrastructure Regulations 2022 (OEI Regulations) require licence holders to make reasonable efforts to identify and consult Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or groups described in regulation 64(1) as:

- 64(1)(b) First Nations people or groups with Native Title rights and interests
- 64(1)(c) First Nations organisations established under law to manage lands and waters
- 64(1)(d) First Nations organisations or groups that are parties to agreements for land and water rights

Consultation with First Nations groups must be addressed in a management plan and approved by the Offshore Infrastructure Regulator before offshore infrastructure activities can commence. As of 1 December 2025, five licence holders in the Gippsland offshore wind area have approved management plans for feasibility activities.

The Government has developed guidance for offshore renewables developers for consultation with First Nations people. These guidelines provide an overview of the government's expectations and requirements for consultation and ensure that industry meets expected standards in its approach to engaging with First Nations people.

In Gippsland, the most advanced of all six declared areas, licence holders are building relationships with First Nations groups. Gippsland licence holders Iberdrola Australia and Blue Mackerel signed historic engagement agreements with Gunaikurnai Land and Waters

Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) in March and May 2025 respectively.<sup>1 2</sup> These agreements create a pathway for the First Nation groups to shape the engagement process, involving them in decision-making, building mutually respectful and beneficial partnerships, and ensuring First Nations rights and interests are considered in projects.

In June 2025, the department released its *First Nations Engagement: the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) guidelines*<sup>3</sup>. The guidelines provide departmental staff with guidance to building honest and meaningful relationships with First Nations people and communities when undertaking engagement and ensuring conversations are informed and consistent.

The FPIC guidelines complement outcome two of the department's First Nations Strategy 2025-30, which outlines the departments aspirations for early and genuine engagement with First Nations people and communities, ensuring communications are consistent, and facilitating First Nations involvement.

### **Recommendation 2**

The committee recommends that DCCEEW engagement during public consultation processes provide targeted and localised information for each declared area. This should include a meaningful, physical presence to provide information, listen to concerns, and help the local community to feed into management plans and desired community benefit from projects.

Further, DCCEEW should improve its communication with local communities to provide a clear narrative about the broader context of offshore renewable energy, including the need to transition away from ageing fossil fuel generation assets and other reasons for the energy transition.

### **Government Response: Agree**

The Government recognises the important role of in-person engagement to facilitate effective public consultation and is committed to fostering meaningful interactions that build public understanding.

The OEI Act framework includes several opportunities for stakeholders to have their say on where offshore renewable energy developments may be located and how they should be managed.

In the feasibility licensing stage, licence holders are responsible for undertaking consultation with stakeholders on their projects. Consultation undertaken must be detailed in the licence holder's management plan. Licence holders are also required to develop a stakeholder engagement strategy which sets out plans for ongoing engagement with stakeholders.

<sup>1</sup> Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation, [GLaWAC and Blue Mackerel Build a New Model for Offshore Wind](#), Gunaikurnai website, May 2025, accessed 29 July 2025

<sup>2</sup> Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation, [Landmark Agreement Ensuring Gunaikurnai Voice in Offshore Wind Feasibility](#), Gunaikurnai website, March 2025, accessed 29 July 2025

<sup>3</sup> Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), [First Nations Engagement: the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent](#), 2025

Detailed environmental studies and approvals are undertaken during the feasibility stage, and public consultation is undertaken through the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* approvals process.

To facilitate ongoing engagement with communities, the Government is establishing Wind Industry Committees, bringing together licence holders with representatives from the local community, industry, workers representatives, First Nations groups, educational institutions and state and local governments to discuss local benefits.

Wind Industry Committees will enable broad engagement to maximise economic benefits for each region, including communities, workers and local businesses. The committees will be chaired by the department, and include licence holders, enabling the community to discuss the projects and potential local benefits directly with licence holders.

The Southern Ocean Wind Industry Committee has already been established, and the Government is currently finalising arrangements for Wind Industry Committees in the other offshore wind regions as licensing processes are finalised.

Departmental staff have an ongoing attendance at the Gippsland offshore wind days. The community engagement events are organised by feasibility licence holders in regional locations in Gippsland, Victoria and provide an opportunity for community members to engage with licence holders, Victorian government representatives and the department to learn more about offshore wind projects in the area.

The department recognises the importance of a clear narrative on offshore renewable energy in the broader context of the Net Zero transition.

In conjunction with states and territories, the government, through the Energy and Climate Change Ministerial Council (ECMC), is implementing the recommendations to the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner's (AEIC) Community Engagement Review, which recommended ways to improve community engagement in the renewable energy transition.

Recommendation 6 of this review specifically recommended developing a clear narrative on why there is an urgent need for new renewable energy and transmission infrastructure in communities. To address this the government has:

- Developed the First Nations Clean Energy Strategy
- Committed to further funding for the AEIC to provide guidance to communities to support their understanding of large-scale renewable energy and transmission infrastructure.
- Committed \$209.3 million over four years from 2024-25 to expand the Net Zero Economy Authority to support workers through the transition to net zero

The ECMC also committed to a behavioural research project that included engagement with local communities where renewable energy infrastructure is being deployed to ensure states and territories as well as the Commonwealth can more effectively communicate.

The department will continue to support further opportunities to improve public communication and engagement processes to ensure local communities can participate in renewable energy developments as Australia's energy transition progresses.

**Recommendation 3**

The committee recommends that DCCEEW in conjunction with the Offshore Infrastructure Regulator, oversee ongoing engagement from proponents with local businesses, worker representatives, marine users, and community groups as a central point for engagement.

**Government Response: Agree**

The department has established a Wind Industry Committee in the Southern Ocean offshore wind region and is finalising arrangements for Wind Industry Committees in other offshore wind regions as licensing processes progress. The department has established the Gippsland Licence holder Advisory Committee to coordinate activities by licence holders across the broader Gippsland offshore wind region.

These committees will provide a forum for stakeholders, including First Nations groups, local businesses, and community representatives to engage directly with the feasibility licence holders and government agencies. Terms of Reference for the WICs are available on the department's website. The Southern Ocean Wind Industry Committee had its inaugural meeting on the 22 July 2025.

The Offshore Infrastructure Regulator independently oversees consultation and engagement between the licence holder and consultees through the management plan and assessment process.

In accordance with the OEI Regulations, management plans must address consultation carried out by the licence holder including the process used to identify consultees, a comprehensive list of the persons, organisations, communities and groups consulted and a report on the outcomes of consultation. Management plans must also include a description of a Stakeholder Engagement Strategy (SES).

The Regulator may only approve a management plan if satisfied the management plan addresses the requirements of the OEI Regulations including that the SES provides for ongoing engagement with stakeholders.

Licence holders are required to publish their SES on their respective project websites to increase transparency of licence activities. Publication of the SES also enables stakeholders who believe they should be consulted the opportunity to self-identify and directly contact the licence holder for engagement over the life of the project.

The Offshore Infrastructure Regulator will monitor the licence holder's compliance with the management plan once approved and take action where necessary to ensure the plan is being followed.

**Recommendation 4**

The committee recommends the Australian Government and DCCEEW proactively ensure that foreign actors, spam engagement, and misinformation and disinformation do not overpower local community voices from being heard in local public debate.

**Government Response:** Agree

While local questions and concerns are often legitimate, the Government recognises the ongoing challenge of misinformation in local public debate on renewable energy.

Following the Australian Government's formal response to the 2024 AEIC Community Engagement Review, the department has strengthened its focus on proactive, community-centred communication, funding research to better understand information gaps and sources of misinformation around renewable energy infrastructure.

The department is committed to providing credible, accessible, and timely information to communities to help build an understanding of offshore wind and renewable energy and address misinformation and 'negative narratives'. The department will continue to ensure that fact-based information on offshore wind is available on its website, through social media channels and through stakeholder engagement activities.

The ECMC committed to a behavioural research project that included engagement with local communities where renewable energy infrastructure is being deployed to ensure states and territories as well as the Commonwealth can more effectively communicate.

**Recommendation 5**

The committee recommends that the Australian Government amend the Offshore Electricity Act 2021 to require public consultation on management plans submitted to the Offshore Infrastructure Regulator, prior to approval of the plan for construction activities and the granting of a commercial licence.

**Government Response:** Agree in principle

To reduce economic barriers and enhance transparency and community confidence in offshore renewable energy projects, the government has committed to undertake targeted consultation on ways to enable public comment on management plans for commercial projects in the OEI sector.

The government intends to amend the OEI Regulations to require an additional round of public consultation on the summary of the proposed management plan for a commercial licence as a pre-condition to the Offshore Infrastructure Regulator's approval or refusal to approve a management plan for a commercial licence.

### **Dissenting Recommendation 1**

The offshore wind zones declared in the Hunter, Illawarra, Southern Ocean and Indian Ocean be cancelled.

#### **Government Response:** Reject

The Australian Energy Market Operator continually tells us that renewable energy, backed by storage and gas is the cheapest way to provide power to homes. Coal fired power stations are ageing and with their retirement approaching the Government is committed to exploring all options to deliver more renewable energy into the grid. Offshore wind is a key part of that plan.

As a large scale, secure, reliable and clean energy source, offshore wind can contribute to energy security, reliability and affordability while supporting our heavy industry to decarbonise and remain competitive.

### **Dissenting Recommendation 2**

The Senate hold a second inquiry where formal public hearings are held in all six communities which will be impacted by the offshore wind zones declared by the Albanese Government to identify lessons learnt which can be applied to community engagement for all future new electricity infrastructure.

#### **Government Response:** Noted

### **Dissenting Recommendation 3**

The Australian Government adopts principles to govern new electricity infrastructure which places communities at the centre, and makes decisions which account for the interests of local communities in terms of economic, environmental, and social impacts.

#### **Government Response:** Agree in principle

The department adopted principles from the APS framework for engagement and participation<sup>4</sup> in designing the public consultation process for the declared areas. The guidance and engagement tools provide the standard intended to apply to engagement in the Australian public sector.

To enable the consideration of local community interests in projects the department has established a Wind Industry Committee in the Southern Ocean offshore wind region and is finalising arrangements for Wind Industry Committees in other offshore wind regions as licensing processes progress.

Wind Industry Committees will enable broad engagement to maximise economic benefits for each region, including communities, workers and businesses. The committees will be

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<sup>4</sup> Department of Industry, Science and Resources, (2021) [APS framework for engagement and participation](#)

chaired by the department, and include licence holders, enabling the community to discuss the projects and potential local benefits directly with licence holders.

In accordance with the OEI Regulations, management plans must address consultation carried out by the licence holder including the process used to identify consultees, a comprehensive list of the persons, organisations, communities and groups consulted and a report on the outcomes of consultation. Management plans must also include a description of a Stakeholder Engagement Strategy (SES).

The Regulator may only approve a management plan if satisfied the management plan addresses the requirements of the OEI Regulations including that the SES provides for ongoing engagement with stakeholders.

Licence holders are required to publish their SES on their respective project websites to increase transparency of licence activities. Publication of the SES also enables stakeholders who believe they should be consulted the opportunity to self-identify and directly contact the licence holder for engagement over the life of the project.

#### **Dissenting Recommendation 4**

For all new and emerging energy technology and major infrastructure, where robust impact assessments are not readily available, extend the minimum public consultation and review period from 60 days to 180 days to allow for stakeholder engagement, expert analysis and public scrutiny.

**Government Response:** Noted

The *Offshore Electricity Infrastructure Act 2021* established by the former Government requires that the public consultation period must be at least 60 days from the notice of the proposal to declare an area and allows the Minister to consult for longer periods.