



FIRST NATIONS CLEAN ENERGY STRATEGY ROUNDTABLE – SOUTH AUSTRALIA

11 & 12 SEPTEMBER | ADELAIDE



First Nations Clean Energy Strategy | SA Roundtable

Location: Adelaide, SA

Dates: 11 and 12 September 2023

Participants: Approximately 80

What is the purpose of the Roundtables?

The First Nations Clean Energy Strategy (the Strategy) roundtables provide an opportunity for First Nations peoples and organisations to discuss what is important from their perspective and to outline the barriers and opportunities so they can meaningfully share in the benefits of the clean energy transition.

The roundtables also provide a forum for government and industry to better understand First Nations perspectives and collaborate on actions, policies, and programs that could be implemented as part of the Strategy.

Key emerging themes captured during the SA Roundtable

1) An action-orientated strategy shared publicly and contextually, with ongoing benefits tracking.

- a) SA Roundtable participants were vocal on the need for a strategy which is underpinned by concrete plans and timelines to which government, industry and all other role players can be held to account. While it is acknowledged that the starting point for this process is consultation and design, the overwhelming sentiment from community is that consultations should be followed by tangible action, which will enhance trust with First Nations communities.
- b) Discussions points from consultations and commitments by government and other role players were requested to be published in the public domain to drive accountability for executing the Strategy.
- c) Potential disconnects observed during the SA Roundtables need to be clarified and addressed within the Strategy: the role of the Commonwealth vs. State Governments in rolling out policy, and the broader benefits vs. costs of the clean energy transition.
- d) Robust report back mechanisms and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were requested to ensure that the benefits of the transition are measurable and shared equitably between communities.

2) The protection of First Nations rights and a potential role for a new Protection Authority

- a) Cultural heritage rights: clean energy infrastructure development poses a risk of irreparable loss of cultural heritage through the potential destruction of landscapes, culturally significant sites, accessibility of cultural practices and song lines if First Nations communities are not consulted appropriately. These rights need to be protected through every step of the development process.



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- b) Land Rights: The importance of negotiating the return of land to traditional owners, especially after decommissioning of existing energy infrastructure, was underlined as a means for First Nations elders to strengthen the connection to the land, and to leave a legacy for their children.
- c) Water rights: Water rights were stressed as being equally significant as land rights multiple times throughout the Roundtable discussions, with concerns on which water resources will be used for hydrogen projects. Water is important for Aboriginal communities for both practical purposes as well as cultural reasons.
- d) An authority dedicated to Indigenous Air, Land, and Sea Protection was proposed, reflecting the need for a holistic approach to environmental stewardship. Such an authority could be responsible for monitoring the impact of clean energy projects on First Nations communities and the environment, and for advising the government on ways to mitigate any negative impacts.

3) Best practices for community engagement need to be defined.

- a) A call was made for clear First Nations engagement principles and terms of reference to enable respectful discussions and negotiations.
- b) Industry-specific legislation was proposed to govern collaboration with First Nations communities on clean energy projects, emphasising the importance of a legal framework which enables equitable partnerships.
- c) An independent platform was requested for Aboriginal communities to gather in a safe and unobstructed manner and continue discussions on an ongoing basis. A suggestion was made that a representative body at the SA level and or a national peak be stood up and resourced to represent First Nations interests as it relates to renewable energy.

4) Clean energy opportunities within and beyond large scale green energy projects, including microgrids and virtual power plants, housing upgrades and energy efficiency solutions.

- a) First Nations communities want meaningful economic participation in the infrastructure development of major wind, solar and green hydrogen projects, but also want to own and operate microgrids. Aboriginal participants see a role for them to coordinate these projects, potentially through virtual power plants, and do not only want to be consulted.
- b) Housing upgrades will make communities more resilient to the impacts of climate change in the context of changing weather patterns. Participants saw a role for themselves in providing related building services within their own communities as a revenue generating opportunity.
- c) Access to and installation of energy efficiency appliances was also highlighted as a key opportunity to participate in the clean energy transition. While energy efficient electrical appliances will reduce power bills, these need to be made financially accessible to Aboriginal communities with a proposal for a government-funded exchange program for exchange existing appliances with energy efficient alternatives.

5) Sustainable and coordinated skills development and capacity building



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- a) Participants expressed the desire to empower the youth and desire for them to take on leadership roles in clean energy projects, ensuring intergenerational sustainability. The Strategy should incentivise participation of First Nations youth by equipping them with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the clean energy sector through programs such as scholarships, internships, and mentorship opportunities.
- b) Instead of just providing certificates, the focus should be on job-readiness through practical skills and post-qualification training, enabling individuals to enter the workforce with confidence.
- c) An Aboriginal-focused training academy was proposed to coordinate clean energy skills development. Such an academy should equip young people with the broader skills required to develop innovative solutions to enable the clean energy transition and to mitigate the address the challenges brought by climate change.
- d) Informal energy-focused education programs should also be provided to communities to drive behavioural change regarding responsible use of energy and water.
- e) Skills development should not be limited to First Nations communities. First Nations cultural awareness need to be further embedded into government organisations and decision-making and be incorporated into corporate ESG skills development and reporting requirements within Australia.

6) A desire for partnerships between community and industry which result in true empowerment.

- a) Communities desire a genuine “seat at the table” to ensure that their voices are not only heard but are influential in shaping clean energy initiatives. Some examples raised were directorships, potential equity stakes in renewable energy projects and Indigenous procurement policies.
- b) The clean energy transition presents inter-generational opportunities for wealth creation. South Australia has access to good quality natural resources for wind and solar energy as well as hydrogen projects, and First Nations communities desire real economic benefits from the use of their land and water.
- c) Access to reliable and sufficient funding is a key enabler to empower First Nations communities to own, operate and maintain clean energy projects. Government should make it easier for communities to understand where and how to access existing funding and grants and fill the gap with new funding mechanisms to ensure meaningful economic participation of First Nations-owned businesses in the clean energy transition.
- d) Industry has an opportunity to develop new innovative business models which integrate First Nations perspectives and skills into their core projects and operations, beyond mere consultation. By working together, industry and First Nations communities can create a more sustainable and equitable future for all Australians



Australian Government
Department of Climate Change, Energy,
the Environment and Water

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Organisations represented at the SA Roundtable:

ATCO Australia

Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA)

Australian Trade and Investment Commission
(Austrade)

Clean Energy Finance Corporation

Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research
Organisation (CSIRO)

Department of Industry, Science and Resources
(DISR)

Energy Performance Strategy

First Nations Clean Energy and Emissions Reduction
Advisory Committee

First Nations Clean Energy Network

HDF Energy

Kaurna

Linking Futures

Marnbi Aboriginal Corporation

National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA)

Nukunu Wapma Thura

Original Power Ltd.

Point Pearce Aboriginal Corporation

The Dieri Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC

Umoona Community Arts Centre

Umoona Community Council Incorporated

Viliwarinha Yura Aboriginal Corporation

Wilyakali Aboriginal Corporation

Wirungu Aboriginal Corporation

Yankunytjatjara Native Title Aboriginal
Corporation

Yuntulun Consulting