

## Planning (Social Impact and Community Benefit) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

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<b>Attachments:</b>	Making the submission and your name public
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FLINDERS  
SHIRE COUNCIL



## Submission to the Inquiry into the Planning (Social Impact and Community Benefit) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

**Submitted to:** State Development, Infrastructure and Works Committee (SDIWC)

**Submitted by:** Jointly by Remote Area Planning and Development Board (**RAPAD**), Flinders Shire Council (**Flinders**), and VisIR Pty Ltd (**VisIR**)

### 1 Introduction

RAPAD, Flinders, and VisIR thank the SDIWC for the opportunity to contribute to the consultation process regarding the *Planning (Social Impact and Community Benefit) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (the Bill)*.

We are pleased to make this submission in support of the Government's objectives and the intent of the Bill. Increasing the influence that local communities and local government have on major energy infrastructure development will (i) increase the economic, social and environmental benefits to affected communities, and (ii) encourage energy infrastructure development in regions where the economic and social drivers complement the impacts and benefits of such development. We commend the government's proactive approach to reforming the way renewable energy developments are undertaken and encourage them to ensure all proposed legislation and regulation finds a balance that strengthens community influence and benefits while facilitating infrastructure investment in regions that align with the economic, environmental and social objectives for Queensland.

RAPAD is a regional organisation of Councils across 7 Local Government Areas (LGAs) that covers approximately 24% of Queensland and initiated the RAPAD Power Grid project as an economic development opportunity for the central west in partnership with VisIR.

Flinders LGA is home to the best performing and most efficient wind farm in the Australian National Electricity Market (NEM) and is a key element of the CopperString corridor with local social and economic circumstance that aligns strongly with renewable energy development.

VisIR is a Queensland business founded in Townsville that has worked closely with regional communities across north and western Queensland to develop energy infrastructure, including as founders and owners of the CopperString transmission network until 2023 when it was transferred to the State of Queensland.

## 2 Unique significant of collaboration and this submission

In 2023 RAPAD, VisIR and Barcaldine Region Council (BRC) agreed to collaborate and drive forward development of a community-led energy infrastructure development comprising a transmission network stretching through the central west from the CopperString Flinders substation at Hughenden to Biloela and comprising energy generation. This was the first major transmission network development undertaken through formal partnership with an organisation of Councils, and this approach ensured community benefits and consultation were at the heart of the RAPAD Power Grid development strategy.

In 2024 RAPAD and VisIR commenced investigations to support development of a Community Benefit Royalty Agreement (CBRA) that would establish a framework for agreement of financial benefits to communities that are impacted by the RAPAD Power Grid. The CBRA was endorsed by the RAPAD Board (comprised of Mayors from the seven LGAs) in October 2024 as the first of its kind pre-emptive and region wide community benefit scheme.

In 2025 Flinders, RAPAD and VisIR signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to establish a collaborative approach to the renewable energy development, particularly with respect to community benefits, which aims to:

- Advance economic development in the north mid-west and central west regions through energy transition investment.
- Establish effective communication and shared information to benefit communities from energy infrastructure investments.
- Align positions on policy and industry engagement to represent the best interests of the region.
- Collaborate on RAPAD Power Grid development to enhance investment through the 2030s.

In May 2024, RAPAD (with the support of VisIR) organised a study visit to Texas for RAPAD mayors and councillors, and then Director General of the Department of Energy and Climate, to learn from regional communities about renewable energy growth. The trip included visits to key energy centres in Texas including, Austin, Houston, Sweetwater, as well as the State of Nevada and California, focusing on:

- Practical economic decision-making rather than ideology.
- Revenue stability for ranchers, diversifying income sources.
- Community benefits from inward investment, job creation, and local tax revenues.
- Observations on improving end-of-asset life planning.

In Texas local government has significantly more influence and participation over the development of energy infrastructure, including renewable energy developments, than local governments in Queensland. Yet Texas, despite this strong influence and authority, including for negotiating payments to local government, is the location of more wind and solar development than any other state in the USA, generating about 26% of all wind energy in the USA. The experience of Texas demonstrates that strengthening the influence of and accountability to local government and their communities does not need to hinder investment. You can read more on the study visit here <https://www.rapadpowergrid.com.au/rapad-us-mission>.

## 3 Considerations specifically related to the Bill

### 3.1 Renewable proponents Community Benefit Agreement expectations

In our collective experience renewable energy developers and investors have a genuine intention to provide benefit to the community, and in most cases direct cash payments (of varying quantum) for the Council and/or other community groups to use. In some cases, these are seen as compensation for impact, and in others they are seen more as a payment above the direct impact as part of sharing financial value.

In almost all cases that we are familiar with clarification of and formal commitment to community benefit payments or other undertakings is left until very late in the development process which creates uncertainty and inhibits community-level decision making about priorities and investments; the government's Bill addresses this issue by ensuring Community Benefit Agreements (CBA) must be in place right at the front of the development process which is valuable for communities and local government.

### 3.2 Positioning local government to complete the CBA negotiation

We note that RAPAD and VisIR undertook detailed research, including discussions with regional Councils and Mayors in other regions in Queensland and those impacted by renewable energy zones in New South Wales and developed the CBRA that was signed in August 2024, <https://rapad.com.au/publications/landmark-rapad-power-grid-community-benefit-royalty-agreement/>. Subsequently Flinders considered the CBRA and given the similar economic, social and environmental characteristics of the central west and the north west of Queensland, Flinders decided to adopt the CBRA. The CBRA is consistent with the underlying intent of the Bill and RAPAD, Flinders and VisIR are proud to be ahead-of-the-game in this regard. This approach provides a clear CBA framework that will apply to the RAPAD Power Grid and can apply to other projects as the respective Councils see fit.

The CBRA provides a standard framework, and we encourage the government to look to establish standards for best practice that help local government and Councils to negotiate and agree CBAs that are appropriate and encourage not hinder responsible renewable energy development in their regions where the community supports this development. We suggest the government consider standardisation for regions, such as the RAPAD and Flinders regions where economic, social and environmental characteristics are similar, however recommend against a one-size-fits-all solution across the State.

Local government and Councils have finite resources and limited expertise in the negotiation of complex or bespoke commercial agreements. We encourage the government to provide facilitation and funding support to regional Councils as they build their capacity to negotiate CBAs to ensure the agreements are effective, risk-free for Councils, and reflect a good deal for the community.

### 3.3 Public Accountability

Flinders, RAPAD, and VisIR believe public accountability is imperative. Councils, the State Government, and proponents must be held accountable for the use of funds generated through CBA. Governance and use of the funds at a local level, where the funds are meaningful and where people understand deeply the investment priorities, is appropriate, however standardised performance

expectations, governance, acquittal and reporting should be set to ensure transparency and public accountability are appropriate and the benefit to the community at large is maximised.

### 3.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, we commend the government for the intent of this Bill and encourage the Committee to consider our feedback as they deliberate on the Bill.

RAPAD, Flinders and VisIR are pleased to have invested time and resources to the issue of community benefit and in development and adoption of our own CBRA that aligns so strongly with the objectives of the government's CBA framework.

Thank you for considering this submission. Should any member of the Committee wish to discuss this submission further, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

Yours sincerely,



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