



30 August 2024

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

To Whom It May Concern,

This submission has been prepared by members of the social and economic research network established as part of the Australian Centre for Offshore Wind Energy (ACOWE) and affiliated universities. The undersigned members of this group are embedded in the regions in which offshore wind is proposed, with representatives from universities located adjacent to the declared or identified Offshore Energy Infrastructure Zones (OEIZs). They include research teams from:

- Deakin University,
- Federation University,
- University of Melbourne,
- University of Newcastle,
- University of Western Australia,
- University of Wollongong, and
- Australian National University.

Together we represent a diverse range of social science and policy expertise from across Australia. We collectively work across a range of social science research disciplines including ethnography, anthropology, marketing, economics, psychology, geography, law and political sciences. Between us we employ diverse qualitative and quantitative methods to explore energy transitions, marine and ocean governance and regional development. Many of us are already actively engaged in relevant research on offshore wind or energy transitions more broadly and we all have strong established research networks both within our own communities as well as with national and international research entities working in similar areas.

We are therefore well placed to comment on the issues currently under consideration as part of the Senate Inquiry into the offshore wind industry consultation process. This letter summarises our overarching feedback and recommendations for the Government's consideration against each of the Terms of Reference (TOR).

a) The efficacy of community engagement and benefit in planning, developing and operating the offshore wind industry

What is effective community engagement?

In order to address this TOR, consideration must first be given to the question of what constitutes 'efficacy' in this context. It might be assumed that successful community engagement equates to communities that are happy or united around a proposal such as the development of offshore wind in their region. However, this is rarely a realistic objective for infrastructure development of this scale and scope.

The concept of a Social License to Operate (SLO) is a commonly used model through which a community engagement approach might be deemed to be successful or not. SLO refers to the level of community acceptance of new energy technologies, organisations, and their activities. It centres on questions of trust, credibility, and legitimacy (Meesters et al., 2021).

In community debates such as this, SLO is also deployed as an activist tool and judged to be gained or lost based on the strength of opposition to an activity (Breakey, 2023, Dare, 2023). This has certainly been true in some of the regions in which offshore wind has been proposed in Australia, especially those in NSW where community opposition has been fierce. In these communities, debate over offshore wind, and renewable energy in general, is often focused on the numbers – counts of opponents versus supporters. In these instances, highly organised campaigns in opposition to proposed new developments, large numbers of submissions against developments, petitions and social media groups with large followings, and protests which attract substantial crowds are all put forward as evidence of an absence or loss of social licence.

While decision-makers must pay attention to large levels of opposition and the drivers of community concerns, quantifying levels of opposition is a problematic measure of SLO on its own. There are several reasons for this:

1. **Voices of substantial sections of the community – particularly those with moderate views – can be lost in these highly charged debates.** High levels of activism against a project or activity are rarely a true reflection of overall community sentiment. In Australia large scale community surveys have pointed to moderate levels of community acceptance for the development of an offshore wind industry. For example, in a CSIRO community survey conducted in 2023, 36.5% of survey participants indicated they would be ‘ok with it’, and 19.5% and 9.9% indicated they would ‘approve it’ or ‘embrace it’ respectively. Overall, this equates to levels of acceptance of 66%, although this was lower (58%) in areas where wind farms were proposed (McCrea et al., 2024). Similarly, a survey of residents on the NSW South Coast found that 53% of respondents were either somewhat comfortable or very comfortable with the idea of offshore wind being developed in the region, whilst 34% were either somewhat uncomfortable or very uncomfortable¹ (Croft et al., 2024). In-depth interviews with 98 young adult residents of the Illawarra conducted in 2023 found that 83% were in favour of offshore windfarm development in the region and 7% had neutral feelings (Klocker et al., 2023). National surveys conducted by the University of Western Australia show that the generally moderate levels of social licence in relation to offshore wind development are largely based on the potential economic benefits of such projects, and that substantial concerns remain about environmental and social impacts of these projects at local levels (Spencer-Cotton, 2024). These results suggest that there are mixed feelings in Australian communities around the development of offshore wind and that community members who are currently open to its development could readily turn against proposals if community concerns are not adequately addressed. Listening to a broad section of the community – including but not limited to opponents and supporters - is therefore critical to ensuring effective community engagement.
2. **SLO is a fluid concept that changes over time and under different conditions:** One of the significant challenges with implementing new developments and new technologies is that it often takes time to build familiarity and trust of new approaches (Suchman, 1995). This is supported by recent CSIRO research which suggests that low levels of knowledge of offshore wind infrastructure may contribute to community uncertainty (McCrea et al. 2024). The range of factors that may influence community support or opposition – including social and cultural norms and community priorities – can shift significantly over time. Activities that are deemed unacceptable today were commonplace in the past, and vice versa. We therefore support the

¹ This survey covered the Shoalhaven, Eurobodalla and Bega Valley regions. It did not include the Illawarra region.

contention of Dare (2023), who argue that it is insufficient and ethically questionable to rely on the degree of approval or opposition within a community at a particular point in time, to determine whether an activity should or should not proceed.

3. **Quantitative ‘counts’ of support versus opposition can leave communities feeling disenfranchised or unheard by consultation processes, because it creates a sense of winners and losers.** This type of adversarial approach to community engagement sets decision making up processes up as a binary battle between supporters and opponents, with both groups aiming to demonstrate that they ‘have the numbers’ to back their positions. However, full approval or complete defeat of a proposal are not the only available – or best – outcomes for communities (Acott et al., 2023).

International evidence suggests that more nuanced and deliberative approaches to environmental conflict are needed (Devine-Wright and Ryder, 2024, Ryder et al., 2023) because people’s sense of place and place attachment, and a complex range of values, motivations, emotions and moral judgements underpin community responses to large scale renewable energy projects like offshore wind (Askland, 2024, Lorteau et al., 2024, Breakey, 2023).

We therefore argue that an effective community engagement process is one that involves more than just persuading communities of a proposal’s merits and offering technical solutions to address concerns (Schadeberg et al., 2024). Rather, **it requires actively involving communities in negotiation and deliberation**, particularly when conflicting or competing values are at play. A more nuanced understanding of the specifics of support or opposition is necessary (Voyer and van Leeuwen, 2019, Tafon et al., 2022). This includes engaging constructively with conflict and employing innovative means of community engagement which encourages co-learning, and discussion across different value sets and opinions (Klain et al., 2017). Effective community engagement also **recognises community as a heterogeneous, diverse and multi-faceted set of interconnected and interdependent groups** which include both direct and indirect stakeholders.

Has the process of community engagement in the development of offshore wind in Australia been effective?

We therefore respond to the Terms of Reference of the Senate inquiry based on an understanding of *effective* community engagement as a process **which involves active negotiation and deliberation within communities**, and one **that recognises and responds to diversity within and amongst different parts of the community**. We now turn to the question of whether the current processes of community engagement in the development of offshore wind in Australia have been effective.

Some sections of communities within the proposed offshore wind zones in Australia have been highly critical of the consultation process for the selection and declaration of the OIEZs. These criticisms have often focused on the mechanics of consultation (e.g. the type, scope, timing and location of meetings; and the length of the consultation period). We have chosen to focus on the context within which this engagement occurred, as we feel this has strongly influenced the ways in which communities have responded to Government efforts to consult. Our observations point towards three features of this context which that have undermined the efficacy of community engagement around offshore wind in Australia to date.

1. **Limited and inaccessible information:** Offshore wind is an entirely new, and alien concept to many Australians. It is incredibly challenging for a community to engage meaningfully, if they have no frame of reference or understanding of how the proposed developments are likely to impact them and their region – directly or indirectly – and over a sustained period of time. Capacity for effective engagement and informed decision-making is limited by unequal access to evidence based, unbiased information available to enable community members to participate in informed decision making. For example, public consultation on the proposed OEIZ’s avoided discussing details of any future renewable energy infrastructure because that would be determined by future applicants. However, this left some sections of the community

feeling like they were being asked to comment on a proposal for which they only had partial details. This vacuum has at times been filled through misinformation, via social media and special interest newsletters.

2. **Deficit-based and divisive models of consultation:** The models of engagement employed in the OEIZ consultation processes tended to rely heavily on obtaining written submissions from the public within a designated submission period. Face-to-face engagements focused on relaying (somewhat limited) information to an interested and occasionally hostile public. There was little, if any, meaningful opportunity for the two-way exchange of knowledge or for deliberation or discussion. This process often led to ‘information wars’ in which facts and science were weaponised in fruitless and intractable debates over whose facts were ‘right’ and whose were ‘wrong’. These models of engagement make it difficult to meaningfully consider and include community values, connections and perspectives and they actively discourage negotiation and deliberation. They do little to constructively build understanding of diverse opinions and values and they often fan division rather than build recognition of the many ways in which the ocean is important to people (Huttunen et al., 2022, Bidwell, 2017).
3. **A failure to contextualise offshore wind within broader energy transitions and environmental changes:** The introduction of offshore wind power generation is but one component of energy transitions. The broader climate action framework includes relinquishment of fossil fuel-based energy sources (coal-fired power, onshore and offshore oil and gas), cessation of native timber harvesting and shifts in agricultural practice; and simultaneous expansion of critical minerals exploration, transmission infrastructure development, plantation forestry and solar farms. All of this is occurring in concert with increasingly severe floods, bushfires, storm surges and coastal erosion. Many of these factors are impacting the same geographic footprint, however they are generally dealt with in isolation without consideration of the cumulative impacts at a landscape, region or community scale. In failing to position offshore wind in the broader context of energy transitions and climate change, communities are left without an understanding of why offshore wind is being considered, and the implications of failing to transition the energy sector for local marine and terrestrial environments.

Effective community engagement is hard, and there are no easy answers or quick fixes. However, there are many models of engagement that may be more effective and responsive to community needs. These include both well-established techniques such as deliberative democracy processes (eg citizens juries) (Hartz-Karp and Pope, 2011), as well as recent innovations like gamification, digital or crowdsourced consensus building applications and social listening (Mehmet et al., 2021, McKinley et al., 2021). Most notably, effective engagement is ongoing and needs to occur both inside and outside of formal consultation exercises. Ideally, citizens will be empowered to articulate what good engagement looks like for their communities.

Recommendations

1. That the Australian Government develop and fund a community engagement program for offshore wind in Australia that includes the following components:
 - a. Activities aimed at creating space for negotiation and deliberation, including funding and support for regional communities to assist them in articulating and defining their preferred community engagement pathways and research and information priorities.
 - b. Coordination mechanisms (such as representative community reference groups – *see recommendation 3*) to support regional sustainable transitions, which place offshore wind in the context of broader energy transitions and ensure mechanisms to address consultation fatigue.
 - c. Clear Terms of Reference for community engagement outlining what local communities can and should have the right to expect in terms of genuine engagement, and where there is and is not capacity for them to influence tangible outcomes.

- d. Clear accountability mechanisms for industry which link back to community expectations on engagement pathways.
2. That the Australian Government, industry, conservation agencies and research partners collaborate to develop ocean and energy literacy programs which assist in providing the information base upon which communities can rely to ensure informed and evidence-based discussions and deliberation.

b) Community engagement within the existing Australian Government offshore wind industry regulatory and legislative frameworks

Research has shown that perceived unfairness and communities' distrust of decision-making processes contribute to local opposition to renewable energy projects (Dwyer and Bidwell, 2019). Critiques often stem back to a concern about not being heard, or listened to, within those processes (Firestone et al., 2020). This can often stem from a lack of clarity as to how community feedback is going to be used, including whether it can genuinely influence outcomes. In many cases this distrust is symptomatic of systemic barriers to genuine engagement, rather than a lack of interest or commitment from decision makers. We argue that **there are a number of features of the existing offshore wind regulatory and legislative frameworks that create roadblocks for effective community engagement** around the development of offshore wind in Australia.

1. **Jurisdictional responsibility for the roll out of renewable energy, and the broader energy transition process, is complex and disjointed.** Different parts of the energy transition process are managed by different layers of Government and different departments within those Governments. The placement and location of offshore wind is primarily managed by the Federal Government, whilst other aspects of the energy transition (including transmission infrastructure) are being managed by State and (to a lesser extent) local governments (Dyer, 2023). This fragmented and complex approach makes it hard for local communities to determine lines of accountability around different aspects of the energy system, or how they fit together. It has also resulted in an almost complete absence of coordinated consultation and engagement across the different layers of Government.
2. The selection of sites for offshore energy infrastructure zones, as noted above, has been conducted by government in consultation with only a small number of select stakeholders. Whilst there is a requirement to undertake community consultation prior to the declaration of the zones there is **no obligation for communities to be consulted on site selection**. The absence of Marine Spatial Planning mechanisms within Australian Commonwealth waters, and disconnect with state based marine and coastal planning processes, has meant that the selection of the OEIZ site's has come as a shock to many of the communities in which they are located. Communities' exclusion from the earliest stages of decision-making has arguably engendered local distrust of the process.
3. Once an OEIZ is declared, the legislative framework for offshore wind planning and assessment **concentrates responsibility for engagement and negotiation with local communities in the hands of individual developers**. Some of the OEIZs may feature separate developments from different proponents, and given that each proponent may be undertaking separate community engagement to bolster their own social licence, there is a very real risk that adjacent/affected communities will experience engagement fatigue. Moreover, while each proponent will see nuance in how their various developments are being undertaken, these nuances will likely be lost among adjacent/affected communities, who instead will likely see offshore wind as an aggregated whole (such that any issue encountered with one proponent may well affect perceptions of all proponents in that zone). In these zones where multiple developers are successful in obtaining a feasibility license it remains unclear how community engagement will be coordinated. Across all OEIZs, there is a need for

safeguarding mechanisms to ensure the efficacy and efficiency of engagement activities conducted by developers. Early attempts are being made in Gippsland to address this issue and their experiences will provide important lessons for other OEIZs to learn from.

4. The current legislative process also places the responsibility for delivery of local benefits in the hands of developers. In Victoria, there is an attempt to address this via a REZ Community Benefits Plan. Nationally, **a coordinated, streamlined and participatory model for assuring community benefits is lacking, undermining community confidence that benefits will be forthcoming.** This includes an absence of information on how developers (and Government) will be held to account in delivering on promised economic benefits (Larkin et al., 2024, Herrejon and Savaresi, 2020).

Recommendations

3. That the Australian Government develop and fund regional and national stakeholder and community representative taskforces or other relevant coordinating mechanisms to:
 - a. Facilitate coordinated and connected processes between layers of Government to ensure offshore wind is considered within the context of other regional development activities,
 - b. Provide oversight and a coordination point for community engagement and benefit sharing negotiations, on an iterative and ongoing basis, to ensure communities are involved in articulating the nature and scale of community benefits for their region and the ways these benefits are distributed in a long term, ongoing and self-sustaining manner,
 - c. Hold developers and Government to account on delivering promised community benefits,
 - d. Facilitate knowledge exchange and lesson sharing across the different OEIZs.
4. That a coordinated and centralised regional benefit sharing fund be established within each offshore wind region, which pools industry contributions across multiple developments and developers within each region (including onshore and offshore renewable energy projects) and delivers benefits back to communities in a participatory, equitable and transparent manner.

c) the adherence to the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent from Traditional Owners of the affected Sea Country by the Australian Government and offshore wind industry;

Prioritising the needs and interests of Aboriginal people, and the importance of protecting cultural connection to Sea Country has been recognised as a critical component of the energy transition (DCCEEW, 2024). These rights and interests will be diverse within and across Traditional Custodian groups and broader Aboriginal communities connected to the OEIZs. Aboriginal people within those areas have expressed a strong desire for self-determination in the way in which they choose to engage with Governments, developers and supporter and opponent groups within each area and negotiation of any benefits derived (Briggs et al., 2024, DCCEEW, 2023). Yet, as with other aspects of the planning and assessment process, engagement and negotiation with First Nation communities remains largely the responsibilities of the individual developers. This holds significant potential to create a situation in which multiple developers are attempting to engage with and negotiate arrangements with the same Aboriginal communities and organisations, placing considerable burden on these organisations, which are largely underfunded and under resourced. It also risks factionalising and dividing Aboriginal communities if sections of the community are able to negotiate better outcomes than others or are preferenced in other ways within the engagement process.

We urge a strong rights-based approach to the development of offshore wind in partnership with Traditional Owners, Custodians, peak bodies and other cultural heritage alliances. This should include self-determined pathways for benefit sharing including active consideration of First Nations leadership, co-ownerships and management of large-scale renewable energy projects including offshore wind.

The Senate inquiry is framed around adherence to the principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) for Aboriginal people. The basis of understanding and regulating FPIC is derived from the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), yet while it has been endorsed by Australia, UNDRIP has not been implemented in Australian law, policy and practice. This allows the government to claim it is supporting UNDRIP, while leaving Aboriginal people without recourse to fairness and equity. If properly implemented, UNDRIP would create a level playing field between those First Nations groups with stronger rights, such as the treaty-like agreements in south-west Western Australia, and those who have no underpinning rights, such as in Tasmania. At present, however, without the clear pathways that Aboriginal people can determine the extent of adherence to FPIC, as outlined under UNDRIP, this leaves developers with the rights to override basic principles of self-determination and leaves Aboriginal people without redress.

If the rights of FPIC are regulated and legislated for, then Aboriginal people can have the opportunity to determine benefit-sharing as a means of co-design with government and developers. Co-design allows Aboriginal people to be informed while leading the cultural heritage and environmental work that underpins the conservation agenda of OEIZs. In turn, strong compliance with FPIC helps to develop a cultural licence to operate that achieves Aboriginal self-determination (Hunter et al., 2024). Moreover, FPIC allows Aboriginal people to accelerate local enterprise and entrepreneurship using Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (ICIP) as a means of engaging with OEIZs and broadening interests in employment and infrastructure in the development of renewables. ICIP is crucial to establishing social science research and provides a deliberate means to tackle the problem of misinformation that contributes to poor community support for OEIZs.

Recommendations

5. Following on from the Senate inquiry into UNDRIP of November 2023^[1], the Australian Government should seek to elevate the status of UNDRIP and embed its principles within the legal frameworks underpinning offshore energy development. At a minimum we recommend the creation of a National Action Plan that assesses and scrutinises legislation for harmony between current OEIZ legislation and the adherence to FPIC.
6. That the Australian Government commits to a process of engagement for the co-design of First Nations engagement and decision-making standards under the EPBC Act reforms. Co-design can bridge cultural heritage and environment standards and ensure that consultation fatigue is not engendered by determining benefit-sharing.

d) the impact of the offshore wind industry on marine life and marine environments in Australian waters, including strategies for impact minimisation and management

A range of concerns lie at the heart of current debates over energy transitions in general and offshore wind in particular. Environmental considerations dominate these concerns and, in many cases, are shared by both supporters and opponents. For example, in the Illawarra OEIZ, 77% of submissions cited worries about potential environmental impacts. These concerns were raised in both supportive and critical submissions. National public surveys by the University of Western Australia found that impacts on marine environments were amongst the top-rated concerns around the development of

offshore wind, with more than 50% of respondents believing offshore wind would have negative impacts on birds and whales (Spencer-Cotton, 2024). For many opponents, the environmental risks associated with the impacts of offshore wind outweigh the benefits. On the other hand, supporters frequently argue that the risks associated with unchecked climate change should be prioritised - but their support for offshore wind could easily be lost if environmental concerns relating to these developments are not addressed. National surveys show that this is already occurring for individuals with high ocean conservation values (i.e., those rating high on valuing the ocean as a place for recreation, culture, and nature conservation), with these individuals being 10% less likely on average to be supportive of offshore wind (Spencer-Cotton, 2024). This is despite the potential threat that offshore wind poses to marine environments.

This is another reason why polarisation of the debate is unhelpful – both supporters and opponents actually share many of the same concerns about environmental impacts of offshore wind development.

For the purposes of this submission, we contain our response to some of the ways we believe social and cultural factors will be influential in relation to the impact of the offshore wind industry on marine life and marine environments. We begin by examining the ways in which environmental concerns have been dealt with to date in the public discourse before highlighting an alternative pathway which can assist in environmental impact management and minimisation.

1. **The influence of mis- and disinformation:** One of the most prominent and high-profile responses to the issues raised by opponents to offshore wind in the public discourse to date, particularly in the media, has been through an examination of the role of misinformation and disinformation². Coordinated and deliberate disinformation campaigns against renewable energy transitions and other broader social movements have been linked to fossil fuel interest groups active in Australia and the US (Walker, 2023), aimed at sowing doubt about emerging technologies and slowing the transition away from fossil fuels. Regardless of their origin, misunderstandings and myths, as well as well-founded community concerns about environmental impacts, are circulating through online media and on the ground. This has generated confusion and tension about what the offshore projects are, how the planning process is structured, and, more generally, how offshore wind will impact treasured marine environments. High levels of concern about mis/disinformation are understandable, and efforts are required to ensure reliable information is available to the public (*see recommendation 2*). However, we also argue that an excessive focus on mis/disinformation will only serve to further alienate vocal opponents if they feel their complaints are being dismissed as wrong or misinformed.
2. **Distrust in environmental assessment and mitigation processes:** Another common response to environmental concerns is to refer to the extensive environmental approvals and assessment processes that will occur prior to construction of offshore wind. This response relies heavily on an assumption of strong public trust in these development processes (Ruddat 2022). It is clear, however that there are concerns over the trustworthiness of the Government processes that have been developed to guide, assess and regulate the offshore wind industry, particularly in relation to the developer-led environmental impact assessment processes. The drivers of this distrust are complex and multi-layered. Research suggests that faith in the regulatory process to appropriately manage environmental impacts will be conditional on

² <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-11-07/editor-blasts-fake-study-linking-whale-deaths-to-wind-farms/103069922>
<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/commentisfree/2023/oct/31/the-right-is-firing-misinformation-bullets-in-its-climate-war-on-renewables-heres-a-way-to-fight-back>

perceived trust in information sources (le Maitre et al., 2024). Misinformation and disinformation circulating within the media is also fuelling growing distrust in public institutions, a trend that has increasingly characterised global politics (Bakir and McStay, 2022). In the case of offshore wind, and renewable energy debates in general, it has become evident that some sections of the community have lost faith in previously trusted sources of independent advice. Despite this, research has shown that reports and websites from research institutions such as universities and the CSIRO remain the most trusted sources of information for most Australians (McCrea et al., 2024).

There is therefore an urgent need to: develop and support **transparent, honest and trustworthy information sources about the real and perceived impacts of offshore wind on local environments** (*see recommendation 2*); **and involve communities in defining their own research and information priorities** (e.g. via participatory and open access science)(*see recommendation 1*). However, we also warn against dismissing community concerns as ill-informed, or relying solely on processes that have not yet won the confidence of some sections of the community to address these concerns. We therefore offer an additional pathway to respond to concerns over environmental impacts.

3. **Conflict as a pathway to improved environmental outcomes:** Whilst social license is often viewed as a challenge or hurdle to be jumped in the delivery of infrastructure projects such as offshore wind, engaging constructively with social and cultural concerns can also play a potentially positive role in delivering improvements in environmental outcomes and provide communities with a sense of stewardship of their local environment. For example, international research has highlighted how environmental conflict – when engaged with in a constructive way - can result in a raising of environmental and social standards beyond regulatory requirements (Knol-Kauffman et al., 2023, Tafon et al., 2022, Saunders et al., 2024). This can occur through several means, including through greater public scrutiny of environmental assessments, explicit consideration of environmental values and priorities within benefit sharing arrangements and a focus on negotiated co-benefits and nature positive design which facilitate positive outcomes for competing users (e.g. fisheries). This may require a process of building trust, engaging communities in the research process and providing a means through which environmental impacts, and potential solutions, can be explored in transparent and collaborative ways.

Building trust takes time, as does the process of fully understanding the range, scale and scope of environmental impacts and their mitigation responses. We therefore suggest that there is opportunity and need for **an interdisciplinary approach to the environmental research and assessments** that will be required over the coming years. Biophysical scientists will need to work closely with social scientists and local communities to both build the knowledge base upon which offshore wind will be developed and the trust of the public in that knowledge base. One potentially useful mechanism through which this type of collaboration might be facilitated is **through demonstration sites or research pilots**, which can explore potential impacts and benefits of offshore wind at a small scale in partnership with local communities.

Recommendations

7. That the Australian Government identify and fund independent, interdisciplinary scientific research by universities and other research institutes to develop a robust evidence base to support decision making, community engagement and peer review of environmental assessment processes for offshore wind.
8. That the Australian Government support and fund efforts to encourage greater community and independent scientific involvement in, and transparency around, environmental

assessment processes and coordinated and robust monitoring programs (e.g. through citizen science, open access data and other data sharing arrangements).

9. That the Australian government work with industry and regional communities to support the development of demonstration or pilot projects which can build community confidence and knowledge about the impacts and benefits of offshore wind.

e) any other related matters.

Social science research is a critical but often overlooked tool within community engagement processes and energy transitions (McKinley et al., 2020). There is a tendency to undervalue and underfund the highly specialised skills that are required to undertake community engagement effectively and meaningfully. This is particularly true for community engagement which must occur outside of formal approvals processes. Engaging with social researchers can provide a deeper understanding of communities' connections to place, place-based identities, and emotional responses to projects – including legacy issues and values in relation to a project. Each OEIZ designated by the government has a context that is inherently specific to that site and will thus require in-depth place-based research and knowledge that cannot be obtained via 'fly in fly out' consultation exercises. A one-size-fits-all approach will not work, nor will exercises which treat 'community' as a homogenous mass rather than diverse and intersecting sub-communities with interests and priorities that sometimes pull in different directions. Local, place-based and long-term social research – which connects with other communities through national scale coordination - is critical to understanding the nuanced and divergent ways in which different individuals, groups, and communities respond to energy transitions over time.

Recommendations

10. That the Australian Government invest in nationally coordinated, but locally embedded social and cultural science research programs in each of the OEIZ regions.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit our collective thoughts on this critical issue. For further information please feel free to contact us via the ACOWE secretariat at ACOWE-contact@unimelb.edu.au or directly via primary contact A/Prof Michelle Voyer at

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