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# **STATE DEVELOPMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND WORKS COMMITTEE**

Mr JJ McDonald MP—Chair  
Ms JM Bush MP  
Mr TA James MP  
Mr D Kempton MP  
Mr CG Whiting MP  
Mr BJ Mellish MP

**Staff present:**  
Ms S Galbraith—Committee Secretary

## **PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE PLANNING (SOCIAL IMPACT AND COMMUNITY BENEFIT) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2025**

### **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**Monday, 2 June 2025**

**Rockhampton**

## MONDAY, 2 JUNE 2025

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**The committee met at 9.02 am.**

**CHAIR:** Good morning. I declare open the public hearing for the inquiry into the Planning (Social Impact and Community Benefit) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. My name is Jim McDonald, and I am the member for Lockyer and chair of the committee. With me here today are: Ms Jonty Bush, the member for Cooper and deputy chair; Mr Terry James, the member for Mulgrave; Mr David Kempton, the member for Cook; Mr Bart Mellish, the member for Aspley; and Mr Chris Whiting, the member for Bancroft, substituting for Mr Shane King, the member for Kurwongbah.

I would also like to recognise our local members: Mrs Donna Kirkland, the member for Rockhampton; and Mr Glen Kelly, the member for Mirani. Nigel Hutton, the member for Keppel, is also hoping to drop in today. Thank you all for being here. We will get the inquiry underway very shortly. Donna, would you like to welcome us to your town?

**Mrs KIRKLAND:** Yes, I would love to do that. Welcome, everyone. It is so great to see a wonderful turnout to our public hearing today. Giving the community the opportunity to speak to a bill or to make submissions to a bill is what we are all about. We are making sure that we are connecting with community and finding out how community feels about the bills that we are presenting in parliament. Three very important topics will be covered today, and I know that our community is keen to be part of the process.

To our chair, Mr McDonald, thank you very much for being here, and to all of our other MPs thank you so much for coming to Rockhampton. We have turned the weather on for you: it is another fabulous day here in Rocky. A couple of us have had to pull out our jackets because we are not used to the cool air.

This bill will help facilitate some wonderful things, including the rowing during the Olympic Games. The commitment that the Rockhampton and Central Queensland area will host the rowing has been verified and confirmed. For me, as the Assistant Minister for Central Queensland, that is a particularly exciting venture.

This is an infrastructure bill, which is very important, and it covers the infrastructure that will be part of our region as a result of that commitment. I am very excited to hear from the committee today. They will be asking questions and we will also hear from people who have put in submissions addressing other components of the bill such as the environment, which we are very passionate about here in the regions. We want to make sure the impacts on our future community—our children and our children's children—are as minor as possible but that our community benefits socially, economically and in a sustainable way. I welcome you all here. Thank you so much for being in Rockhampton. I look forward to the proceedings.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much for that, Donna. The purpose of this morning's hearing in Rockhampton is to assist the committee with its examination of the Planning (Social Impact and Community Benefit) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. The bill was referred to the committee for detailed consideration and report. This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only committee members and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. I also remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee.

These proceedings are being recorded by Hansard. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and the chair's direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. Please turn your mobile phones off or put them on silent. Thank you.

**GODINA, Mr Alex, Head of Development, Cubico Sustainable Investments**

**QUINNELL, Mr Shane, Head of Development, WestWind Energy**

**VERMEY, Mr Damian, Head of Development, Ark Energy**

**CHAIR:** Thank you for being here today. You may each make an opening statement and then the committee will have questions for you.

**Mr Quinnell:** Thank you, Chair and committee, for this opportunity to discuss the bill. I began my career up the road at Queensland's Middelmount coalmine, having graduated from the University of Queensland. Many mates are tradies and professionals working on mining, gas and energy projects across the state. For 13 years I have developed wind, solar and battery projects with farmers and communities. I work for WestWind because we deliver commercial projects that respect people and the environment. We are one of Australia's top developers and are half owned by Shell.

WestWind supports the community intent behind the bill. We always have. We have worked with Queenslanders to offer genuine benefits years before they were mandated. Our team and executives spend time in the regions with councils and communities. We have an office in Roma dedicated to community engagement. We acknowledge there are impacts with regard to renewables which we need to work with community on. While we support the bill's intent, recent changes have been tough. Policy has shifted rapidly without proper consultation or transition periods, even for approved projects. Respectfully, claims that the bill simply aligns renewables with other sectors are not correct. Mining projects do not require binding benefit agreements before permit application—a position three-quarters of published council submissions do not agree with. Appeals rights are broader than for agriculture or petroleum, and the unintended consequences are real. Projects are stalling and, unless revised, this bill will significantly delay most Queensland renewables—risking jobs, investment and urgent new generation. Queenslanders fear losing renewable jobs. Farmers fear losing income. CEOs, like Rio Tinto's, agonise over keeping major operations powered. Many councils agonise over resourcing new requirements.

Developing renewables is risky, grid connections are scarce, permitting takes years and tens of millions are spent years before any returns are realised. Many projects never succeed. Investor confidence is plummeting. Queensland Renewable Energy Council's April survey shows policy stability—once a key attractor—is now investors' biggest concern. As energy demand rises, Queensland urgently needs new generation to meet the government's target of being Australia's energy anchor. With the cost of living being Australians' biggest fear, renewable energy offers the cheapest way to power Queensland's homes and keep its industries open and provides high-paying jobs for Queenslanders.

To unlock this we need stable, pragmatic, whole-of-government policy as well as clear targets, appropriate transition periods and timely consultation. We are not asking for subsidies or favours, just bill refinements. We suggest the focus be on: one, refining benefit agreements, timing and scope; two, removing retrospectivity and clarifying transitional arrangements; and, three, simplifying public notice to reduce duplication and fatigue. We ask the committee to support these changes to help deliver the outcomes Queenslanders deserve. The Treasurer and energy minister has said that Queensland is open for business. We are here today to show that we are too. For the benefit of all Queenslanders, let's work together. Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Shane.

**Mr Godina:** Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Planning (Social Impact and Community Benefit) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. Cubico, as a global renewable energy investor, developer and long-term owner-operator, has a strong and ongoing presence in Queensland, including the Wambo Wind Farm, which is currently under construction and about to start generating energy, and a portfolio of approximately four gigawatts of other development opportunities in Queensland. Cubico is owned by two Canadian pension funds—PSP Investments and Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan—which contribute to the energy mix across renewables, oil and gas, hydrogen and nuclear.

Strong and robust community engagement align with Cubico's approach to development, with a great focus on transparent and proactive engagement with key stakeholders. We conduct early and ongoing consultation with local landowners, traditional owners, councils and community groups to both assess the social impacts and develop tailored community benefit initiatives. Whilst supporting the intent of strengthening these frameworks, Cubico does not support some parts of the legislation

that may cause confusion or delay and do not help achieve best outcomes for community and stakeholders. These key areas are: the retrospectivity of legislation, the insufficient detail on the community benefit agreement in timing and scope; and the broadening of appeal rights.

Retrospectivity in legislation has the ability to undermine industry and investor confidence, adding uncertainty and hesitancy with the fundamentals of the development process. We encourage the government to consider transitional provisions that allow renewable energy projects already well advanced in their planning to continue progressing with certainty and minimal disruption. Projects already well advanced in the planning pipeline have undergone state assessment over many months—and in some cases years—and in many cases have proactively addressed the intent of the social impact assessment and community benefit agreement framework. Requiring these projects to revisit assessments or duplicate efforts could be unnecessary and counterproductive. Recognising the substantial work and community engagement already completed will help ensure continuity, reward proactive planning and facilitate the timely delivery of clean energy infrastructure aligned with the intent of the proposed reforms.

We understand appeal rights for stakeholders is a valid process in ensuring projects are assessed fairly and interrogated properly through the planning system. It is important to have procedural fairness where the people who have been impacted have the ability to appeal on valid concerns; however, it is dangerous to open this pathway for appeals driven by ideological beliefs of third parties which are not directly impacted.

Well planned renewable energy projects can be beneficial to the community and have a comparable, or lesser, impact to other important undertakings such as broadacre farming; building roads, highways and rail; residential projects; mining; and gas and other energy production. It is important for all these projects to balance the impacts of the benefits on the broader community as well as to acknowledge that renewables can balance coexistence very well—for example, windfarms taking up marginal farming land and being able to coexist with mining and gas.

Cubico encourages robust and ongoing consultation with industry on these key reforms, including the Queensland Renewable Energy Council, with their positive leadership on the matter. We want to work with government to deliver lasting community benefit, ensuring our frameworks are practical and do not bring unnecessary burden on industry, local governments and the broader community. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

**Mr Vermeij:** Thank you to the committee members for the opportunity to speak today. Ark Energy specialises in the development and operation of renewable energy generation assets, battery energy storage systems and renewable hydrogen. It is an Australian subsidiary of global refiner Korea Zinc and sister company to the Sun Metals refinery in Townsville. Ark Energy's purpose is to deliver renewable generation to decarbonise the operations of Korea Zinc and Sun Metals and other major industrial customers and to deliver to the Australian National Electricity Market. Ark Energy have projects in Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania, including a large wind energy project in very early development about 100 kilometres outside of Rockhampton, near Marlborough. This project, the Boomer Green Energy Hub, is proposed for several pastoral landholdings as an opportunity for coexistence with grazing and would supply renewable electricity to the Queensland grid.

Firstly and most importantly, Ark Energy absolutely agrees that local communities should be consulted from the early stages of a proposed project. We established a local information centre here in Rockhampton in 2023 for that reason. We also agree that proponents should deliver tangible, meaningful benefits to host communities. Our approach to local stakeholders is consistent across our projects, regardless of the jurisdiction, and is based on two key objectives: facilitating participation and delivering meaningful, contextually appropriate benefits. So we agree with the intent of the amendment bill and support the requirements to assess social impacts and contribute to host communities.

Our main concerns with the changes as proposed are two key aspects. The first is the timing of requiring a final benefit agreement before lodging a DA. This is impractical and likely to add significant unnecessary costs and delays to the pre-approval process, which is already long and expensive. Well-considered benefit programs take time and resources to design. Delivery is contingent on a project proceeding, and implementation typically commences from the start of construction, which is 12 to 18 months after the development consent is granted. While time could be spent researching and developing a potential scope for benefits in the earlier stage of a proposal, we suggest it makes more sense and is more efficient for everyone involved—proponents, councils and other community stakeholders—to finalise and execute an agreement after a DA has been approved,

when there is certainty that the project can proceed and more clarity on what that project involves. We consider that adding a social impact assessment to the requirements for a DA but making a community benefit agreement a condition of development consent and required prior to construction is a more practical approach and will achieve the intended outcomes.

The second concern we have is the absence of guardrails and guidance for community benefit agreements. This is required for investor certainty to manage expectations and ensure the timely delivery of outcomes that are fair and consistent, consider input from various local stakeholders, enable collaboration between proponents for delivery of benefits at greater scale and will directly benefit the communities that are impacted. Generally, proponents want to deliver tangible, meaningful local benefits. We respectfully request and encourage further consultation with industry on these reforms to ensure they are practical and meet the collective desire to maximise the opportunities presented by renewable energy projects for host communities. Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thanks, Damian. As customary, I will go to the deputy chair for the first question.

**Ms BUSH:** Thank you, Chair. Shane, Alex and Damian, thank you for coming along today. As always, we never have enough time with stakeholders, so I might start with a bit of a macro kind of question, if that is okay, to kick us off. You have given us some detail, but can you just take me through a bit of a snapshot of each of your organisations? How long have you been operating in Queensland? How many projects are completed or underway? What kind of energy output will that deliver? How many homes will that power? What types of investments have you made in capital and in terms of community benefit, just so I can get a sense of the contribution so far?

**Mr Quinnell:** Westwind has been in Queensland for approximately three-plus years. We are one of Australia's leading developers and to date we have about two gigawatts of wind energy projects which have reached construction operations. That includes the Golden Plains Wind Farm, which is now the largest wind farm in the Southern Hemisphere at about 1.3 gigawatts. Here in Queensland specifically, we have two main projects and then other earlier stage projects. The two specific projects are: the Bottle Tree Energy Park, which is down in the Maranoa region, near Roma; and the Cameron Downs Energy Park, which is up near Hughenden. Between those two projects, we are looking at about two gigawatts of generation across all stages. What that translates to is around \$5 billion in investment and about a thousand jobs across all stages. It also translates to about \$58 million to the Queensland government, just from the Queensland levy alone. In terms of that capacity, we are looking at the ability to power around 40 per cent of the residences in Queensland with energy for a period of about 30 to 35 years.

In terms of community benefits, we have various things. We have community benefit funds that we set up in our projects. Typically, that is about \$2,000 per turbine for the project per year. For our projects we have that set up. Then we also have neighbour benefit funds that are set up to share the benefits of those projects with neighbours. Just to come back to something that I mentioned in my earlier address, all of these community benefit funds and schemes were set up long before they were mandated as part of this recent bill, so Westwind very much does support that community-minded intent.

**Mr Godina:** Cubico has been in Australia since 2019 and their first project was actually in Queensland. That is the Wambo Wind Farm, which is currently under construction, with 500 megawatts which can power up to about 300,000 homes. The first stages will be commissioned shortly, so that project will start generating. We have a pipeline of Queensland projects that is quite large. Queensland has been our focus since joining Australia. We have about another seven wind farms in Queensland under development, with our two most progressed projects being the Middle Creek and Marmadua projects currently in the planning system. They were actually under proposed call-in by the minister, expecting a response this month. Those projects are also quite large—up to 1.4 gigawatts for Middle Creek and 700 megawatts at Marmadua.

On community benefit, I think our focus with all of these projects in the Western Downs region has really been working collaboratively with council, so that has been a real focus of Cubico and a great relationship to have. Our focus is on partnering with them and hearing what they need in the region to guide how to deliver benefit to the community. For those two projects in planning, we have a heads of terms on how we come to agreements, similar to up-fronting some of the work under the new legislation. We have done some of that work in coming to agreement with council. Particularly with that council, some of their key concerns are accommodation for the temporary workforce and roads, so that is something we like to work through in the early-stage development processes with council and obviously community.

The Wambo Wind Farm has already been delivering community benefits whilst in construction—delivering \$100,000 every year which has gone to a lot of things like flood resilience in certain times with issues out there but also helping for health care, transportation and giving to the community in terms of sporting and other clubs. This is a framework we will replicate and grow on for all of our development projects, starting in Western Downs but also other opportunities we have in Queensland.

**Mr Vermeij:** Ark Energy were established in 2022, so they bought out Epuron, so Epuron was the previous developer. Along with coming from Epuron, we have about eight gigawatts of projects throughout Australia but about four gigawatts of proposed developments in Queensland. Two key ones that we have under development at the moment are, as I mentioned, the Boomer Green Energy Hub, just 100 kilometres north-west of here, and the Collinsville hub, which is a proposed two-gigawatt wind farm which would also potentially tee into hydrogen developments in Bowen, where we are looking at hydrogen and ammonia export.

Ark Energy also are 30 per cent owners of the MacIntyre Wind Farm, which is an over-900-megawatt farm—the largest wind farm in the Southern Hemisphere. I suppose we have been contributing for quite a while and will continue to work through where we are at at the moment, the key one being Boomer that we are trying to get up by submitting our EIS by the end of this year. We have started our social impact assessment on that and met with each of the councils and are working through, let alone the landowners and also the traditional owners, that development but in progress as we are progressing through with those.

**Ms BUSH:** Alex, you mentioned that you are negotiating the community benefits through council. Does council then take the lead role in engaging with residents on that? Who leads that part of it? Do they define the benefit or do residents get to define the benefits?

**Mr Godina:** It is a collaborative approach with both. Ultimately it is our decision, but we want to return the benefit to where it is best placed, so council and residents are the key stakeholders in that process.

**Ms BUSH:** Understood. Thank you.

**Mr KEMPTON:** You say that a community benefit agreement should be a condition of the approval rather than the prerequisite, but the problem I see with that is that the whole community benefit is at the key of this legislation and important, of course, but if you leave it until after the application is lodged then, surely, you are giving the community some kind of a veto over the future progress. Surely, you want to know that that is a clear requirement met before you spend the money on an application and all those things subsequent. I would see that as actually speeding the process up, not slowing it down.

**Mr Quinnell:** I think that is a really relevant point. What I might point towards is that this discussion around community benefits has been playing out for quite a long time over different states around Australia. For example, in New South Wales last year there were community guidelines released for the specific purpose of aligning local governments, industry and communities—in effect, trying to set a common ground and a common understanding.

The way that this is now managed in New South Wales, for instance, is that there is a guideline in terms of the amount that is set aside per megawatt for different technologies—so in this case for wind and solar. The way they have set it up is that they expect developers at the time of submission to provide clear guidance on the way the community benefit scheme or benefit agreement is set up. For example, that can look like a heads of terms with the local council or it can look like a very clear description of the way that is set out—the funding mechanisms, the total amounts et cetera. Then that binding agreement is only required as a post lodgement or a post-approval stage. What that does is enable very clear agreement to the key terms pre lodgement, to provide certainty for all stakeholders, and then, potentially as a condition of consent, mandates the requirement to actually adhere to those things that are set out. By having that dual-stage process or few stage process, it enables clarity but it also enables projects to keep moving. Finally, one of the things I am really cognisant of is that there are a lot of councils out there that will need to resource these requirements, and what it enables is councils to have a longer period to work with developers.

**Mr Godina:** I would just reiterate what Shane said. It is very similar to other impact assessments that we go through when doing a development application where studies are done and commitments are made through the application stage and then there are things to be addressed through the conditions of approval. That relates to management plans and it relates to contractual arrangements, so this could be another one of those. As Shane said, it can be somewhat premature to try to lock things in at the development application stage because that can still be very early

development and there is a lot to play out across stakeholder engagement—so obviously continuing to get the feedback through the process so you are not locking in anything too early. Yes, I think that can be well addressed in the conditions of consent.

**Mr Vermey:** Yes, similar. The issue is: you do not have the exact number of the turbines finalised until, really, you are getting those final inputs from the state and also the Commonwealth. Once you have that final number, then you can lock in going forward. I agree with the potential to scope it up and get it all ready—almost those interim agreements but then in finalisation post the other side of it.

**Mr MELLISH:** To Alex from Cubico, I note your submission raised a few concerns about how the bill will apply to projects already well advanced in planning. Do you have an idea of what that means in terms of timeframe delay or timeframe uncertainty on existing projects you may have?

**Mr Godina:** The main point is there is uncertainty. Our understanding is that if this bill passes as is projects that are already in the planning scheme will go back to the start of assessment. We have two projects in that category. They lodged DAs in December last year and are under proposed call in by the minister. We have completed a lot of that work. Social impact assessment has been done. The community benefit framework has been agreed with council, and we have engaged with the community, so to go back to the start of that process, we are somewhat double handling it. It would be confusing for the community. We would be going through statutory processes that have somewhat already been completed, and timing-wise it is unknown.

Queensland DAs were being approved within six to nine months, so assuming there is a bit more work to be done moving forward, which I think we have all agreed is fair enough, but that could mean a year of delay to a project like this, and the risk of a delay like that flows through to all areas. Obviously, with more uncertainty on the DA side, it is harder to commit to works with council with the community. It is harder to progress the grid connection stream with Powerlink. It is harder to get contracting things done. With regard to the two projects we have, we are hoping to go to construction as early 2027, so this would present a pretty significant time delay.

**Mr MELLISH:** Damien or Shane, is that a similar experience for your projects, whether they are at a similar stage or not?

**Mr Vermey:** We do not have any projects under DA at the moment, as outlined in our submission, but the intention was that, for Boomer, we were intending to put that in later this year, but I think we will be assessing to see what the timing is. Our intention was to submit and hope for approval, starting construction in 2027. That potentially could go out. I suppose it is under consideration how far we progress with that.

**Mr Quinnell:** To mirror the sentiments that have been expressed, one of the things to be aware of, on my understanding of the new bill, is that it will apply to projects that go through effectively another change process. If you have an approved project, there are two processes under which you can change or amend an application or approval. If it goes through the other change, it would effectively get captured. One of the things to be aware of is that a lot of the projects that have gone through are likely to have community benefit schemes, for example, which have been set up, but they just may not match the exact framework. So, if those projects are approved and need to go through another change, they potentially will then go back into the negotiation process. It is quite similar to how the negotiations with, for example, First Nations people happen here in Queensland, which is completely parallel to the planning process. Those negotiations can take 12 to 24 months to conclude.

**Mr JAMES:** Shane, in your opening statement you mention that there is no need for binding agreements, with the emphasis on 'binding'. Can you elaborate on that?

**Mr Quinnell:** Yes. Just to be clear, there is a need for binding agreements. The only thing that I am looking to clarify is the timing of that nature. From my perspective, and going back to the New South Wales example, it would be that developers, industry, community and local governments should be able to get to the point of having the concepts underpinning agreements by the time that lodgement happens, but that that binding agreement can actually come slightly later to enable (a) a longer period to discuss and negotiate, and (b) projects to keep moving.

The other thing there, and going back to a point that the other guys made earlier, is that projects often are still relatively flexible at that time, and allowing that actual binding agreement later, in our opinion, will probably get to better outcomes for the community and for local governments because it is much clearer as to what the real impacts are. So, you do your social impact assessment early which then should dovetail directly into the community benefits agreement.

**Mr JAMES:** So it is a condition of your DA approval?

**Mr Quinnell:** Yes. I suppose it is up for discussion in terms of exactly what that looks like, but a condition of the DA approval is one example. Again, I think there should be clear alignment as to the broad concepts earlier to avoid confusion or delays later on, but that timing of when it is actually executed and made binding is really just a nuance there.

**Mr WHITING:** Gentlemen, one of the themes that came through in your submissions is how the uncertainty undermines confidence in your investment. Obviously billions in investment brings thousands of jobs. Comparing the situation we have here in Queensland to what is now proposed or happening in New South Wales, does this make New South Wales potentially an already more attractive place to invest your funds?

**Mr Godina:** The short answer is yes. Fundamentally, New South Wales has a larger demand. It has higher power prices for generators; they get a higher price for their electrons. It has higher wind resources. Fundamentally, projects in New South Wales generally stack up a bit stronger. One of the advantages here was a clearer planning pipeline and a shorter time to approval. I do not think it has ever been a different amount of work; it has just been that the process has been a bit more streamlined in achieving the same outcomes that New South Wales gets. Cubico has been very strong in Queensland and, in fact, most of our projects are still in Queensland. We have none in New South Wales currently, and a few in Victoria, and I think that really shows where the investor confidence is from our side of things, where Queensland is still seen as the best state to be doing business in. Working with the government owned corporations and Powerlink, we have really positive outcomes, but delay in planning does add to the fundamentals of the competition between states.

**Mr Quinnell:** To add to Alex's themes there, in terms of the Queensland Renewable Energy Council's executive survey which I mentioned earlier, that came through in April and it is effectively a survey of the executives within the member base of the Queensland Renewable Energy Council. What that showed was that comparatively to the end of last year when that survey was last done, policy stability has jumped to the biggest concern for investors from having been, I think, No. 3 or 4 previously. What it also showed was that there was increasingly a hesitancy in terms of the environment in Queensland and the stability and how that impacted investors. In a sense, what investors really are looking for is a stable environment.

Interestingly, what it also showed, however, was that Queensland is still an exciting and interesting place in which to invest; it is just not as exciting as it was previously. One of the nuances here is that places like New South Wales, for example, are very complex places to develop and there are a lot of guidelines and requirements, but they are certain. We are not against complexity, we are not against having processes that we need to work through, it is more just that certainty and being involved in that discussion of how to achieve the best outcome. One of the ideas which may be valuable is setting up a working group with local governments and the Queensland government and industry to try to resolve some of these minor refinements in the bill.

**Mr Verney:** Queensland is still a very attractive opportunity for Ark Energy, absolutely. We have pipelines in both New South Wales and Queensland. Our intention is to make a financial investment decision on a project in New South Wales later this year. That is for a solar battery. That was our first progression. Our intention was to get into Boomer up here, and that most likely will happen: however, we do have an opportunity in New South Wales that we are further progressing as well. It is not so much the uncertainty, but, with the changes, we are keeping our options open. We still see Queensland as a very attractive opportunity.

**CHAIR:** I think it is important for us to be aware that what gets measured gets done. Whilst there is no mandatory requirement for social impact community benefits, there will be under this new legislation. Do you think this legislation will stop bad actors from not bringing the community on a journey? Can you talk to some of the things that you have had success with?

**Mr Quinnell:** Yes. To your point, again, having clear guidelines and having a clear playing field is a positive thing. Mandating community engagement is a positive thing and it is something that Westwind and the renewable energy industry supports. In terms of the way that it is built out, one of the things we need to be cognisant of is that Queensland urgently needs new generation in order to support the government's goal of being Australia's energy anchor, and renewable energy can, and basically needs to, play a very big part in that, along with gas peaking and that sort of thing. It is really just trying to find the balance of how we encourage and effectively mandate good behaviour, which a lot of the industry is already doing, and there probably are examples where that really needs to improve. I think that this bill will help baseline that. It is more about just refining the bill to make it more workable and to encourage alignment between different stakeholders and, therefore, to get outcomes for the benefit of all Queenslanders.



**Mr Godina:** Very well said by Shane. With all planning matters, no matter what they are, it is about balancing impacts with benefit, and renewable energy farms are no different. I do agree that there will be a raising of the baseline with the changes to legislation, which has been needed across this. As Shane said, a lot of developers, particularly on the larger-scale projects, have been doing it the right way for many years, but it does not mean that there are not people doing it the wrong way. That is why we certainly support the intent of these changes. I think we will continue to see the pragmatism in balancing those impacts, and it should be considered really that way because there is a lot of community benefit and need for these projects, and Queensland can continue to be a leader in progressing these projects.

**Mr Vermey:** Thank you, guys. Likewise, I say that a lot of the cowboys have been out of the industry for quite a while. There are still patches, but certainly from Ark Energy's perspective it has been important establishing offices in those areas that we want to develop, build, own and operate those assets, and that is generally where people are going with those builder-owner-operators. They are not just in as a developer and flipping off. Going through with it and being a significant part of the community for a long haul is a big step in all of our processes.

**CHAIR:** All of you mentioned in your opening addresses the timeliness of these matters. How can we make sure that we strike the right balance between speed and genuine community engagement?

**Mr Quinnell:** That is a really good question and it is a question which developers, like all of us here, work very hard on. The number of discussions that are had within organisations about benefit sharing, about social impact assessments et cetera are significant. The way we do it is we try to start that engagement as early as possible, and we try to engage with the local community in a manner which suits their needs. We utilise different tools to engage with them, take that feedback and then try to design systems which we believe will best suit their needs based on the communication that is coming back.

Also, one of my personal opinions on guidelines and benefit sharing is that there should be clear guidance, but it should be guidance which allows flexibility. One of the reasons I say that is that 'community' is a very broad term which encapsulates a whole bunch of different demographics and groups, and those groups include neighbours that live adjacent to a project. They include the community which live in the region directly next door. They include the broader region in which the project is conceptualised, and then they include local governments, First Nations peoples and the list goes on. There can be issues with mandating very strictly how a benefit-sharing agreement is set up. The best way you can create benefits is to take the feedback from a community and design a system to suit their needs. If we are mandating specific ways and percentages that have to go to specific groups, you are effectively removing that creativity and you are potentially actually limiting the positivity of outcomes.

**Mr Godina:** Again, very well said. I would add that the process drives the timeline, not the other way around. It is important to have a robust process of talking to all relevant stakeholders and giving them the time needed to come to agreements and include their feedback into the development process. In that regard, I would try not to set statutory timeframes or have processes that are proscriptive in that manner; it is really about the process and making sure all the steps are done.

**Mr Vermey:** Again, following that process, getting along. It is taking time; however, it is a timely way to get through this. We all want to set ourselves up for success. That also involves, as developers, trying to work out what areas we can help out as well, so working through with it.

**Ms BUSH:** I find myself agreeing with your questions, Chair. They are great questions. Firstly, I want to talk about engagement and consultation. I think we can all think of proponents whose consultation has not been sufficient. That is probably what has brought us to this point. My understanding is that under the former government there was some work going with industry in the Better Regulation Policy. Would you like to talk a little bit about that and how that was rolling out—the framework to try to put some clearer guardrails and guidance around, in particular, community benefit?

**Mr Godina:** Obviously, the issue with the original state code 23 is that community engagement was not really included in any meaningful way. That means that bad actors could really ignore it entirely and get approvals and then projects would be popping up to the community's surprise. The scale of those projects was usually smaller but had direct impacts on landowners and communities. There are guidelines and best practices that most of the industry have been using for some time. There is the developer code of practice that has been established with QREC and government and other guidelines—state code 23 guidelines. Again, it really is about best practice. For large-scale

projects like ours, it is also of benefit to the project to go through these steps. That is the way we have seen it at Cubico. It is not a 'tick the box' exercise. It is not doing it out of the goodness of our heart; it is establishing the way we develop projects.

**Ms BUSH:** Were you seeing that guidance shift? Did you see that that was shifting how projects were being designed and then implemented?

**Mr Godina:** I think so. As Damian said, some of the bad actors have been slowly getting out of the industry and the expectations have been shifting. The expectations of stakeholders and community have been shifting as well.

**Ms BUSH:** Were any of you consulted on this bill before it was introduced into the parliament?

**Mr Godina:** No.

**Mr Quinnell:** No.

**Mr KEMPTON:** You talk a lot about certainty for investors in this whole process. I am also interested in the landholders in this room and, in fact, the communities whose investment is generational. To bring the community with you through the process is critical, but I am wondering about what happens at the other end, at the end of life of these facilities—wind farms and solar panels. I know there are agreements to clean them up, but these companies may be not around. If I was a landholder, I would want to understand: 'If I'm going to enter into a community benefit agreement, how can I have certainty in the long term that I will, in fact, benefit and not be left with what could be a disaster to clean up?'

**Mr Quinnell:** That is a really topical point. I have personally spent a lot of time in the communities of various different regions of Queensland, for quite a long time—in this role but in particular in my last role. Decommissioning is one of the top topics that comes up when you are looking to engage with landowners in terms of securing leases and that sort of thing. You would probably be happy to hear that there is a huge amount of work being done on this. The Clean Energy Council, which is the national peak body for renewable energy, and the Queensland Renewable Energy Council, which is obviously the Queensland-specific committee, have actually set up a working group with some of the most senior members of the renewable energy industry to solve this specific problem. I am a part of that group and there are probably about 10 different industry members on that.

One of the biggest things here is that we acknowledge the community is genuinely concerned—and we acknowledge that the Queensland government is currently concerned about it—and it is something that is being actively worked on. There is actually a proposal that is due to come from both the CEC and QREC soon. No-one in the industry wants to leave a legacy of leaving a mess behind. We are really passionate about getting that right. We believe that we have some really good ideas. I think it is potentially a topic where the fear of the possibility is bigger than the reality of it. Likewise, it is something we are working on and it is something we are really passionate about solving.

**Mr Godina:** I echo Shane's points. We are also a member of that working group at Cubico. Our projects will have commitments to decommission and rehabilitate, and that will flow through the planning conditions and usually landowner contracts as well. The contracts with the landowners say that it is the responsibility of the developer, obviously in the concern that a company might not be around or might do some taxation gymnastics to get out of their obligations. There are also commitments to sort that out, whether it is through an insurance or a financial guarantee, so that the costs can be recovered regardless of who might own the project.

**Mr Vermey:** Likewise with our option agreements, there are decommissioning clauses in there. There are steps we have to take in establishing those funds up-front and then following on from the industry side of it as well.

**Mr WHITING:** Alex, you state in your submission that there would need to be an alignment of planning frameworks with the mining and resources industry once this does come through. Can you talk about the potential imbalance between your sector and the mining and resources sector if this was imposed?

**Mr Godina:** I think that is particularly around the community benefit part—the legislated need to engage with that before the submission of a development approval particularly.

**Mr WHITING:** For example, for gas and coal that hurdle is not there at this point, is that correct?

**Mr Godina:** That is as I understand it, yes.

**Mr Quinnell:** My understanding is that mining projects, for example, currently do not require binding benefit agreements pre lodgement—the distinction there being pre lodgement. Also, appeal rights in the current iteration of the bill are actually broader than for both agriculture and petroleum. If the aim is to align the playing field, it is just being aware of those nuances and trying to align it rather than set a higher bar for renewables than other sectors.

**Mr JAMES:** In terms of community benefits, you mentioned \$2,000 per turbine per year. How do you arrive at that? Do you think that is low?

**Mr Quinnell:** It is a good question. There is a huge amount of work done in the industry, day in and day out, to try to align on targets for benefit sharing. It is a complex question because how do you define the benefit that should be shared and how much is there in the budget to actually set aside? We have tried to arrive at a target which we think is reasonable and which we think adds genuine benefit to the community. It is a continual improvement process and we are constantly reviewing our benefit-sharing agreements, where we sit in market—whether we need to change or revise those. It is a continuous conversation. Currently, that has come up from what our projects can sustain and from what we think offers a genuine benefit to community.

**Mr Godina:** Obviously, that is just one delivery of community benefit. There can be community benefit fund neighbour impact payments, road upgrades and infrastructure upgrades. Then there is obviously the economic benefit of jobs, supply creation and so on. That can be in the billions of dollars over the life of the project.

**Mr Vermeij:** There are local employment opportunities as well.

**Mr Quinnell:** Alex's point is one example. In addition to that, there is a neighbour benefit scheme—we are working with the First Nations people in that area—and there are other elements. From a project point of view, when we look at community benefits and benefit sharing we just need to be cognisant that there is a bucket of resources we can provide. When we are looking at benefit sharing, I would really encourage that we look at that bucket holistically—at all of the constituent parts. Ultimately, what we are trying to achieve is a legacy of operational projects that are high performing and that leave community benefits, but if those benefits get to the point where, because of the fact that they are separate, projects start not being able to come ahead then we are not actually delivering benefit to Queenslanders.

**Ms BUSH:** I am mindful that we have not picked up on the conversation around the threshold for solar, which I think is set at one megawatt. One of the submissions—it might have been the Clean Energy Council—picked up that a mining company that has a footprint of 2,000 square hectares is not impact assessable but what could be the equivalent of rooftop solar at one megawatt would be. Shane, are you involved in solar? Do you want to speak to that threshold?

**Mr Quinnell:** To be clear, I am not currently involved in solar but in my last role I was the state manager for a solar developer so I can definitely talk to it. The nuance here is that, currently, the threshold in the bill is set at one megawatt. A one-megawatt solar farm constitutes about a two-hectare impact, so it is about two to one. To your point, there was a submission which indicated that, for example, a mining project which I believe is two megatonnes per annum is not required to go through this impact assessability. There is a mine site in Queensland which I understand is around 2,000 hectares which therefore would not fall into this category while your two-hectare solar farm would.

Stepping away from trying to compare industries, however, I think the key focus here should be on what we are trying to achieve for Queensland. To give you an example, one of the places where I see smaller solar farms and smaller battery projects as particularly relevant is for mine sites or gas projects to enable their operations in a more stable and reliable manner at a cheaper cost to those operators. If you have a one-megawatt solar farm getting wrapped into a state process, you may have mine sites or gas operators that are looking to set up projects, whether it be to reduce emissions, to reduce costs or to increase stability. They may be very far away from population centres with, for example, a 100,000-hectare piece of land that they own. If they put on a one-megawatt solar farm it would have objectively very little impact, but because that threshold is so low they do not make that decision. My recommendation, having worked a lot on solar and having worked a lot on trying to accommodate solar onto mine sites and gas projects and that sort of thing, would be to increase that threshold. That will allow more flexibility for companies to consider solar and those sorts of technologies in order to power their operations which then benefits Queensland jobs and benefits the transition.

**Ms BUSH:** What would you set it to? What would be reasonable?

**Mr Quinnell:** It is a good question. There are a couple of ways of thinking about this. New South Wales, for example, use a \$30 million capex as their threshold. That constitutes probably a 20-megawatt project. I personally think that is quite sensible because it is the kind of project that a mine site or a gas project might consider. Five megawatts is another threshold you could look at because that is where the Australian Energy Market Operator turns from what is called non-scheduled to either semi-scheduled or scheduled generators. The issue there is that a lot of the solar farms that will be considered at around the 20-megawatt mark are probably not even connecting onto the National Electricity Market; they are actually connecting directly to mine sites. Therefore, if you set it as a state process, you would effectively be setting a timeline that is non-commensurate with any other part of that project.

**Ms BUSH:** That makes sense. Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Renewables are obviously important for our community but so are affordability and reliability. Can we make sure that Queenslanders have certainty over reliability and affordability?

**Mr Godina:** Obviously, the key factor there is supply and demand. The demand is going to increase over the next 30 years quite markedly. Any supply will help drive electricity prices lower. We know that it has to be a mix of different electricity, and renewables are not going to come in and take over 100 per cent. It really will be a transition to a greater mix and more diverse generation across the state and the country. It is still showing that renewable is the cheapest source of generation at the moment. I think that is a good addition to the mix in terms of helping meet the supply and lowering costs.

**Mr Quinnell:** One of the things to be aware of is that the energy system, like any other system, is made up of a mix of a lot of different generation technologies. Just to be clear, no-one in the industry is advocating for renewable energy to become 100 per cent because that would actually lead to a cost outcome which is not beneficial. What we are suggesting is that, by renewables increasing in the energy mix and becoming sort of a major fuel source—along with, for example, gas for peaking purposes—because of the levelised cost of energy of renewables being lower than your other technologies, you are actually looking at a lower cost future. Currently, cost of living is Australians' biggest concern, so for us that ability to ensure lower cost of energy is actually a really good story.

**Mr Vermeij:** Reflecting on what both Shane and Alex are saying, we are looking for that big mix. We know that is an important part of this. We are still working through with coal at the moment and progressing along. Renewables, with the coal and the gas side of things—looking at all opportunities—is critical for the whole market.

**Mr KEMPTON:** Is this legislation timely?

**Mr Quinnell:** I think it is beneficial for the industry and for stakeholders to align in community engagement. I think that is a great thing. With some minor refinements, I think it will be beneficial.

**Mr Godina:** Same. I think the devil is in the detail. The intent of the changes are really good, but it is about making sure that it does not come in and accidentally block process.

**Mr Vermeij:** Absolutely. We are doing a lot of the community benefit already, but it is bringing a bit more structure in so it is timely.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, gentlemen. The time for this session has now expired. No questions were taken on notice so you are free to go about your day. Thank you for appearing before the committee. We appreciate your evidence.

**DENDLE, Mr Cale, Chief Executive Officer, Isaac Regional Council**

**VEA VEA, Ms Kelly, Mayor, Isaac Regional Council**

**CHAIR:** Thank you for travelling 4½ hours to be here, Mayor Kelly and Cale. You may make an opening statement and then the committee will have some questions for you.

**Ms Vea Vea:** Thank you so much for the opportunity to present to the committee today. I also acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered. I acknowledge all the people in attendance, in particular landholders who are working with the industry today, members of the industry and also members of my own council who are here in the gallery.

The Isaac region is home to 35 operating coalmines. We have six currently under expansion. We have 12 approved renewable projects. We have another seven in the pipeline. We also host the gas industry. We are home to Australia's second largest cattle herd. Out where we are, we really are the interface of industry and major projects. We are where the rubber hits the road. What we are seeing out there is that we are not watching energy transition from the sidelines; we are actually in it. We are seeing wind and solar farms that are built beside and on cattle stations. We are seeing batteries proposed across rural landscapes. Energy corridors are reshaping how the land is used, where people work and how and if our communities grow.

In Isaac, we do welcome renewable investment but the speed, scale and complexity of the transition is running well ahead of the rules meant to manage it. Currently, our regions have no tools or framework to guide development, minimise impacts or maximise benefit for the people and communities that are at the forefront of the renewables boom. Our region, as I said, has 12 approved renewable projects and seven in the pipeline. Our first battery project was approved last Wednesday and we have 10 more that are currently being scoped. Even if six out of the 10 battery storage projects come online, with our wind and solar projects our region is set to generate enough power for over one million homes here in Australia. This level of development is significant. The impacts on the ground are significant, but the legislative framework has not kept up. That is despite having to deal with workforce impacts, housing pressures, new large-scale construction camps that are really isolated and require multiple services from communities, infrastructure demands, impacts and the community concern.

We currently have no formal power to enforce social or community benefit commitments and many developments continue without clear or consistent expectations around how they will contribute to the regions and where their projects are being built, and that is to the detriment of the communities and it is also to the detriment of the industry. The lack of consistency and transparency around consultation, approvals and benefit schemes has resulted in a lot of communities, councils and families being divided, mistrusting and unsupportive.

When I talk about consultation, I really want to highlight that in our world consultation is a two-way conversation, not to be confused with information sessions that people turn up for. Genuine consultation means that we have the ability to influence an outcome.

The Isaac Regional Council acknowledges and thanks the Queensland government for its work on this legislation. We have been putting motions to the LGAQ conference for years on the community benefit agreement side of things when it comes to the renewables sector. I think it is important that as resource councils we take into consideration what we have learned from hosting mining booms and large-scale rapid project approvals. What we know is that these amendments to the Planning Act will not stifle the renewable industry. This is just about creating clear and consistent guidelines that give everyone a seat at the table and where everyone really knows the rules of the game. We did it before when we implemented the Strong and Sustainable Resource Communities Act and we have seen the benefit of legislating social impact assessments. Therefore, we do support the inclusion of formalised community benefit agreements when it comes to renewables.

In our submission, our council is calling for 14 targeted reforms. Our recommendations are simple and we think they are fair. No. 1: councils must be recognised as concurrence agencies for projects that require a social impact assessment because we know that our community should have a formal voice in shaping how these projects land. Local councils are not just another community group stakeholder in the project; councils also must be able to enforce community benefit or social impact conditions. Where we do not have capacity to do so, there has to be a clear pathway to escalate those matters to the state and receive timely support.

There must be consequences for companies that fail to deliver on their community benefit agreements. That includes the option to suspend approvals, apply penalties or publicly disclose noncompliance. That is in keeping with having a tangible social licence in the community in which you operate. We know that communities deserve more than good intentions. They deserve guarantees when it comes to large-scale projects.

A standard benefit agreement template, clear guidance on contributions based on megawatt or capital expenditure and a mandated compensation structure for people living closest to the projects should also tier out to the surrounding neighbourhoods so that we lessen the divisiveness of the current framework and then, obviously, into the broader community benefit agreements. This is about smoothing the benefit process so that we can take away the winners and losers that are literally neighbours, in this instance. We also believe strongly that SIA frameworks should be consistent across all commodities. Whether it is mining, critical minerals, hydroelectricity, wind or solar, social impact assessments should be consistent and clear for the benefit of the communities that are participating in them and clear for the expectations of the industries as well. We feel that is what policy stability really looks like.

These planning amendments are not about stopping projects. It is about managing them responsibly and enabling industry to have a social licence framework that is clear for them. These amendments are about making sure regions powering Australia's clean energy future are not left behind, that we are not left out of the conversation and that we are not left footing the bill for Australia's energy transition. Thank you. We are happy to take questions.

**Ms BUSH:** Thank you, Mayor. That was a fantastic opening and thanks for representing your community. Before I ask my question, I want to check whether you were consulted on the bill or saw an preview of the bill prior to its introduction into parliament?

**Ms Vea Vea:** There was consultation. I know my CEO and councils had discussions around it. Also, the concept has been communicated across resource councils and it has been a conversation piece around councils for years.

**Ms BUSH:** Not the concept; the bill itself.

**Mr Dendle:** Yes, there was some structured and unstructured consultation on things, both from the planning department that gathered a group of council planners together and also some consultation with a number of council CEOs and other executives across the state.

**Ms BUSH:** When did that happen? What was the timeline for that?

**Mr Dendle:** In the last few months.

**CHAIR:** This bill addresses a number of LGAQ conference motions. It was obviously our government's election commitment. How do the new laws help to reframe the planning partnership between the state and local councils in terms of clarity and certainty for all stakeholders?

**Mr Dendle:** It is against a background of councils being development assessment authorities in their own right and having a relationship with the state where state agencies that might have interests in particular proposals not only engage the stakeholders but also are concurrence agencies. If I use, for example, a development that might be going on next door to a main road, the main roads department, as a concurrence agency, will provide the council, as the ultimate decision-maker, with conditions that must be applied to that development approval, whether or not the council agrees with them as the ultimate decision authority. Whether the council agrees or not, those are applied. In our submission, we see an opportunity for a reciprocal arrangement to exist whereby the local authority, on behalf of the local community, might be treated in a similar way where agreements that are reached, as is proposed in the bill, or other matters that the council wants to bring to that particular approval process are treated in an equivalent way and not just as another stakeholder.

**CHAIR:** Do you have anything to add?

**Ms Vea Vea:** No, I think Cale got that one.

**Mr MELLISH:** Thanks, Mayor and your council, for your very detail submission. It was very useful to read through that. I note in your submission you raise concerns about the administrative burden placed on councils. Are you able to expand on what that means for your day-to-day operations in terms of what the bill proposes and perhaps what it means for councils that are not your size and with your capability?

**Ms Vea Ve:** We understand that this is, again, a new service that will need to be provided in terms of project approvals for our councils. In our experience, during the last mining boom this was no different and it is no different really for any of the other regional councils that will be at the forefront of the critical minerals industry that develops up in the North West Minerals Province. It will be no different for any council at this point that has any major project at their fingertips.

In our experience, there are different ways that we can resource this. I think that would be a great collaborative discussion to have between industries and the state. We have gone through many iterations in our council. We had shared resources between our council and Central Highlands during the mining boom. We have had companies that fund positions within our council when they are projects of state significance. For example, the opening of the Galilee Basin was largely funded by mining companies—the position within our council. That gave us the ability to negotiate a better outcome on behalf of the communities it impacted. We believe that the local government sector can collate a number of options for councils. We note that entering into community benefit agreements is not mandatory for councils; it is optional in this bill.

**Mr KEMPTON:** Mayor, thanks for that presentation. The previous presenters suggested that council might have a role in facilitating these community benefit agreements. I see you perhaps as a stakeholder, but how do you feel about taking on that responsibility?

**Ms Ve:** I think we need to be careful not to shift burdens onto local councils for the delivery of company community benefit agreements. There has to be an understanding about what our roles and responsibilities are and we do see this in the mining sector. Our job is to equip councils with their capacity to respond meaningfully on behalf of communities, but not necessarily deliver the projects. I think that is why having a community benefit agreement is important because then we have an understanding about who does what.

The issue that we are experiencing with a lot of the renewables projects is that they are out in rural areas and the community benefit agreements should involve a number of large infrastructure contributions. It should be clear about who is responsible for delivering those and what funding is available. That is always a combination of local and state governments and companies. The agreements should clarify but not shift the burden onto local councils to be the deliverer of their commitments.

**Mr WHITING:** One of the things you talked about is that obviously the CBAs are the key. You mentioned that under the previous government there was the Strong and Sustainable Resource Communities Act. Is there a template in there? What has been your experience with the CBAs drawn up under that act?

**Ms Ve:** Absolutely. The Strong and Sustainable Resource Communities Act was a game changer when it came to communities having a seat at the table for large-scale projects. We are pleased to see that the CBAs really do reflect that social impact assessment framework template. There are currently five pillars in that framework: workforce strategy, accommodation strategy, community consultation, community health and wellbeing, and local procurement policies. They are the pillars that we discuss for mining projects should be all responded to collaboratively by companies and communities to get an outcome. We would suggest that in this iteration we update that template to pull out infrastructure agreements as the sixth pillar in the new CBA framework. These projects are being delivered out in rural areas, as I mentioned. The investment in road networks and telecommunications connectivity is what legacy really looks like in these areas, so it is about pulling them into its own separate pillar so that communities can understand what the legacy projects coming from a new renewable project could look like.

We do keep in mind as well that, in terms of our work currently in our area, particularly around the Clarke Creek area, we have had a lot of growth in renewable projects. There is a willingness at the moment for companies that have projects in play to come together and look at some of those larger legacy outcomes that we would like to see there for communities. We appreciate that the scope and scale of some of those investments might be beyond what a single company could deliver. Therefore, it should be open to have community benefit agreements that take into account the cumulative impact and cumulative benefits from companies that are developing in certain areas. The feedback from the industry itself is really positive about that.

**Mr WHITING:** Those CBAs were arrived at after the project was approved. One of the things that presenters talked about earlier was that, instead of it being up-front, the requirement to do that comes as part of the approval. Those ones that have already been delivered have been part of the approval given to those projects; am I correct?

**Ms Vea Ve:** That has come after, yes. What I would not do is rely on the social conscience of any company in an area once they have approval to then retrospectively go back and create community benefit. We support the idea of there being clear and binding understanding about what projects bring up-front of renewable or mining projects.

I would like to clarify that the difference in this aspect between mining and renewables is that leased mining areas are known to communities for years in advance; you can google them now. We all know when new exploration areas are opened up, but we do not know when new renewable projects are popping up. I think that is the difference in terms of front-ending a renewable project, because you do not have time to gather community sentiment as you do with mining leases. I think communities should have the opportunity to give that feedback very clearly as to whether or not it is appropriate to be developing in that space. In the mining projects we have years to do that. That would be the difference from my perspective in front-ending the renewables.

**Mr WHITING:** Are those projects happening, therefore, outside the renewable energy zone, because there were renewable energy zones set up throughout Queensland under the former government and that gives some prior knowledge? Are the projects happening outside those zones?

**Ms Ve Ve:** Projects are on private land. Projects are on identified areas. Projects are dependent on agreements with landholders. They are in state government spaces. There is broad zoning being put in place, but that does not give a lot of understanding to the broader community about what is coming. One of our requests has been for the state government to develop a portal where projects are uploaded so we can keep track of what is in the pipeline and what is coming, because often they are commercial-in-confidence agreements for a long period.

**Mr JAMES:** You make your points very well. You welcome clear and consistent guidelines. Do you have any suggestions on how that process might take place, be it facilitated by the state or even the LGAQ, for example?

**Ms Ve Ve:** I think everyone has a role in this. I will begin and I think Cale has something to add. What we did learn out of the development of the SSRC Act is that realising the full value of meaningful legislation means everyone has a role to play and it is everyone knowing it. I would see that the LGAQ's role would be about working with local councils to ensure that we all understand how to meaningfully contribute to the CBAs, that we all understand how to articulate not what we do not want in communities but what we do want to see with regard to social licence. I think the state government has a role to play in developing the guidelines and template for developers so that they have clarity and consistency. Everyone will have a role to play in the implementation. I will hand over to Cale.

**Mr Dendle:** The basis of our recommendation 12 about there being a suite of reference materials available, both for local authorities and for developers, is to provide that certainty. In response to your question, yes, if we were asked I think we could develop something fairly readily, but we see it as being a joint exercise between the Queensland government, the development sector, their representative bodies, with whom we engage fairly regularly and have already had some discussions down this path, and also the Local Government Association representing local government across Queensland.

**Ms BUSH:** Some of the submissions have raised the lost opportunity perhaps in the current bill that assessments are made on a case-by-case or project-by-project basis and it removes the power of councils and proponents to look at a regional level and to leverage funds and leverage investment opportunities to deliver for a whole community rather than taking piecemeal approaches. Do you see value in perhaps looking at more of a landscape or regional level assessment rather than taking a project-by-project approach?

**Ms Ve Ve:** From our experience with the way it currently sits, with the planning approvals sitting under councils, we actually have no capacity at the moment outside of the willingness of companies to enter into agreements. We have no tools to create broader benefit or even isolated benefit when it comes to projects. In our region we have not had a great experience in creating legacy and outcome. I think there is an appetite for the industry to work collectively and collaboratively. I do not see that the CBA is being restrictive of that. I think it just identifies and clarifies for each company and each community who is doing what in that scenario.

I think we have seen some positive movement in the North West Minerals Province with the state government doing some social baseline planning for that area so that companies up there can buy in to a broader picture. I think we can replicate that across renewable energy zones so that



companies are not charged with reinventing the wheel for every project. There are methods to make it simpler and more consistent, but it would be a collaborative effort for state and local governments and companies to set that up.

**Ms BUSH:** What I am asking is not so much the status quo. Under this bill, obligating project proponents to do the community benefit engagement work before lodgement is going to, in reality, result in numerous agencies coming out to your people and to you engaging and trying to get these agreements in place before they have even lodged and know if they are going to be approved. There is no opportunity to really work together to look at a long-term plan and there is a real issue of stakeholder fatigue that has been raised. I wanted to flag that and get your feedback on whether you agree with that.

**Ms Vea Vea:** I agree that is important. Our area has been fatigued by consultation for the last six years. That is where creating a social impact assessment baseline for an area, like has been done in the North West Minerals Province, takes the onus off companies having to do that over and over again. Then that region has a baseline for companies and community to work from. There are already ways we can streamline the process and remove replication to try to mitigate fatigue.

There is no denying that, if you are in an area of large-scale project development, consultation fatigue will play a role. It is important to recognise—and I respect the fact that there are a lot of people from local government and with local government experience here today—local governments are the representatives of the community; it is their job to negotiate these things on behalf of communities. I appreciate that while everyday community members will get fatigued, it is the role of the council to be that touchpoint and we will continue to be that touchpoint when community just needs to take a break. Once you are approving and working through the process of multiple projects, I think you will find that you have a continual baseline to work from ourselves, and that has been our experience over the last 10 years because there are no big gaps. It is just constant for set amounts of time. That is helpful.

**Ms BUSH:** Are you learning towards that? That is not what the bill is at the moment. Rather than having that consultation fatigue, there might be room to look at conditioning it. I hear what you are saying and I agree with you 100 per cent that there should be clear arrangements in place about who is doing what, when and why and enforceable powers. I wonder, then, about how projects are dynamic and change, and communities are dynamic and change, and over the course of a 30-year project those needs are going to look different. I am curious about whether this bill gives you that flexibility that you are asking for.

**Mr Dendle:** I believe that it does. As the mayor points out, if the local authority is the coordinating point, I think it can provide guidance to proponents about the level of engagement that might have already occurred in a particular area. If I use an illustration, we have a small area just north of here called Clarke Creek. It has been consulted to death in recent times. If we as the touchpoint, as the mayor describes, are able to abbreviate that process for the benefit of both parties, which I think the bill contemplates through the CBA process—

**Ms BUSH:** I do not know if it does that, though.

**Mr Dendle:** We would be happy for you to clarify that. We would certainly see ourselves playing that role. If there is some impediment in the bill to that, we would appreciate its removal.

**Ms Vea Vea:** That is how it is currently working under the SSRC Act. That is how we are operating right now for mining projects.

**CHAIR:** Thanks again for being here today. The evidence you have given us today shows the experience you have. Obviously there are varying levels of experience with these issues—social impact and community benefit right across the state. I know that the LGAQ have put in a submission and are looking forward to bringing together some of those things to assist some of those who do not have the experience that you have. Do you think this bill will provide a level of consistency across the councils to make sure there is a broader community benefit?

**Ms Vea Vea:** Yes, I do agree that it will. We brought together resource councils from across Queensland in the last couple of months to discuss mining projects new and old and to discuss renewable projects and how we are all managing them. I think we have a structure in place to be able to share our experiences and to ensure the smaller councils are just as equipped as the bigger councils when it comes to the approval. At the moment, people and councils need to know where to start; they need to understand what they can ask for and what a minimum even looks like, and I think the CBA agreements give that guidance. It is our intention to continue to collaborate with the state to come to an agreement on what that looks like and give it some structure. However, at the moment

communities are absolutely missing out and people are missing out on opportunities and benefits. Companies are missing out on their ability to establish social licence because of the lack of clarity. I think this positions all of us better in the long run.

**CHAIR:** I will note that the member for Bancroft has local government experience, the member for Mulgrave has many years of local government experience and I have had 16 years in local government as well. It is certainly something close to our hearts. The time for this session has ended. There are no questions on notice. Again, you have got off lightly without having to do any homework. Thank you again for travelling 4½ hours to be here and for sharing with us the rich experience you have had through the exposure to mining projects in the past. Thank you very much.

**CARROLL, Ms Mary, Chief Executive Officer, Capricorn Enterprise**

**CHAIR:** Mary, thank you for being here today. Would you like to make an opening statement before we ask some questions?

**Ms Carroll:** Thank you, I would. Capricorn Tourism and Economic Development Ltd, trading as Capricorn Enterprise, as our name suggests is one of Queensland's 13 official regional tourism organisations as well as an economic development organisation representing hundreds of business members across the Capricorn Coast and Rockhampton. We are an apolitical, not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. Capricorn Enterprise cares for our members, our hardworking businesses and our communities. We believe in what is right, fair and reasonable for the long-term sustainability of our region.

Our role involves destination marketing, business support, visitor servicing and investment attraction and our membership represents a wide range of stakeholders from micro and small business through to large corporations. We advocate for and represent businesses across a broad range of industries including tourism and hospitality, retail and professional services, health, education, mining, civil, construction, agriculture and energy. Our organisation prides itself on being well connected and informed and our advocacy efforts to all levels of government have helped secure billions of dollars of public and private infrastructure for this region over the past 15 years. Part of our role is to keep our members informed of major projects and business opportunities across our region with our corporate website providing information, statistics and hyperlinks to a plethora of relevant information.

Capricorn Enterprise has held an annual major projects and industry forum for a number of years here in Rockhampton, with speakers delivering updates across a broad range of industries including defence, resources, energy, water, health, education and tourism to an annual audience of some 200 business delegates. I recall quite vividly at our November 2018 event, over six years ago, when we hosted a presentation from Lacour Energy regarding Clarke Creek Wind Farm. All but a handful of people in that audience had heard of the Clarke Creek Wind Farm let alone knew where it was—about 150 kays north of Rocky. At that stage, finalisation of a comprehensive feasibility and project commencement program was underway. It was reported that, when commissioned, Clarke Creek would be one of the largest wind energy projects in the Southern Hemisphere, with further consultation of specialised industry groups to commence in early to mid-2019. The Clarke Creek project straddled the Isaac and Livingstone shires, but Isaac shire was delegated the primary LGA under the state government's assessment of the project under SARA.

Fast forward to 2025 and Squadron Energy's February update states that—

The project team have ... successfully completed installation of 72 wind turbines ... Having almost reached the three-quarter milestone, we are on track to complete the erection of all 100 turbines by June 2025.

Government owned energy generator Stanwell signed a 15-year deal to buy more than 75 per cent of the 450 megawatts that the Clarke Creek Wind Farm will produce. This will help their customers, including Brisbane Airport Corporation and Anglo American, achieve their sustainability objectives.

It is fair to say that the Clarke Creek Wind Farm development has also materialised the reality of the size and scale of these developments atop hillsides. Ironically, one of the former landowners who benefited financially quite significantly from the sale of their agricultural property in the vicinity of Clarke Creek was only recently expressing their great sadness to me about the degradation of the natural landscape and biodiversity, and the vacant and deteriorating historical homestead. Herein lies just one example of the challenges of coexistence of energy projects and agricultural land in regional and rural Queensland and is arguably the reason for this public hearing today.

On our corporate website, we display a table that contains information for our members and interested parties that details about six key wind, solar and battery projects that are either under construction or planned in the Rockhampton, Livingstone, Banana and Isaac LGAs, but there are some 48 wind and solar energy projects in the pipeline here in our own backyard. Here in Central Queensland, across the local government areas of Livingstone, Rockhampton, Banana, Gladstone, Central Highlands and Woorabinda, the six LGAs that make up the Central Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils, our communities have long depended upon the jobs and lifestyle that the mining and resources industries have afforded us. Most people understand that the provision of energy is not one versus the other—that is, coal versus wind and solar—but will continue to be a mix of coal, gas, wind, solar, batteries and potentially hydrogen and nuclear. Most people, here in CQ anyway, also understand that there are major coal operations in the Bowen Basin alone with mineable

reserves of 25-plus years of continued operations with development and government support. The royalties generated from Central Queensland coalmining are the economic backbone of the state and nation.

Across the footprint of the local government areas of Livingstone and Rockhampton that my organisations represent, of our gross regional product of \$8.2 billion in 2023-24, \$2.9 billion is the contribution from the resources industry while the value of exports from Gladstone ports was 37.5 per cent of Queensland's total exports. Resources is also the sixth highest employer across the Capricorn Coast and Rockhampton, representing 3,562 people or 6.5 per cent of the local workforce.

Over the past few years, a number of Capricorn Enterprise members have expressed their vehement opposition to wind and solar farms constructed in areas of good quality agricultural land and biodiverse hilltops. In fact, some find it abhorrent. We also have members who are excited by the revenue generated by leased land and others by subcontractor business opportunities that new energy projects may bring to themselves and the region. But what the majority of our members agree upon is that wind and solar farm projects should be subject to the same rigorous approval process as any other major coal or resource development. Industry and business want a fair playing field and people in rural and regional areas, particularly those directly impacted by wind and solar farms, want to have a say and should not be the casualties of our energy hungry cities and growing populations.

Our learned experience is that the coal industry provides generations of jobs for local families and long-term legacy benefits for our region. Wind and solar farms have up-front growth, a sugar hit if you like, with no long-term job opportunities. We have seen the effects of mine closures like Glenden and Mount Isa to local communities and we do not want the same for our Rockhampton and Capricorn Coast families and communities. Coalmines have built entire towns and facilities yet the coal industry is often vilified. Queensland exported 200 million tonnes of coal in 2023, with a maximum royalty of between 40 to 43 per cent. We are the highest royalty jurisdiction in the world yet 0.01 per cent of land in Queensland is actually disturbed by coalmining activity.

My organisation's understanding of this bill is that it accounts for the cumulative impacts of a project and how the project as a whole—from construction to decades of operation—is mitigated. We also understand that the state government will assess solar farm applications if a project size is one megawatt or two hectares in size, with smaller proposals assessed by the relevant local government authority. We understand this bill enables local governments to negotiate community benefit agreements without affecting their role in decision-making where they are not the assessment manager. Therefore, Capricorn Enterprise supports in principle the Planning (Social Impact and Community Benefit) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I would like to state for the record that phrases such as fossil fuels, renewable energy, net zero, climate action, clean coal and green hydrogen are merely marketing phrases suited to varying political and philosophical agendas that, by their very definition, can be grossly misleading.

I turn to the 2023 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The bill relates to the delivery of the necessary infrastructure, villages and venues for the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Our understanding is that these costs align with a budget of \$7.1 billion—with a 'b'—for the delivery of games authority venues and \$3.5 billion—with a 'b'—for villages. The bill proposes amendments to the Planning Act 2016, the City of Brisbane Act 2010, the Local Government Act 2009 and the Planning and Environment Court Act 2016.

Our understanding is that the policy objectives are to introduce a community benefit scheme requiring a proponent to conduct a social impact assessment and enter into a community benefit agreement with the local government before lodging a development application. The community benefit agreement may provide or contribute towards infrastructure or another thing for the community such as a sports facility or library, a training program to upskill members of the community or giving a donation to a fund established for the benefit of the community. The bill states that—

To remove any doubt, it is declared that a community benefit agreement is not an infrastructure agreement even if it relates to providing or funding infrastructure.

The bill proposes a new section 106Z. The explanatory notes state that—

The relevant local government includes the local government where the premises subject the subject of the application is located and any local government identified as being subject to impacts through a social impact assessment. For example, an adjoining local government area may experience impacts of the similar scale as the local government where the development is located. As such, the impacted local government/s may also enter into a community benefit agreement with the development proponent.

In light of the fact that the Fitzroy River in Rockhampton has been named as the venue to host the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games rowing, Capricorn Enterprise, representing the two co-dependent communities of Rockhampton and the Capricorn Coast, strongly request that both Rockhampton Regional Council and the Livingstone Shire Council are formally recorded as experiencing impacts of similar scale and, therefore, are both eligible to enter into a community benefit agreement with the development proponent.

Regardless of local government boundaries, Capricorn Enterprise is here to represent our local businesses and talk about what benefits our region and the good people who live in all of our local communities. Earlier in my presentation, I provided the example of the Clarke Creek Wind Farm, the location of which straddles both the Livingstone shire and the Isaac shire council areas, yet Livingstone Shire Council was removed from that process with no opportunity for it or its residents to have their say on that particular development.

Capricorn Enterprise strongly advises that any community benefit agreement by Rockhampton and Livingstone shire councils should focus on the necessary key infrastructure needs of the region directly related to the provision of the 2032 Olympic rowing and not on soft infrastructure such as a library extension or training program. Capricorn Enterprise also strongly advises that our organisation is willing and able to play an integral role in the decision-making related to the necessary hard infrastructure required for our region.

The information provided today is provided with the balance and professionalism that our members and stakeholders expect. I thank the state government for inviting Capricorn Enterprise to be part of today's hearing. As the peak tourism and economic development organisation representing the needs of our local business and broader community, I look forward to being a key part of your deliberations going forward to ensure that the voices of our local and regional stakeholders are truly heard.

**Mr MELLISH:** Thanks, Ms Carroll, for your opening statement and for attending today. You mentioned the Olympic venues. I note the \$7.1 billion budget for venues, most of which are in Brisbane. Would you be concerned if the IOC decides that Rockhampton will not be the rowing venue?

**Ms Carroll:** I would be. As a former rower, I am happy to speak on this topic, winning the Head of the River here on the Fitzroy River and going on to win the women's fours state championships in 1985, so thank you for your question. I am very well across the argy-bargy going on between the Queensland national and world rowing authorities and the state government. It was a recommendation actually of Rowing Australia that the Olympic rowing for 2032 proceed at Penrith in Sydney. That is not acceptable. When the announcement was made, I was hopeful that we would get both the rowing and the sailing because a few years ago we achieved \$20 million for a world sailing hub at Keppel Bay. In short, yes, I would be very disappointed.

**CHAIR:** Mary, thank you very much for your representation today. You mentioned the importance of the different councils being able to get that community benefit, which is a very sound suggestion. Can you talk to us about the broader benefits of the region with the prospect of the Olympics?

**Ms Carroll:** It is not dissimilar to Beef Australia that is held here in Rocky every three years. The next Beef Australia is May 2027. That benefits the entire Central Queensland footprint, not just Rocky. The Olympics is no different. There are about 10,000 to 15,000 spectators that need to be accommodated for the rowing, and that can be done. The broader benefit of a large-scale event like the Olympics in the regions is not just about the event; it is about legacy infrastructure. That is why in my presentation I touched on that legacy infrastructure. With all due respect to book lovers, it is not a library—and I love books; it is not soft infrastructure. Let us really think about how—and the previous speaker, Mayor Kelly, touched on this—we can all work together—the state government, local governments, economic development agencies like ours—and how we can really focus on legacy infrastructure projects that benefit the communities not just now but into the future, into the decades ahead. I do not think there has been quite enough of that.

**CHAIR:** How many people come to Rocky for Beef Week?

**Ms Carroll:** The gate numbers through Beef are 120,000, but 55,000 of those are what we call unique visitors—in other words, some people visit multiple times. There are 55,000 unique visitors. We have about 3,000 commercial rooms in Rockhampton, so clearly that is not enough. Airbnbs are very important, a lot of people stay with friends and relatives—that is a very important part of our visitor economy—they have a tent village and a lot of people fly in for the day, from Brisbane to Rocky, so Qantas puts on additional flights. We can cope with it, for sure.

**Mr WHITING:** Mary, you talked about how the same rigorous assessment process should be used for renewable projects. Does that mean that mining and resources projects have to lodge their CBA before they get an approval?

**Ms Carroll:** I think so, yes.

**Ms BUSH:** I have many questions, but I will keep it really quick because we are against time. I was looking on your website over the weekend, and it is a fantastic website. Given all that you do for the region, I am curious as to whether you were consulted on the drafting of this bill. Did you receive an advance copy or were you informed of it before it was introduced into parliament?

**Ms Carroll:** I have six FTEs. There are a lot of bills and a lot of things happening all the time and I do not have the manpower to do submissions all the time, so I am grateful for the opportunity to come and pretty much do a submission today.

**Ms BUSH:** You were not personally approached?

**Ms Carroll:** Not personally, but we have had a recent staff change. The industry engagement manager position has been open for a couple of months, so it may have been missed. I will take the blame for that one.

**Ms BUSH:** I do not think there is any blame on your part.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much for your appearance today and your submission. The time for questions has now finished. There are no questions on notice.

**GEORGE, Ms Sophie, Coordinator, Capricorn Conservation Council**

**CHAIR:** Good morning. Would you like to make a brief opening statement? Then the committee will have questions for you.

**Ms George:** Thank you so much for having me here today. I apologise for my lateness. I am a lecturer at CQUniversity and we are about to go into exam week, so it was really important I was with my students this morning—there were a few tears and mental breakdowns. I acknowledge that we are on Darumbal country today. I would like to pay respects to the elders of Darumbal country who have taught me and led me and guided me in my role as the coordinator of Capricorn Conservation Council and as a lecturer at CQUniversity teaching the next generation of scientists.

It is an absolute privilege to represent this region as the coordinator of CCC. It feels a bit weird sitting here with my back to the community. Usually I would be looking at my community and interacting with them and talking with them—

**CHAIR:** We understand.

**Ms George:**—and bringing their voices to this table. Many of these guys behind me have definitely brought their concerns to Capricorn Conservation Council and it is our job to voice that to get not only great environmental outcomes but also great outcomes for the community, for the climate and for country.

Behind me is Glen Kelly. He is a bit of a local legend around here. We have had many conversations in the lead-up to this bill. Our community are just getting left behind. Our elders are not being consulted. There are decisions being made about country and the future of this region that just do not align or resonate with the community that have to deal with the repercussions. That is really disappointing. We wanted to see a strong, clear transition and that is not what we are seeing. We are seeing coalmines go ahead and destroy our country and our land and we are also seeing renewables going ahead which are tearing down the little bit of remnant vegetation we have left, so it has been really disappointing. We were so excited for a transition to renewables—a true transition where we are no longer doing coalmining and we are moving to renewables. That is not what we are seeing, unfortunately, in our region.

Landholders are so important to me. My family have a country and western store here that just closed down, Georges. They have been around a ridiculous number of years—150 or 200 years. We love our landholders. We love working with our landholders. They are caring for our country and they are healing our country. A lot of our landholders today do want what is best for the environment, so it is really harmful to see projects come through that are not aligned with that. What is really interesting about the beef capital of Australia is that we have a lot of landscapes which are cleared as agricultural zones and then we have this remnant vegetation, which are wildlife corridors which remain, and that is where these projects want to go. That makes it quite difficult for us.

Our councils, both Livingstone and Rocky regional and surrounds, are just getting smashed by proponents and they do not have the time, capacity, funds or staff to keep up with what is being proposed for the region. They have not had the help that they need. They have not had the support that they need. They are making really big decisions about our region and our future and they need support with that. They need the Queensland government to come and help out with that. That has been a lot for our regional councils and it has unfortunately prevented them from taking action on other things such as housing and the huge population boom that we are seeing here at the moment. They are getting smashed, so we really want more support for our regional councils. That would be great.

We need to hear the voices of the people on the ground. The communities and First Nations people need to be consulted first and have prior and informed consent about any proposal that might go ahead in this region, whether it is renewables or not. We have not seen that either, which is really disappointing. It is great to strengthen that Planning Act, but it is not great to hold renewables to accountability that even coalmines do not have. That is disappointing for our region.

Mention was also made of the Olympics and what that might look like for our region. Where we go and do our rowing is down on the Tunuba River, which is the Fitzroy River. It is a very sacred and important waterway and we want to make sure that it is respected and that everything in that waterway is respected as well. We recently wrote a submission to the Katter's bill about the culling of crocs, which obviously we do not support. That is not something we want to see. We have had rowers in that river for hundreds of years. It is absolutely fine to go and row in there if you know what you are doing and you do not go for a swim while you are going. We want to make sure that our crocs and our country are protected when we are doing rowing.

Yes, it is great to have some infrastructure, but let us do it in an ecofriendly way. Let us respect the river and make sure we are incorporating that infrastructure with the surrounding ecosystems and we are not doing something like cutting down the big old gums that remain on that riverbank. I would not like to see any trees cut down for any form of infrastructure because we are on a massive floodplain and we need all of those trees to keep that riverbank nice and stable there.

If there was anything to come out of that for the Olympics, we really want to make sure we are doing environmentally friendly development. Yes, we support the Olympics in the region, but we also support caring for the country and the community and the crocodiles that live in the region as well. For us at CCC it is just about a matter of respect, a matter of talking to First Nations people first and our communities first and just doing things in an environmentally thoughtful and respectful way. Unfortunately, that is not the way many of these things roll out in our region.

**Ms BUSH:** Thank you for coming along. It pains me to hear some of the things that you have said. I can hear that you are supportive of renewables but that implementation has not always been there for you, so thank you for your honesty. I wanted to pick up on the comment you made around the misalignment between resources and mining and renewables under this bill, the biggest distinction being the timing of the community benefit assessment. Massive mining projects do not have to do that until it becomes part of their approval whereas, under this bill, renewables would have to do that pre lodgement. Would you like to see alignment whereby mining companies are required to do that pre-lodgement work?

**Ms George:** Absolutely, yes. Mining has such a strong hold over this community and this region. We cannot live without it. Mining is what puts food on tables. Mining is what puts roofs over heads. We need to align those benefits before we sign off on such a huge commitment to our community. Mining never had to think about the repercussions of mining in five, 10, 15 or 20 years time for the community, and we are seeing it right now in front of us. Yes, we want that for both. Whatever expectations you are going to put on renewables we want aligned with coal, with gas mining and all of that destructive industry.

**Ms BUSH:** The minister's charter letter says that part of their obligation obligates them to ensure there is an even playing ground between mining and renewables. Do you think this bill does that?

**Ms George:** No, it does not. It will in time. It is really difficult, because the way that renewables went forward should have just aligned with coalmining anyway. We should have always gone to a social impact statement. We should have always gone to an environmental impact statement. It was not the greatest decision to remove that requirement to proceed with renewables and that is what lost it. We lost social licence. Social licence does not exist in this region.

**CHAIR:** When was that removed?

**Ms George:** The social licence? When proponents started showing up with maps in halls and telling us, 'This is what we are going to do and this is how we are going to do it, and you are either going to get along with it or you are not, and if you do not, that sucks. You might want to sell your property and move.'

**CHAIR:** What was that timeframe? When was that?

**Ms George:** That is probably going back maybe two years ago, but I know there were a lot of deals done before that time. Really, what went through our region was divide and conquer. When you are a farmer and you have just been through drought or through flood or you have had a heap of cattle die or something horrible has happened because of the changing climate and the harsh conditions we live with here in Central Queensland and someone wants to give you a multimillion-dollar cheque for some solar panels in your backyard, you are going to say yes. But that was not community consultation; that was a divide and conquer tactic that was used across our region.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Sophie. I would not expect you to know this, but I understand there were about 19 motions through the LGAQ conference. The LGAQ is the peak that coordinates 77 councils. There were 19 motions that had gone through their conference. Obviously this was an election commitment by our new government. Do you think this is a step in the right direction to make sure social impact and community benefit is addressed?

**Ms George:** Yes, but there also needs to be some kind of independent monitoring. With the community benefits I am seeing in real life, it is just to the level that the community will accept. It is still bare minimum. If you say, 'I am going to come in and I will build a wind farm and I am going to



earn \$3 billion from that, but all I will give to the community is \$100,000 a year and you have to divide it between the whole community—that is, everyone in the community only gets a little bit of that little bit of money,’ it is not properly aligned to anything. It is not properly aligned to the market. There are a lot there just doing what they think will be accepted, but at the bare minimum standard. We need someone to actually come in and investigate that and make sure the communities are getting what they are worth and the value of what they are sacrificing.

**Mr MELLISH:** Thank you for appearing today and for your detailed submission. I note in your submission you state that retrospective penalties for renewable projects should be removed. Can you elaborate on that a little and what changes you would want to see to the bill?

**Ms George:** With the retrospective ones, it is really difficult because those projects were not held to the right standard from the beginning, and they have made many of the changes that they needed to, to move forward. Our biggest issue with those projects that are already past that stage is that they would have likely triggered the EPBC Act by now. That is what we went out and did with most of those projects. We figured out which ones are going to trigger the EPBC Act and which ones we can make sure that the government come back and put some proper conditions on. We are fairly confident that anything from the past has been caught up and, moving forward, we need to do so much better.

**Mr KEMPTON:** Sophie, this legislation is designed to bring certainty to developers and investors, to landholders, communities, councils and Indigenous people. Your reference to the cultural heritage protection goes beyond the current legislative regime, both state and federal, where you talk about language, rituals, shared values and so on, and I understand the sentiment behind that, but you are also going beyond those persons recognised by those processes of legislation. To me, having had a lot of experience in this area, that is actually going to make it a lot harder not only for the developers to meet that standard but also for the Indigenous people to actually get the benefit. I wonder how you see that being achieved. It certainly will not happen voluntarily.

**Ms George:** Yes. I think definitely the entire system needs to be set up better so that First Nations people can come into this space, lead, share those values and make sure that they are part of the planning process. Indigenous people absolutely need to be acknowledged for their time and paid for their time, just like any of us here today. It is disappointing that I cannot see a Darumbal ranger here today. I cannot see someone from Darumbal Enterprises. Where are they in this room? It is just ensuring they are here and are part of the process of what we do in the government. There is a systemic change that needs to happen. What we do at CCC is we would tell our Indigenous mentors and elders, ‘Hey, I am going to do this thing today and can you tell me what you need me to say so we can make sure that is part of it?’ It is the whole system that needs to change, and not just for this bill but for all of them.

**Mr KEMPTON:** So you are suggesting amendments to other legislation to achieve that outcome?

**Ms George:** Yes, definitely, but more so the process of how we do this, so that the First Nations people would be your key stakeholder. When you plan this meeting today—I know I got a phone call maybe Thursday or Friday—the first phone call you make is to Darumbal Enterprises, the first phone call you make is to the Indigenous people of this region, and say, ‘This is the day, this is the time. What are you guys up to? Does this work? Can we sit down? Can we talk?’ It does not have to be in this room today, it could be at their offices, but you do need to have that perspective as part of the decisions you are making.

**Ms BUSH:** Sophie, I wanted to pick up on that a little bit in relation to the Olympics component of the bill and particularly the fact that when essentially what the bill does is if GIIA approves a venue as a venue, then it is a venue and it is approved and it circumvents about 15 pieces of legislation, including the Cultural Heritage Act, and prescribes a new cultural planning pathway. Have you looked at that aspect of the bill and did you have any views around that? I am particularly interested in the timeframes that are prescribed and how workable they are.

**Ms George:** It is really hard to put those timeframes on Indigenous communities, for starters. The other thing is you need to make sure you have the right representative that you are talking to, and you absolutely need to allow time for that representative to go back into the community and have those conversations and bring those decisions forward. Again, it is just another systemic thing that just does not always work. We need to make sure we have clear leaders in the community whom we can come to and give that prior and informed information to so that the decision can be ready-made for when you need to make that call. I think there are many different ways to reach out to Indigenous

communities to get that information as well. I definitely do not speak for any Indigenous community, but I am asking that we perhaps change the system or change the ways we are planning these things to make sure it is part of the conversation.

**Ms BUSH:** Under the bill, the pathway prescribed is that they will be issued a notice in writing and given 14 days initially to respond. Is that workable for your communities and your TOs?

**Ms George:** Not really at all. It depends on the format. Is that coming in an email? Is that coming in the mail? Who is it going to? Who is it addressed to? Yes, it is definitely good to have that conversation on how we can build those systems a little bit better so that we do get those representatives at the table, and what those invitations might need to look like as well.

**Ms BUSH:** Would you like to see something baked into legislation that gives you more flexibility or recognises that, particularly in the regions, it is not always that easy to get someone in 14 days?

**Ms George:** Yes. For me, in my position, it would have been good to have been able to bring an Indigenous person with me today so they could talk for country, for themselves. It is not something that I am always comfortable doing, unless I have been specifically told, 'This is the message we need to deliver,' but definitely having more of that open invitation and an open invitation for Darumbal people to have joined us here today.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Sophie. We will certainly take that on board.

**Mr JAMES:** Sophie, I note your support for the government's decision on Moonlight Range. Could you outline what your concerns were with this project?

**Ms George:** We made a submission against Moonlight Range because again it is one of those projects where the remnant vegetation was remaining. That remnant vegetation would have been ripped down. There also seems to be this thing with blowing up mountaintops with renewables in this region for some reason. That seems like a bit of an idea that many proponents have put forward. On that particular mountaintop, there was a lot of environmental significance and cultural significance there as well. It absolutely was not appropriate to put a wind farm in that location. I feel like if we are going into any remnant vegetation zones, we probably need to be thinking twice about what we are doing, because it is very much like what Mary Carroll said: we want to make this renewable future, but we want to cut down all these trees to do it. It just does not make sense. That is where we have not seen a true transition. Where we have stopped coalmining and we have used already degraded land to go ahead and build those renewables, we are doing double the damage.

**CHAIR:** Sophie, thank you for being here today and being a representative for your community. This is the inquiry part of the bill. I know the Darumbal corporation here in town, and we look forward to being able to further consult with them. There are no questions on notice for you, so you do not have any homework to do. The time for this part of the hearing has now finished. Thank you for being here. We are now going to go to an open mic session.

**HOLLAND, Mr Nick, Private capacity**

**KELLY, Ms Nikki, Private capacity**

**SEDGMAN, Ms Leanne, Private capacity**

**CHAIR:** We will keep you on a very tight timeframe of 10, maybe 15 minutes. I invite you to make an opening statement or presentation.

**Mr Holland:** My name is Nick Holland. I am part of the Kalapa Wycarbah Local Action Committee. I live adjacent to a proposed wind project, just west of Rockhampton, and I live there with my wife and three young children.

**Ms Sedgman:** My name is Leanne Sedgman, and I am also a part of the Kalapa Wycarbah Local Action Committee. I am a non-host neighbour to the proposed Moah Creek wind factory, and I have lived there with my husband and three young children for the last 20 years.

**Ms Kelly:** My name is Nikki Kelly. I am also a member of the Kalapa Wycarbah Local Action Committee. I am a non-host neighbour as well. This group arose out of a lack of consultation from the developer, CQP, with our local community. As a result of that, we welcome the government moving this bill's amendment to encourage more consultation with neighbouring communities that these projects are coming into.

**CHAIR:** We are all ears.

**Mr Holland:** October 2022 is when our journey began. We had heard rumblings that there would be a project in the district. The proponents were holding an information session at a local hall to which there was a large gathering. This was our first introduction to the proponents themselves, any information on the project whatsoever and a realisation of just how close they were going to be to our property. From there, we found their development application online. It was posted under a name that was not reflective of the project name or the company hosting, so from there we were able to get a real insight into what their plans were for our region. From there we have raised that there will be a number of impacts that are going to affect our local community. We have raised a number of environmental, health and property value impacts with the proponents, to which we get very little feedback, or they are very dismissive of the topic. We have had discussions in the hope of trying to reach a solution, requesting that wind turbines have their proposed positions altered or moved, to which there has been no agreement whatsoever.

We have raised the topic that there are a lot of residents in our area who live on smaller blocks and that there are quite a number of people in that district, so given the 1.5-kilometre setback from a turbine there are a lot of lots that are affected now given the location of turbines to property boundary and from that we have land devaluation because the historical deeds that are there can no longer be built on for families or additional housing into the future. The mental health has played on a lot of local residents just in terms of the unknown and the stress. There are a number of people who are maybe not quite as proactive as ourselves but still definitely expressed their concerns around the project. A real division has arisen in our community in terms of the minor few that are for versus those who have their concerns against. Another thing we have identified is that the Moah Creek wind project failed to identify all the homes in the vicinity of the project as part of their development application, so on the map identifying sensitive land uses there have been a number of homes identified as not being present on the map and these were there prior to the map being developed.

From a personal point of view, for our family where we live if we are to look out the window on the northern side of our house at the mountain range, we are likely to see up to 20 wind turbines, with the closest being just under two kilometres from our house, so we have that. When we go up to where our cattle yards or shed are positioned, from there we have an uninterrupted view of the entire mountain range, so we will see everything from where we work and spend a lot of our time. Obviously as it recently came in, we have the tiered neighbour benefit scheme based on the distance from wind turbines. To us that suggests that you are admitting that there is an impact to those neighbours in the district and we feel the values offered depending on your distance from a wind turbine are very low compared to the impact that that would have on your family, let alone the value of your land. If a lot of people were to incur a 10 per cent or 20 per cent land devaluation, that could pose some financial impact on them.

**Ms Sedgman:** We just wanted to bring to light that the Moah Creek wind project is in densely vegetated and steep, tall mountainous ranges anywhere from 300 to 400 metres high. The proposed turbines that are looking at going on top of these are 275 metres on top of that, so not only will Nick see it but the majority of people in the region will and also the western view from Rockhampton you

will see these. There have been numerous landslips along these steep ridges and it indicates to us the instability of the soil. Previous generations left the soil-stabilising trees untouched. These will be dozed over the edge. The mountaintops will be blown apart.

The building of wind projects in these hills will require a huge amount of earthworks to build haulage roads, enabling vehicles to transport heavy vehicle wind turbine foundation materials and components on to these ridges, and explosives to move rocky ridges to allow wind turbine hard stands to be excavated and compacted. A big issue raised by local residents is water. Water is hard to come by in these areas, particularly in times of drought. We have not had any answers from the developer as to where they will source their water for construction of this project. There have been comments made—somewhat throwaway comments—that they will use water from Rockhampton or a Stanwell pipeline or possibly Rookwood Weir. To us that suggests a lack of professionalism and inadequate project planning. This inadequate planning was also evident in the initial ecological studies that CQP submitted to the federal government's EPBC for approval, which included a significant amount of ecological data submitted from sites anywhere up to six kilometres away from the project area, as evidenced. They were looking for koalas in an area that they were not even planning on working in. We find that very unprofessional and these areas make us question everything that they are presenting to us.

Earlier this year myself as a livestock producer and other people in the community have started the role around completing our LPA assurance accreditation. In question 2.8 on food safety for your property, the question is asked: do livestock have access to leaking electrical transformers, capacitors, hydraulic equipment, solar panels, wind turbines, coal seam gas structures or coalmine waste? There is now recognised concern that this type of infrastructure has a risk to the ecological food chain, yet as neighbours to wind turbine hosts we cannot control if components of degrading wind turbine blades are carried by the wind to land on our property and get consumed by livestock. Who takes responsibility for this and what legal compromise will neighbouring farms have?

The last point that I have is fires. Most people would remember the big fires that came through and evacuated Gracemere some years ago. I, Nick and Nikki are members of our local fire brigades respective to our communities and we share great concern as neighbours of this proposed project about what it will mean for our livestock and our wellbeing. How do we fight them? That particular fire itself was put out by a 737 water bomber. How do they interact with 275-metre-high turbines on top of mountain ranges in thick, dense smoke? We are very concerned about that.

**CHAIR:** Thanks, Leanne. During your presentation you mentioned LPA—livestock production assurance?

**Ms Sedgman:** Yes; correct.

**Ms Kelly:** The renewable energy transition was initiated in the past with no framework that considered zoning or transmission infrastructure or communities or environments and developers had free rein in Queensland to target those areas closest to transmission with an effort to minimise their costs, regardless of what would be flattened along the way. It seems we have seen an influx of these companies that seem to form these \$2 ventures, like the developers of Moah Creek. They tend to be reliant on the government to bring them to fruition. To us it appears like they are just there to take the money and then move on to the next community.

Currently through the SARA portal we know that there are at least 42 proposed wind farms in the portal with a proposed capacity of just over 24 gigawatts. Currently in Queensland we only have nine wind farms with a two-gigawatt capacity. We have 38 solar farms with a capacity of just over three gigawatts and 94 in the pipeline through the SARA portal. We have an existing 577.8 kilometres of roads within wind farms and in the proposed developments there would be an additional 5,761 kilometres of haulage roads and access roads proposed, so the total footprint for all renewables, including both proposed and existing with a 200-metre buffer around them, is in the vicinity of 410,455 hectares. If you were to account for all the land parcels that would be involved in hosting renewables just in Queensland, it would be over three million hectares at present based on what is in the portal at this time.

Until those recent changes, these renewable energy projects were assessed individually and there has been no accommodation for the cumulative impacts of these projects on any one particular community. Additionally, none of the projects have given consideration to the influx of workers who would be required to live in the regions in order to construct these and places like Rockhampton already have a very low vacancy rate. We already have families living in tents in local parks. It would be prudent, we believe, for those projects that are still in the development phase that are yet to receive full approval moving through that phase to have their impacts properly assessed to ensure that we

have the best outcomes for the communities and the environment in Queensland. There is no point allowing all of those 94 solar farms and proposed 42 wind farms to go through and then have all of that destruction still occur.

Additionally, we would suggest that there be a database of projects developed by the planning department that could be accessible by community or businesses to allow transparency of what is in the future planning. For the committee's sake, I would like to table, if permitted, some documents. We have an example of the Moah Creek wind proposal that shows just where the turbines and the haulage roads are located in the green that would be in remnant vegetation and also the number of very small land parcels that buffer right up to the edges of those things, demonstrating what Nick said about the 1.5-kilometre setback and how that can impact over other property boundaries. We also have an example of the number of homes located there, if I could also table this document with your permission. There are 142 homes listed and the triangle showing the location of the turbines. If you wanted, I also have a copy of all of the proposed developments listed in the SARA at the present time. We thank the committee for giving us an opportunity to share our thoughts and our experiences with renewable energy projects.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Nikki. We just have to have a quick look at those documents. The committee is happy to accept those and table those. Thank you for that.

**Ms Kelly:** Thank you.

**Mr WHITING:** You mentioned that there is a tiered benefit scheme, and the proponents talked about that as part of that. Is that common across renewable projects or mining projects throughout this area?

**Ms Kelly:** We have not had any mining projects on our back doorstep, so I would not be able to comment on that.

**Mr WHITING:** So you found out about the tiered benefit scheme as part of the initial information sharing?

**Ms Kelly:** Not initially, no.

**Mr Holland:** No. That has only come out in the last 12 or 18 months.

**Ms Kelly:** Yes, less than that, yes.

**Mr Holland:** Yes, so it was not part of their original plan at all to start with.

**Mr WHITING:** No worries. Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Will this bill help in the process for your community and the efforts that you are making? If it will, can you give us some sense of that?

**Mr Holland:** Yes, just to become impact assessable. This one was assessed under the state code 23, which we believed lacked a lot of real clarity and ground-truthing of what the project involves. In terms of social licence, not just this project but all projects require that. To not even receive an introduction to who they were prior to them putting out all of this information saying, 'This is what you're going to be looking at,' got it off on completely the wrong foot, as has not being willing to negotiate or take on board any suggestions that we raised. Some of those that we have raised have come from the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner's reports, so for them to not even be willing to take any of those on as they are just recommendations means that we have genuine concerns that we are not being heard or our concerns taken on board.

**CHAIR:** Leanne or Nikki, do you have anything to add?

**Ms Kelly:** Yes. We regularly met with the developers, but to us it felt like a box-ticking exercise. We know, as you can see by that map, that there is a large area of cleared land that already has been cleared for agriculture that would move these wind turbines away from the property boundaries. We said to them, 'We're not saying don't have your wind farm, but just move it away into those areas so you don't have to clear those mountaintops and you don't have to impact those neighbours to such a big extent.' It is that 1.5 setback. If you put a turbine on a neighbouring boundary, that 1.5 kilometres exists right over someone else's land, preventing them from development and the peaceful enjoyment of their own property.

**CHAIR:** Thanks for that.

**Ms BUSH:** I just wanted to start with a comment: thank you so much for coming and being really transparent with us and it does really break my heart to hear what you have to say. I think we are all understanding that renewables are part of the mix and when it is not being done right or in a way that feels fair or honourable I can see that that has had a huge impact on you and your

community, so thank you for that. I just wanted to pick up on a point that you mentioned, Nikki, that no-one is looking at the cumulative effect. In fact, this bill does not either and that is one of the things that submitters have raised—that is, that perhaps communities would benefit from more of a regional assessment planning process and empowering regions to look at it more across a larger area rather than on a piece-by-piece or project-by-project approval process. It sounds like you are kind of supportive of that as well—that is, that community and the broad planning should be looked at at a regional level, not just on every single case-by-case basis?

**Ms Kelly:** Yes, there should definitely be a central point or that database so you are starting to map where all these projects want to go and what is in those areas. In the past because there was a free reign developers could essentially pick the areas themselves without any forethought to what areas we want them to avoid and where our transmission line is instead of trying to now connect the existing things and find a way to connect them in the most efficient way through the REZs.

**Ms BUSH:** There should be clearer guidance about what is coming in here, what are the obligations, what are the benefits and who stands to benefit from that?

**Ms Kelly:** Not even benefit, but just to make sure that communities are not ridden roughshod over and we value everyone's opinions.

**Ms BUSH:** There is a whole other conversation about the benefit piece and who is part of that, who is scoped into that benefit and who misses out, but we may not have time to go there.

**Mr KEMPTON:** Having been so heavily involved in this and you now know what this legislation is going to bring, is there a compromise to be reached through this community benefit agreement, or do you think they just need to be somewhere else away from your region?

**Ms Kelly:** No, I think there is definitely a place for a community benefit and if you have those conversations up-front you are more likely to establish that relationship between community and the developer. Until now it has felt like a lecture and, 'This is what's going to happen to you.' It is about being transparent, being open and saying, 'Here's what we're looking to build,' so that everyone can try to get on board and understand what is going to work and what is not going to work for that community.

**Mr KEMPTON:** That fait accompli is really what is causing impact on people's mental health; there is nothing you can do about it and it is all going to happen?

**Ms Kelly:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much for being here today. The time for the session has now ended. Thank you very much for sharing your personal experiences and suggestions. That concludes the hearing. Thank you to everyone who has participated today. Thank you to our Hansard reporter. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. I declare the public hearing closed.

**The committee adjourned at 11.32 am.**