



# A Real Deal for Gladstone

Community Listening Report to Shape Economic and Social Transition



**QUEENSLAND**  
COMMUNITY ALLIANCE



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**SYDNEY**  
—  
Sydney Policy  
Lab

July 2023

## Acknowledgement of Country

The Queensland Community Alliance and the Sydney Policy Lab acknowledge the generations upon generations of Traditional Custodians that have held responsibilities for Country, “custodian-ing” it from one generation to the next. We acknowledge the cultural protocols of protecting and holding knowledges that have sustained culture and Country for over 60,000 years.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners on the lands of which this listening and learning was conducted, and where much of this Community Report was written, the Gooreng Gooreng, Bailai, Gurang and Taribelang Bunda nations.

We also acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of our broader writing team who work on the land of the Yuggera and Turrbal Peoples in Brisbane, the land of the Yugambeh People in Logan and the land of the Gadigal People in Sydney. We honour and respect the sovereignty of the many Nations where we live and work.

We are committed to working respectfully with First Nations communities across these beautiful lands, seas and skies. Sovereignty was never ceded. Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land.

## About the Queensland Community Alliance

The Queensland Community Alliance brings together 35 member organisations representing 1.7 million Queenslanders. We organise our members and communities to act for the common good. We are churches, mosques, other faith groups, trade unions, community organisations and ethnic associations.

Community organising is democracy in action: winning victories that change lives, transform communities, develop leadership and strengthen civil society.

## About the Sydney Policy Lab

The Sydney Policy Lab was created by the University of Sydney to be a multi-disciplinary, non-partisan space where the academy and the community can come together to investigate and solve complex policy issues that face our world, build community and make progress. It represents a powerful contribution by the University to the common good.

The Lab’s prime focus is on and with community. It was created by people searching for practical answers to the question of how we can best arrange our lives together. Its work reflects this, building relationships with and between people from diverse backgrounds to encourage greater empathy and understanding, and supporting them to create community-led policies. In particular, we seek to work with those who have been excluded from decision-making structures.

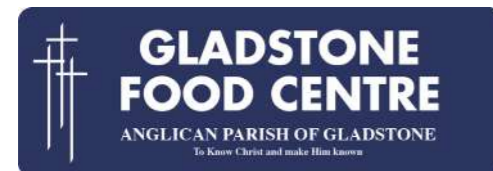
## About the Real Deal

Inspired by the global Green New Deal, a Real Deal seeks to build a new community-led relationship between market, state and civil society that works for people and the environment. It includes but goes beyond public expenditure, by transforming the institutions that shape our relationships with one another and with the environment that supports us all.

A Real Deal starts from an acknowledgement that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are the Traditional Custodians of Country. Any Real Deal must support the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as declared by the United Nations.

An initiative of the Sydney Policy Lab, the Real Deal project works with Australian communities to envision and shape the societal changes and transitions that climate change demands. To build this collective community voice, the Real Deal deploys participatory research, community organising and other relationship-based research strategies. It brings together a diverse and unusual alliance of faith, climate, union and community groups across Australia, supported by a network of researchers convened by the University of Sydney’s Policy Lab.

The strength of the Real Deal project lies in its commitment not to fast policy but to collaborative relationships spanning the full breadth and depth of Australian society. It prioritises relationships as the necessary foundation for policy that will buoy Australia through the political and economic transformations attendant to climate crisis. The multiscale structure of the Real Deal project also reflects the large variation in the political, economic and social consequences of energy transition for Australia’s many cities and towns, aiming to develop policy settings at every scale.



## Authors

In this Community Report the term “co-author” refers to people who assisted with research analysis and writing. The term “co-researcher” refers to people who assisted with designing, gathering and recording listening data.

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How to Cite this Community Report

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Contents

60 Second Summary	9
Executive Summary	10
Introducing a Real Deal for Gladstone	12
Three pillars of a real deal for Gladstone	21
Pillar 1: Access to Quality Healthcare	24
Pillar 2: Housing	28
Pillar 3: Overall Liveability	32
A Real Deal agenda for Gladstone: Pathways and Possibilities	36
Community Benefits as a Pathway	38
Policy Possibilities	40
Next steps for Gladstone	48
References	50



## 60 Second Summary

Inspired by the global Green New Deal, the Real Deal project is an unusual and diverse alliance of faith, climate, union and community groups across Australia, supported by a network of researchers convened by the Sydney Policy Lab at the University of Sydney. It comprises a national coalition and place-based projects in Gladstone, Geelong and Western Sydney that are united by common commitment to a community-led relationship between market, state and civil society that works for people, community and the environment: a Real Deal. In Gladstone the place-based Real Deal project is convened and coordinated by the Queensland Community Alliance.

Though fossil fuels are central to Gladstone's historical and current local economy, the share of fossil fuels in the global energy mix is declining. Gladstone's future is at the heart of Australia's climate commitments. Decarbonising the region's alumina industry and coal exports will be vital to achieving national net zero targets, yet the community is wary of the challenges associated with "boom and bust" industrial cycles. This Community Report presents the findings of a six-month "Listening Campaign" on Gooreng Gooreng, Bailai, Gurang and Taribelang Bunda Country in Gladstone. People led 316 conversations about the community's concerns and aspirations in response to the pressures and opportunities posed by the economic transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy.

The Listening Campaign revealed three essential pillars of a Real Deal for Gladstone: healthcare, housing and liveability. There was a widespread recognition that if Gladstone is to become a stronger community, then these challenges need to be addressed as part of Gladstone's broader economic, energy and social transition. This Community Report canvasses potential policy solutions identified by local community organisations that suggest concrete ways to achieve this.

## Executive Summary

Inspired by the global Green New Deal, the Real Deal coalition formed in 2019. It is a diverse and unusual collaboration of a broad alliance of faith, climate, union and community groups across Australia, supported by a network of Australian researchers convened by the University of Sydney's Policy Lab. Alongside the national coalition, place-based coalitions have been built in Gladstone and Geelong, and the Real Deal is working with a third coalition in Western Sydney. Relationships have been built with longstanding networks in a range of Australian communities experiencing transition. In every place, organisations seek to learn from and with Country and are united by a common commitment to forging a new community-led relationship between market, state and civil society that works for people and the environment: a Real Deal.

In Gladstone the Real Deal project is led by the Queensland Community Alliance, supported by a strong network of community, religious and union partners. Though the share of fossil fuels in the global energy mix is declining, fossil fuels remain central to Gladstone's local economy, making the city vital to Australia's energy transition. Since 2020, community organisers and leaders in the Gladstone community, alongside researchers from the Sydney Policy Lab, have built a diverse place-based coalition in Gladstone. This includes working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Peoples and privileging their ancient knowledge systems. Together, we are committed to ensuring that community concerns, interests and voices inform and shape the renewable energy transition to address not only environmental and economic challenges but equally the most pressing societal challenges in the Gladstone community at large.

The Real Deal coalition argues that energy transition, and the shift in energy supply from fossil fuels to renewables, is also a moment for economic and social transition, that can create positive change in how we support Gladstone's local economy and people to thrive. Across the country, the Real Deal locally and nationally is committed to generating an economic and climate policy agenda from the ground up.

This Community Report documents our "Listening Campaign," the first step towards creating a community-led agenda in Gladstone. The Real Deal for Gladstone project engaged hundreds of people in conversations about what is working and what is not working in Gladstone. Local residents involved in community groups, religious organisations, schools and unions gathered around tables in Gladstone community spaces for semi-structured conversations. At "Table Talks" and in one-to-one conversations, they shared their insights on the challenges they face, their fears and hopes for Gladstone's future, and how they imagine an economic transition that improves the lives of Gladstone residents.

Across the Listening Campaign, participants expressed awareness that as Gladstone enters a new period of change the economic, political, social and natural environment will be subject to transformation. Analysing the data, we found that three widely and deeply felt concerns about the economic changes on Gladstone's horizon are held in common by its community members: healthcare, housing and liveability. These form three "pillars" of a Real Deal for Gladstone:

## Pillar 1: Access to Quality Healthcare

Participants overwhelmingly felt that there is a crisis in Gladstone's healthcare system. They identified difficulty in accessing quality services in the region and felt frustration about the consequences of needing to travel for specialised care. The ongoing ramifications of the closure of Gladstone Hospital's maternity ward were continually raised as a key example of Gladstone's systemic healthcare challenges.

## Pillar 2: Housing

Participants emphasised the distinctive character of housing stress in Gladstone, linked to the historical "boom and bust" shape of its economy. Cost and access to the rental market were also cited as significant difficulties, with housing stress compounded for many with intensified caring and work responsibilities.

## Pillar 3: Overall Liveability

Many participants love living in the Gladstone Region and have intentionally chosen this region as the place to raise their families. But participants identified a sense of dislocation, a lack of community cohesion and poorly integrated services resulting from the transience of Gladstone's population. Participants felt that the prominence of fly-in fly-out and insecure jobs in Gladstone's industries have compromised the city's overall liveability. Services available to support critical life transitions, such as from infancy to attending school, childhood to adulthood, and from retirement to aged care, are unavailable.

Listening to Gladstone's residents, we found that the three pillars overlap to shape the overall social determinants of health in the city, as well as its sense of community. For instance, participants felt that Gladstone's ability to attract high quality service providers was compromised by the lack of adequate local health services and unavailability of rental accommodation.

Participants expressed that the way in which Gladstone responds to concerns with healthcare, housing and liveability has the potential to entrench or to alleviate longstanding inequities in the region as a whole.

Across the Listening Campaign, a mixed set of attitudes towards the future of economic transition emerged. The viewpoints that participants held about Gladstone's future were often shaped by personal experiences of economic transitions in the past. While many participants felt positive about the employment opportunities that a new renewable economy could generate, many participants simultaneously voiced a lack of understanding about the lived realities of economic transition. As one participant expressed, it is often unclear what is undergoing transition. Most importantly, participants were concerned that a transition led by outsiders was unlikely to address specific local issues. We found widespread support for community-led processes that empower Gladstone's residents to lead effective change that strengthens the community.

Leading local organisations identified the most concrete policy pathways to address the challenges raised by participants in the Listening Campaign. Responding to community concerns, the policy ideas we put forward in this Community Report form the early outlines of a Real Deal Agenda for Gladstone. In particular, the policy tool of a Community Benefit Agreement leverages local benefit from new infrastructure. At the heart of Gladstone's Real Deal Agenda is the premise that economic transition in Gladstone must create local community benefit that leads to just outcomes.

What sets the Real Deal apart is that it is a product of and authored by the communities that energy transition stands to affect, not "on behalf of," "about," or "in consultation with" those communities. The Listening Campaign in Gladstone developed in tandem with similar processes in Geelong and Western Sydney. While this Community Report talks of participants, the people who drafted this Community Report and who are quoted in this document are our neighbours and our friends, organised together for community action. As the result of long-term relationship building and organising across Gladstone, this Community Report shows that local communities are uniquely placed to identify the complex array of interconnected social and economic issues that must be at the forefront of a successful economic transition, one that strengthens the capacity of all its residents to prosper and live well.



## Introducing a Real Deal for Gladstone

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**“If the transition were held in the realm of community groups, it wouldn’t be as blunt as other transitions we’ve seen around the world.”**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, local mother

**“We should focus on making Gladstone more liveable and attractive for workers to move here and attract business that way.”**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, young person

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Inspired by the global Green New Deal, the Real Deal coalition formed in 2019. It is a diverse and unusual collaboration of a broad alliance of faith, climate, union and community groups across Australia, supported by a network of Australian researchers convened by the University of Sydney’s Policy Lab. Alongside the national coalition, place-based projects have taken root in Geelong, Gladstone and Western Sydney, and relationships have been built with longstanding groups in the Hunter Valley in New South Wales and Collie in Western Australia. The national and place-based coalitions are united by common commitment to forging a new community-led relationship between market, state and civil society that works for people and the environment: a Real Deal.

Gladstone joined the Real Deal in November 2020, nominated by the Australian Conservation Foundation to be a flagship place-based project. In September 2021, Queensland Community Alliance played a leadership role in convening a team of funding partners to employ a local organiser in the Gladstone Region. These partners included Australian Conservation Foundation, Queensland Conservation Council, Rail Tram and Bus Union, Electrical Trades Union, United Workers Union, Queensland Council of Unions, Queensland Teachers Union and the Sydney Policy Lab. These funds enabled local organisers to be brought in, and the Listening Campaign documented in this Community Report was developed and carried out. This Community Report marks the beginning of an ongoing process through which increasing numbers of local organisations and individuals can play a role in shaping economic and social transition in Gladstone.

In parallel to this place-based work, the Real Deal project operates at a national scale, seeking to bring together regional networks to ensure that communities like Gladstone have a stronger voice when advocating for policy solutions with State and Federal Governments. The national Real Deal coalition involves some of Australia’s largest climate groups, unions and community groups. These include the United Workers Union, GetUp, Australian Conservation Foundation, Jesuit Social Services, Climate Justice Union, Queensland Community Alliance, Sydney Alliance, Victoria Trades Hall, Tomorrow Movement, NSW Conservation Council and Sweltering Cities.

## Planning for Transition

Across the world, climate change is causing change, and this is especially true for communities embedded in economies reliant on fossil fuels. The cascading impacts of climate change continue to increase pressure on national governments to decarbonise and transition their energy supply and, consequently, their economies. Further, Australia's export markets are increasingly demanding renewable energy and products manufactured with renewable energy. The global move away from fossil fuels is neither smooth nor even, and it has broad social and economic dimensions. In Germany and Spain, for example, governments have worked with industry to provide orderly pathways for workers and communities to have a say in the transition process, whereas in the United States, transition has often occurred suddenly, with sharp halts in coal production leaving communities unsupported and vulnerable. Where transition is poorly handled, the consequence is community polarisation and frustration.

Australian governments and local decision-makers are alert to these challenges. The Queensland Government's 10 Year Energy and Jobs Plan and the Gladstone Regional Council's 10 Year Economic Transition Roadmap identify that these global trends magnify local challenges and opportunities in Gladstone. These reports argue that Gladstone is on the precipice of a rapid transition that will change the landscape of the region. Over the coming years and decades, as in Germany, Spain and the United States, the region will experience scheduled coal power station closures, just as it will be an important staging ground for the construction of new renewable energy projects.

While different levels of government are essential partners in the transition process, organised communities are equally essential to shaping the ways in which change occurs. Gladstone has the opportunity to become a model of well-planned regional transition in Australia. But inevitably, any process of change is accompanied by uncertainty and risk. To ensure that local voices can shape their changing economic and social environment, the Real Deal Listening Campaign was designed to include representation from as many of Gladstone's communities and groups as possible.



## Why Gladstone? Background and Context

**"It's a beautiful place with a strong community that sticks together."**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, local market attendee

Gladstone has undergone a multitude of social and economic transitions. Its residents readily express pride in the community's resilience and capacity to respond creatively to the many challenges it has faced. Across multiple generations, residents tell stories about how changes in the local economy have impacted families, schools, sports groups, and the wider community. These changes haven't always been easy, and while people remember changes to the meatworks and dairy industries, the beginning of production by Queensland Alumina Limited (QAL) in 1967, and the construction of the gas plants in 2011, they also are aware that economic cycles of "boom and bust" have characterised Gladstone's economy.

In Gladstone, change is again on the horizon. The Gladstone Region has a local economy that relies on jobs in heavy industry, including jobs that depend directly and indirectly on fossil fuels. While the fossil fuel industries have built and maintained a high standard of living for Australians over the past century, government policy and corporate investments are moving in different directions. This means that there will inevitably be changes to the kinds of jobs that are available in Gladstone.

The city of Gladstone stands on ancient land. For more than 60,000 years this region has been cared for by the Gooreng Gooreng, Bailai, Gurang and Taribelang Bunda Peoples. Today this coastal city in Central Queensland is the centre of a regional area with a population of approximately 65,000 people. It is home to Queensland's largest shipping port. The Gladstone Region's dominant industries are tied to agriculture and mining, and its port is one of the largest coal-export terminals in the world, adjacent to an export hub for liquified natural gas (LNG). It is also home to the three alumina facilities of Rio Tinto, the region's largest employer: Yarwun Alumina Refinery, Queensland Alumina Limited and Boyne Smelters, the single largest energy user in the state of Queensland.

These industries are facing changes because of the need for global energy transition. Politically, the Federal Government's commitment to significantly reduce carbon emissions by 43% by 2050, combined with the Queensland Government's commitment to invest \$62 billion to transition the Queensland energy grid to 95% renewable energy means that the jobs associated with energy production in Gladstone will change. Market players are already responding, with Gladstone's biggest employer – Rio Tinto – committing to decarbonise its operations by 50% by 2030. Energy transition is also creating opportunities in Gladstone, with industrial production shifting to renewables, the growth of a local hydrogen industry and the development of renewable manufacturing, such as by Fortescue Metals.

In recent years Gladstone has been identified as a key site for Australia's economic transition due to its existing infrastructure, renewable energy assets, skilled workforce and proximity to Asian markets. Federal and State Governments are targeting Gladstone as a primary site for renewable technology, evidenced by the May 2023 announcement of a \$117 million investment in a renewable hydrogen Gladstone, the largest project of its kind in Australia. As fossil fuel industries decline, the pre-existing aggregation of electricity infrastructure means that Gladstone has a comparative advantage that is likely to see it host energy-dependent industries of the future. Moreover, the Gladstone Region is already highly profitable and economically successful, with an annual economic output of \$18 billion. There is ample evidence that energy transition will attract economic resources to the Gladstone Region, but it remains unclear who will benefit from this economic and social transition. The residents of Gladstone are asking: how can the economic and social transition sparked by the movement from fossil fuels to renewable energy help the Gladstone community to grow and thrive?

## Our Method

The Real Deal for Gladstone is designed to support civic organisations to intervene in the economic transition for community benefit. The strength of the Real Deal, regionally and nationally, lies in its commitment to a distinctive research method developed by the Sydney Policy Lab: the Relational Method. The Relational Method brings together aspects of community organising, co-design and participatory action research to generate policy solutions grounded in the lived experience of communities that stand to gain or lose most from the policies in question. It is based on the contention that the best knowledge is produced when researchers and communities work together. The core of this approach is drawn from the methodology of community organising, established by the Industrial Areas Foundation over 80 years ago. In Australia, the Queensland Community Alliance and NSW Community Alliance (Sydney and Hunter Alliances) lead this practice, provide training in this approach and support the evolution of this method. Community organising provides a proven conceptual approach and practical tools such as “Relational Meetings” and the “Organising Cycle.” The Relational Method builds on this by synthesising the expertise and experience of practitioners, policymakers, community groups and the broader public alike.

The Real Deal prioritises policy solutions that arise from relationships built across diverse coalitions of faith, climate, union and community groups across Australia. A relational starting point is especially important in discussions of climate change because “climate” can be laden with political connotations and longstanding community divisions that foreclose creativity and collaboration. Critically, the Real Deal also recognises that the political, economic and social dimensions of energy transition will vary across Australia’s many cities and towns. Its dynamic and multiscale structure aims to facilitate the development of policy settings that operate locally and at scale.

The Relational Method’s Organising Cycle (see Figure 1) proceeds from listening to communities to identify policy themes, to planning and researching those policies, to acting together to implement solutions, and finally to evaluating the process and outcomes. The Real Deal project engaged local organisers to lead this process in Gladstone. From September 2021, Byron Cubit, and then Elise Ganley, began one-to-one meetings with organisations across the community, building a “core group” that sought to represent the diversity of Gladstone. Between December 2021 and December 2022, community leaders were invited to three community forums to learn more about energy transition and share stories of socio-economic challenges they faced in Gladstone. The resulting Gladstone “Listening Campaign” began in March 2022 and continues as we publish this Community Report in July 2023. It comprises a series of semi-structured qualitative conversations held as small group conversations of six to twelve people known as “Table Talks” and as one-to-one meetings. All conversations were hosted by organisations in the Gladstone coalition, including churches, unions and community groups. The organisers, members of the core team and other Gladstone community leaders thereby became community “co-researchers” collaborating with Sydney Policy Lab researchers to facilitate a research process. This Community Report records the findings of the listening phase of the Organising Cycle including a series of indicative policy solutions arising from the interests of community leaders.



**Figure 1. The Organising Cycle**

As part of the Gladstone “Listening Campaign” the Gladstone community held conversations with 316 people, through 21 Table Talks, three market stalls and 139 one-to-one conversations.

**Each Table Talk addressed, at minimum, the following three questions in approximately one hour:**

1. Share a story about why Gladstone is important to you
2. What are the existing pressures on you and your family? Please share a story.
3. We made a short presentation about the broader social and economic context, then asked for reactions. How will this impact the people you love and care about?

The Table Talks represented over 30 organisations across different civic sectors. All residents in the Gladstone Region were invited to attend, and the network used membership lists, social media promotion, market stalls and personal relationships to support participation. The focus was on people living in the 4680 postcode, extended when appropriate to include surrounding regions, such as to ensure the inclusion of workers in Gladstone’s heavy industry.

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Despite the demographic reach of the Listening Campaign, the local team were aware of some reluctance to participate among some of the city's constituencies. Factors that dissuaded people included a lack of public education about the energy transition, which left some people unclear about the pending urgent economic change ahead. Others felt unsafe participating because of reputational concerns for their employer. The combination of these factors reflects an environment where apathy ("I'll believe it when I see it") and fear ("Without coal we won't exist") continue.

It was also, at times, challenging for people to find the time to come together in groups. Many people and their families work shifts, others were volunteering outside of working hours, and others do this work as part of their paid employment. These time constraints meant that the local leaders needed to be creative in finding different ways to engage people and remain open to different organisations joining the process at different times. There was also a change in organisers mid-way through the development of the Listening Campaign, which meant that the process took longer than anticipated.

We are also conscious that the work of listening needs to be ongoing, and we continue to build relationships with Bailai, Gurang, Gooreng Gooreng and Taribelang Bunda Peoples and other First Nations People throughout the organising process in the spirit of reciprocity. We recognise the harm of the unproductive cultures of over-consultation and extractive research in Gladstone and want to prioritise building power together and negotiating for policy solutions. We seek to deepen these relationships as the place-based coalition grows.

The Listening Campaign sought to begin to build a strong collective voice in response to the intersecting challenges of a changing energy market and ongoing social inequalities as the Gladstone economy transitions away from fossil fuels. It was designed to strengthen democratic networks in Gladstone such that its communities are well-placed to set a shared agenda and shape the economic transition which will affect their lives and livelihoods. The Listening Campaign not only created opportunities for organisations to facilitate a stronger sense of community within existing networks, but also connected individuals and groups across organisations as unlikely allies with concerns transcending socio-political and cultural divides. Ultimately, we aspire to shepherd a process in which Gladstone's future is written by the stories, experiences, and ambitions of its many and diverse residents.

After the Table Talks, Gladstone community co-researchers worked with Sydney Policy Lab researchers to analyse and interpret the data. The data was analysed qualitatively and coded according to the use of key words and themes. Three "pillars" emerged as the most identified pressures raised by participants, identified using quantitative and narrative analysis. First, we calculated the frequency with which the three key pillars were discussed by participants, recording as a percentage the total number of participants who raised each of these issues overall. Second, using a narrative analysis, we identified stories told by the participants. We included stories that shed light on key dimensions of the pillars as well as stories that exemplify widely held grievances about injustices that participants felt required further attention. In this way, the stories of participants who often feel marginalised from public discussion, such as young parents and people with disabilities, were amplified.

After this process, the report was written collaboratively. Mentored by researchers, community leaders undertook an initial data analysis, which was then used to produce initial drafts of this Community Report. Community leaders read and responded to early versions, often seeking to share more detail about ways in which the issues arising could be addressed. Iteratively, the intersecting knowledges derived from lived experience and research analysis sharpened the Community Report's findings. At the same time, community researchers from the Gladstone organisations identified a list of policy solutions that could be explored together with industry and governments, which have been included in this Community Report.

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## Gladstone's Transition: Current Perspectives

Many participants expressed great pride in their town and optimism about the future, sharing a belief that renewable energy was necessary and that it would benefit Gladstone. While these participants frequently talked about their support for the prospect of energy transition, many also raised that they feared sharing these beliefs publicly. Some were concerned that friends or co-workers might disagree with them. Others raised that while they were pleased about energy transition for Gladstone as a whole, they were personally fearful about what it meant for their own and others' job security.

Most participants raised confusion and uncertainty when asked about the plans for economic and social transition in Gladstone. Some were unsure about what exactly was being changed or replaced and on what timeline, with many participants unclear about the future of different pieces of infrastructure such as smelters, power stations, coal exports, the port and local manufacturing facilities. Participants often expressed a distrust of expert, industry and government sources of information, seeing outside authorities as imposing an agenda rather than listening to local concerns. This distrust extended to cultural and minority groups that have often been ignored or not engaged previously.

The Listening Campaign revealed a lack of effective dialogue combined with an underlying uncertainty about specific plans for energy transition that made it difficult for participants to quantify and explore what transition might mean for them personally and for the city. Some participants shared scepticism about the political hype surrounding the so-called promise of a "green future," raising issues of "greenwashing" in some government and industry narratives with few real outcomes for local communities. Equally, residents criticised industry narratives that adopt Corporate Social Responsibility and "social licence" messaging and offer nothing substantive to the community. Others questioned why Australia needed to transition so quickly away from coal-fired energy given the persisting reliance of other countries on coal. Several participants expressed a sense of hopelessness and questioned whether this outlook could be changed. Others still expressed resignation about the role of renewables alongside concerns about whether the opportunities they had now would exist in the future.

Attitudes to energy transition were often connected to people's experiences of previous transitions. Some residents felt confident that Gladstone "is too big to fail" and expressed trust that government would "bail out industry" if problems occur. Others discussed with pride how resilient and innovative the Gladstone Region was and how they believed that the best of the region was yet to come. Others still, especially those with experience of the gas "boom and bust", had greater reservations, fearing that economic change and uncertainty would benefit neither residents nor the community. Indeed, many participants did not see economic outcomes necessarily leading to community benefit.

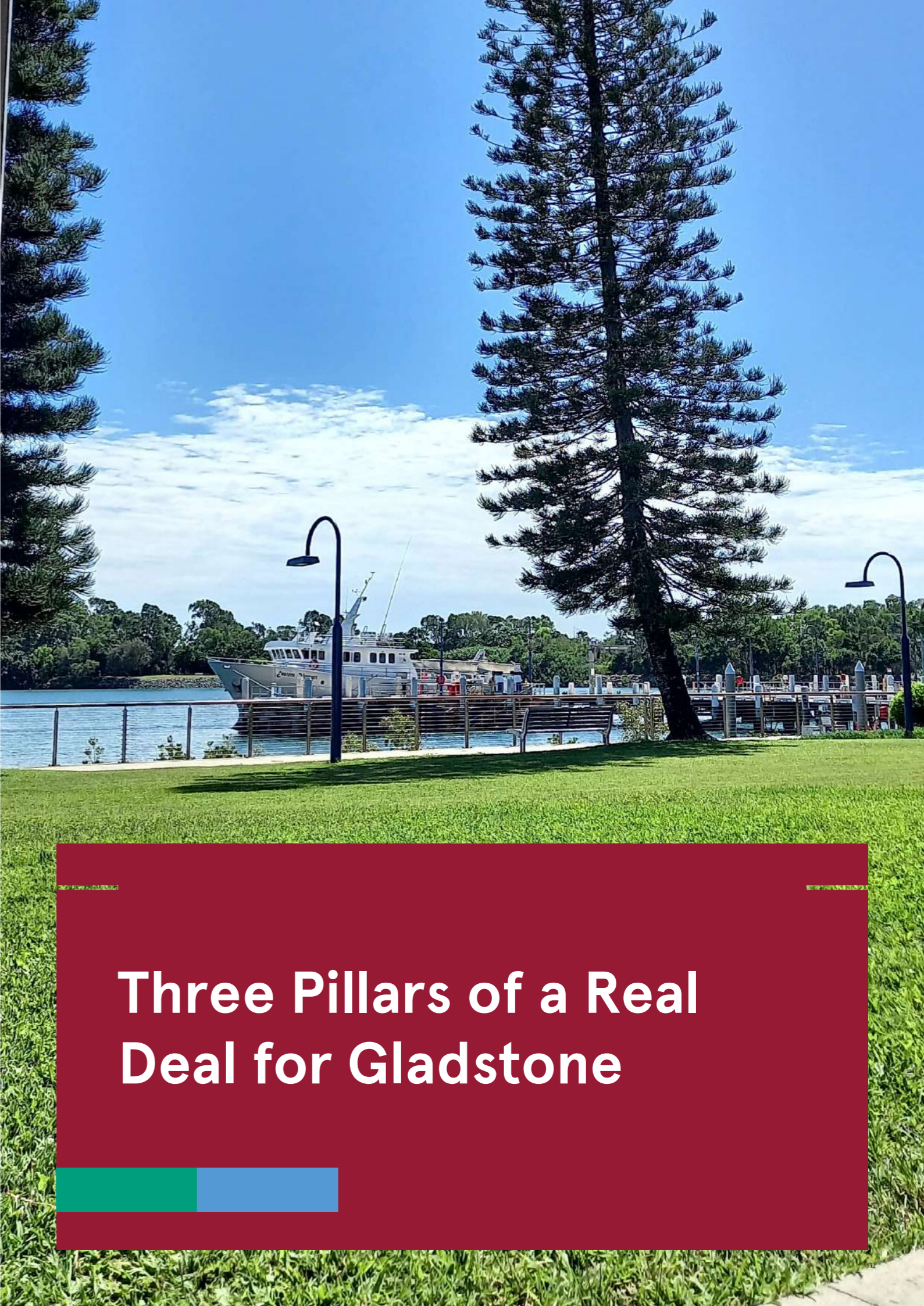
Some participants did not believe that the transition conversation was relevant to them. This was often the case for people facing the greatest precarity and uncertainty, for instance, women of migrant backgrounds struggling to enter the local job market. These participants could see the connection between the economy, energy and their way of life in Gladstone, but they often expressed that they did not think that they could make a difference because the “real” conversation was happening elsewhere, in Canberra, Brisbane or among a small group of people who already had power in Gladstone.

The strongest and most consistent message from participants was a desire for the communities of Gladstone to play a role in shaping the economic and social transition going forward. Many participants said that community involvement in the transition process could help avoid the problems associated with the “boom and bust” economic transitions of the past. New industrial projects had created a population “boom,” drawing in investment and development in Gladstone, but once the new infrastructure had been completed, a massive population decline led to economic “bust.” While participants expressed doubts that any singular industry could offer Gladstone a “silver bullet,” they believed that having a say in how change occurred offered an opportunity to make economic transition work better for the people who live here.



**Figure 2.**

Word cloud of responses to the question: What are your reactions to Australia’s transition away from fossil fuels to renewable energy?



# Three Pillars of a Real Deal for Gladstone

**“People have to stop using fear as a reason to stop moving forward. While the changes that are coming are drastically focused on industry, I hope the rest of Gladstone isn’t forgotten, especially the hygiene, care and service workers.”**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant,  
disability support worker

It's hopeful that we'll see renewable energy, but it's such a big change for people to wrap their heads around. It won't impact our household directly, but indirectly. We'd be concerned about the flow-on impacts to other businesses like our supermarket. It's hard not knowing how small business and housing prices might change."

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, allied healthcare worker

Participants in the Listening Campaign strongly expressed two sets of competing reflections about contemporary life in Gladstone. Many people shared pride and care for what Gladstone means to them, while also expressing serious concern about the challenges that they face personally, and that the city faces collectively, as it engages in economic and social transition.

Reflecting the diverse pathways of migration in regional Queensland as a whole, the Listening Campaign revealed stories of recent and long-standing residents making life together. Many participants moved here to start a family, live closer to relatives, or live in the warmer Queensland climate. First Nations participants spoke of a deep and continuous connection to Country over thousands of years. Some had lived in the region for generations, while others had only lived in Gladstone for a matter of months.

Gladstone's physical, social and economic geography – its sense of place – anchored how participants interpreted their hopes and pressures in Gladstone. Gladstone's social and economic infrastructure, including healthcare, schools, community services, education and quality jobs, was seen by participants as the foundation for prosperity, but it was also the subject of most concern to participants (see Figure 3). The central issues raised by participants directly related to critical city infrastructure, indicating three pillars of a Real Deal for Gladstone:

## Pillar 1: Access to Quality Healthcare

Participants overwhelming felt that there is a crisis in Gladstone's healthcare system. They identified difficulty in accessing quality services in the region and felt frustration about the consequences of needing to travel for specialised care. The ongoing ramifications of the closure of Gladstone Hospital's maternity ward were continually raised as a key example of Gladstone's systemic healthcare challenges.

## Pillar 2: Housing

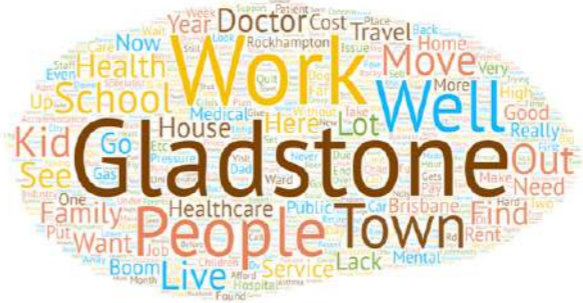
Participants emphasised the distinctive character of housing stress in Gladstone, linked to the historical “boom and bust” shape of its economy. Cost and access to the rental market were also cited as significant difficulties, with housing stress compounded for many participants with intensified caring and work responsibilities.

## Pillar 3: Overall Liveability

Many participants love living in the Gladstone Region and have intentionally chosen this region as the place to raise their families. But participants identified a sense of dislocation, a lack of community cohesion, and poorly integrated services resulting from the transience of Gladstone's population. Participants felt that the prominence of fly-in fly-out and insecure jobs in Gladstone's industries have compromised the city's overall liveability. Services available to support critical life transitions, such as the transitions from infancy to attending school, from childhood to adulthood and from retirement to aged care, are unavailable.

Co-researchers also identified that the ways in which participants expressed concern over these pressures intensified across the course of the Listening Campaign, with anxieties about liveability, the cost of healthcare and housing growing locally as national factors such as inflation, interest rates and the cost of living became more salient.

The Listening Campaign revealed how the future of healthcare, housing and liveability connects to the challenges presented by economic transition, with many participants concerned that an energy transition would not benefit them and could instead create an unsustainable increase in the Gladstone population. Many worried that an influx of new workers would not lead to government spending on health and social infrastructure but would rather add additional strain to already overstretched resources. Our analysis also indicated that these pressures and concerns are experienced most acutely by certain minority groups, including people with disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and people in insecure and low-paid work.



**Figure 3.** Word cloud of responses to listening question 3: reflecting responses to economic and social context in Gladstone

## Pillar 1: Access to Quality Healthcare

Healthcare was the most reported pressure on Gladstone's community, raised in over 70% of conversations in the Listening Campaign. Participants raised three distinct ways in which access to quality healthcare is compromised: the lack of sufficient quality health services in the city, the pressure of travelling great distances to obtain healthcare and the cost of services in Gladstone. The closure of the maternity wing at Gladstone's hospital, and the ongoing consequences of this absence, were repeatedly raised by participants as emblematic of the challenges related to healthcare in Gladstone.

### The Lack of Quality Health Services in Gladstone

Participants readily acknowledged that local access to healthcare would always be limited by the geographic constraints of a regional city. However, participants identified a decline in the number and quality of healthcare services being provided locally in Gladstone, particularly since the closure of Mater Misericordiae Hospital Gladstone in 2018. Access to care was described by participants as a generalised problem; participants described long waits for General Practitioners (GPs), a shortage of bulk billing GPs, an increasing number of patients at GP clinics and hospitals placing pressure on doctor's ability to provide quality continuity of care, an insufficient number of specialised mental health workers and services, and the temporary closure of the maternity ward in Gladstone.

**"40 years ago I worked at Gladstone Hospital and Gladstone had great healthcare, like an ICU, obstetrician, paediatrician and other visiting specialists. During the floods in 2011 they had to set-up a makeshift ICU at the airport because the highway was cut-off. Why didn't we have an ICU!?"**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, local mother of four children and receptionist

In a region the size of Gladstone, where renewable energy infrastructure is likely to see the population grow further in coming decades, the lack of quality health services is perceived as a health crisis. In the absence of sufficient opportunities for residents to access early intervention or preventative care, residents are at risk of developing serious injuries and health problems that are more costly and resource-intensive to treat.

The Listening Campaign also revealed that Gladstone has a 'missing middle' crisis, to borrow Professor Pat McGorry's term. The 'missing middle' includes people who are too sick for community health but not sick enough to be in a hospital, meaning that their needs go unmet by existing healthcare infrastructure.

**"I've had friends turned away from hospital in mental health crisis because there are no beds, and people are waiting at 3:00 am for a teleconference from someone to triage them from mental health services based in Rockhampton without ever seeing a doctor."**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, young person

Participants identified that there was a particular shortage of mental health support, including both psychologists and psychiatrists. Some shared their personal experience of the rise in suicide in Central Queensland and the need to address this. Some participants were aware that local services had improved in the past few years, but they also noted the last economic bust and the COVID-19 pandemic. They reported that these recent events had adversely impacted families and their mental health, which would likely lead to further pressure on mental health services in the future.

**"Everything falls to shit in a bust...Enrichment starts to leave town, and this makes the people left in town feel its emptiness."**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, nursing student

Participants were aware of the connections between healthcare, workforce issues and the broader care system. Residents were overwhelmingly supportive of local health workers and the heavy demands placed upon them. They saw the healthcare problem as a problem connected to the region because Gladstone struggled to attract more healthcare workers. Participants identified that they had experienced better healthcare in the past, and they believed that decision-makers outside of Central Queensland had chosen to prioritise funding facilities in Rockhampton, resigning Gladstone to lower quality local care.

Even in Gladstone, several communities with greater healthcare needs identified that healthcare processes and "bureaucracies" make it hard to access care. This was stressed by people with disabilities and First Nations communities. People with disabilities noted that the requirement to travel created barriers to healthcare, as many people with disabilities have chronic pain and cannot readily travel for eight hours to Brisbane. Air travel for medical care is prohibitively expensive. The lack of local healthcare services is thus a pronounced barrier to continuity of care.

**"For children to get a diagnosis to use the NDIS [National Disability Insurance Scheme], most have to go through a paediatrician. A few months ago [August], Central Queensland Rural Health didn't have availability until March next year."**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, disability client liaison

**"For an able-bodied person in Brisbane it would be an annoyance and it would be inconvenient. But when you are a person with a disability for flights and accommodation, it is far worse."**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, community leader

**"Medical facilities are very far away which is time-consuming, exhausting and very expensive."**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, retired mechanical engineer

## Travel and Healthcare

The reported decline in local healthcare in Gladstone means that people routinely travel anywhere between 90 minutes to seven hours by road for essential healthcare. Participants shared stories of travel pressures related to emergency care, such as the setting of broken bones, vital healthcare check-ups such as pregnancy ultrasounds, and specialist care such as allergy testing. Participants identified that the absence of accessible vital health services routinely put people's health at risk. Equally, it contributed to the inefficient and highly expensive provision of healthcare.

**"Something that should cost hundreds and take one day costs thousands and two people having to travel. People [are] paying thousands for accommodation for things they shouldn't, like regular cancer treatment."**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, former employee of the Gladstone Hospital

A lack of accessible healthcare reduced the quality of care available to Gladstone residents. Gladstone's hospitals are left to compensate by providing gap measures, such as remote support for doctors. Participants had first-hand experience that these gap services provide an inadequate level of care.

**"I went to the hospital because my daughter's arm was broken. They didn't treat it properly. It is now deformed. The specialist was on Telehealth. [The experience] made me feel stereotyped. I'm a single mum. When I questioned the doctor I felt judged, and they didn't believe me."**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, local market attendee

## Cost of Healthcare

Cost is a barrier to accessing healthcare for Gladstone's residents. Participants repeatedly raised the stress associated with large out-of-pocket costs for healthcare and related pressure on work and family experienced when specialist appointments were changed.

For community members with complex needs, the challenge of cost was compounded. Current schemes such as the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme do not fully compensate patients, creating further obstacles to accessing healthcare. Several participants described the experience of travelling to Brisbane for medical appointments which were cancelled mid-flight or of finding that multiple appointments were not coordinated and therefore required expensive return visits.

## Case Study: Gladstone Maternity Ward

### Case Study: Gladstone Maternity Ward

For almost nine months, Gladstone Hospital's maternity ward did not provide full birthing services to residents, with pregnant people redirected to Rockhampton or Brisbane for pregnancy and birth care. The closure stemmed in part from difficulties recruiting medical professionals to the hospital. In June 2023, full birthing services were reinstated. The closure of these services placed immense pressure on the community and hospital workers.

**A local midwife said: "We are the ones that are breaking the news to families that they can't have kids in town, and it could be dangerous for them to stay. 'Worst case you chopper out, and we hope you survive.'"**

**A community member said: "The hospital is the number one issue. My son and his wife are wondering whether it's even worth having a baby. What will happen?"**

Despite the reopening of the maternity ward, patients still need to travel if they experience complications. Further, numerous families relocated during the period that the maternity ward was closed continue to suffer from birth trauma following emergency relocation and dislocation during the birth process. The Real Deal Agenda identifies a series of social prescribing and support services that address these unresolved pressures.

## Pillar 2: Housing

Over 50% of participants in the Listening Campaign raised the issue of housing. Participants' specific experiences of the housing crisis were diverse and included several participants who had personal experience with the threat or reality of homelessness. In aggregate, the findings of the Listening Campaign revealed several areas in which Gladstone's housing pressures depart from national trends, attributable to local factors including cycles of commodity "boom and bust" and the pressures of an economic transition away from fossil fuels. Participants' stories showed that the economic transition affects housing security and revealed further housing pressures including cost of and access to the rental market and connections between housing and issues of care and work.

**"People are sleeping behind the library, down at the marina. There are people sleeping under trees at night and in cars. Some people are in hotel rooms which they can't afford. One night isn't enough in between places. Where do they go after one night? People are hidden. I recently saw one man who was using cardboard as a blanket at night"**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, community member



## The Effects of Transition on Housing Security

While housing security and affordability are challenges across Australia, the impacts are felt differently in Gladstone and surrounding areas because of cycles of economic "boom and bust." While Australia's larger housing affordability crisis is tied to housing commodification, interest rates and housing supply, housing affordability in Gladstone is additionally affected by the pressures and uncertainties of a transitioning economy. Gladstone's housing prices have been unstable in the past. For instance, prices rose with the LNG gas construction boom in 2011 and then declined sharply after the boom ended, with persisting impacts. Today, there is uncertainty in the community about how housing demand and supply will contract or expand as a new economy emerges.

The Listening Campaign exposed that participants already feel affordability pressures acutely, combined with widespread fear about the potential for new "boom and bust" cycles related to the reduced reliance on fossil fuels and renewable energy investment to create further housing insecurity.

Many participants shared stories about how people moved to Gladstone when rents dropped during the bust and how house prices are now rising. Some spoke with pride about the homes they own. Many participants discussed how they can only afford to buy their houses because they live in the Gladstone Region as opposed to a capital city. Some people discussed how it would now be more expensive to pay rent than it is to pay a mortgage. Uncertainty and unpredictability are felt constantly by residents, indicating the need for planning around housing and transition in the future.

**"Our family left when there was the Curtis Island boom. We came back afterwards, but we never got anything from those booms. The housing is scary. I don't want to think about another boom. They don't fix this issue [housing] nearly enough."**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, local market attendee

**"[The] owner of our last rental decided to sell. We were given less than a month to move out, but we couldn't find anywhere and were threatened with forcible removal by police to live on the streets."**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, disability support worker

## Rental Market Challenges: Cost and Access

Participants who were renters shared many challenges, including the cost of rental homes, the pressure of a rising rental market and the struggle to find affordable rental accommodation.

Low vacancy rates and increasing rental prices in the Gladstone Region have priced many low-income earners out of the rental market. Over the past five years, rents have increased by 80% in the city of Gladstone. Several participants mentioned that they were looking to move out of Gladstone because they could not afford the cost of living.

**“My rent was \$170 but now it’s \$360 and my landlord is pressuring me to pay \$400. I’ve had to consider moving out of Gladstone, but moving is so expensive I don’t want to pay for that either.”**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, university student

**“We had one of our clients for the NDIS move because she couldn’t find a place to live.”**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, disability support worker

For those participants that could afford to make their rental payments, many felt concern that they were not getting as much value for money in Gladstone as they would in major cities because of the financial burden of having to travel to access essential services.



## Connections between Housing, Care and Work

Housing is not a standalone issue. Participants expressed that insecure housing intensifies healthcare, education and workforce pressures. Participants who owned their homes directly raised concerns that the region’s lack of housing posed an obstacle to settlement for essential workers, such as nurses and teachers. Vacancies in healthcare and public education go unfilled because people recruited for these positions cannot find a place to live. In turn, the inadequacy of Gladstone’s affordable and accessible healthcare services is in part related to its housing affordability crisis.

**“I have lived in Gladstone for eight years. I have a son here, and a five-year-old grandchild. Rents are just going up and up. We live in Calliope, we go to Boyne for bulk-billing.”**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, local market attendee

The compounding crises associated with housing and healthcare are most acutely felt by those in Gladstone who experience the greatest barriers to economic and social opportunities.

**“Housing is a big pressure at the moment. If you have the added pressure of living below the poverty line, which many people with disabilities do, and you can only pay a couple hundred dollars a week, it is really hard. Not everyone with disability requires accessible accommodation, but a lot of them do. Every day I am grateful that I am in a place that I own that is accessible. I know quite a few people that are going to be homeless in a couple of months, and you can’t couch surf if you are in a wheelchair. For a person in a wheelchair, that is not an option at all. At this moment, when there is such a need for rentals, Real Estate agents can be pickier and leave people without a home.”**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, community leader

Housing is a social determinant of health, and this was clear to participants, who linked access to housing in Gladstone to healthcare outcomes, especially for residents with greater social needs or in precarious conditions.

## Pillar 3: Overall Liveability

Participants in the Listening Campaign were proud of the changes and improvements in Gladstone that had made it a better place to live.

**“When I came to Gladstone in 1976, it was called a dirty industrial town. You couldn’t say that now. The green spaces we have now are wonderful. Port Authority put the foreshore in, then they did Spinnaker Park.”**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, church member

## Transience and its Effect on Liveability

Gladstone is a city with a mobile population that fluctuates according to the economic cycles of commodity markets. Insecure work and housing have also exacerbated a sense of social disconnection that inhibits people’s ability to “put down roots” in Gladstone. Transience can lead to feelings of dislocation for people who relocate to Gladstone and negatively affects social cohesion for those who live in the city on a long-term or permanent basis.

**“People should be able to put down roots and not be itinerant.”**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, mechanical engineer

Participants expressed gratitude that Gladstone’s civic organisations build meaning and connection. Rainbow on the Reef Ltd. successfully launched Gladstone’s second ever LGBTQIA+ Pride festival and runs regular coffee catchups to boost a sense of community in a town that is traditionally seen as less accepting of the LGBTQIA+ community.

**“I went to Toowoomba, and then went to Melbourne. But in Melbourne I never found that sense of belonging even though I like Melbourne. It never really clicked...Gladstone State School was the first place I felt comfortable coming out.”**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, local schoolteacher

Furthermore, Lionheart Disability Services has purchased a fully accessible van to take clients to monthly barbeques to increase community cohesion. Australian Conservation Foundation similarly holds social events and clean up days to introduce likeminded people to each other and forge a sense of connectedness. The Rail Tram and Bus Union frequently organises pub dinners with their members, and Integreat Gladstone hosts regular picnics to welcome new community members.

## Liveability, Services and Phases of Life

Participants described that Gladstone’s crises of liveability and service provision are felt most acutely in certain phases of life and for people with pre-existing challenges.

For parents of older children, the lack of pathways to employment, educational opportunities and affordable housing creates concern that children will need to move to Brisbane for work and study.

**“We lose people because they can’t afford to live here with skyrocketing rents and wages not keeping up. There is a loss of talent of the youth that can’t get jobs here.”**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, small business employee

**“I moved here in primary school, grew up here and have kids here. I’m concerned about the future for them. I want them to grow up here and have jobs when they graduate. I’m worried the kids’ dads won’t be able to maintain jobs here and may have to move away.”**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, homelessness youth worker

Older residents and their families expressed anxiety that local health and community services cannot adequately provide the support they need as they age. Participants described that a lack of liveability for older people led them to feel a sense of pressure to leave Gladstone so they could age well.

**“I have a friend who is 80 this year, who has a care manager that lives in Victoria. Those people take out money to manage her, and she hasn’t seen a case manager for two years. The oldies aren’t properly supported. She’s stressing.”**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, local market attendee

For participants who relied on public transport or could not afford or access a car, transport services were critical for liveability in Gladstone. For families living in the wider suburbs of Gladstone and surrounding towns, inadequate public services create spatial barriers that make parts of the region, and its essential services, inaccessible. A lack of accessibility is especially challenging for culturally and linguistically diverse communities to navigate, with additional barriers such as translation and cultural disconnects.

Participants who were mothers and early child education staff shared the challenges in accessing early child education, care and playgroups. There are long waiting lists for childcare centres as social services struggle to keep up with demand and to recruit appropriate workers. There have also been changes in the ways that evidence-based playgroups are funded and can operate, and many participants indicated that they knew parents and young families who had missed opportunities. Parents and community workers are fearful about the potential long-term development impacts of the shortcomings in early child education on Gladstone's children.

Even when people are able to access playgroups and early childhood education and care, participants reported that many residents, particularly new migrants, struggle with transportation. Bus timetables often do not align with the timing of playgroups, and community leaders raised concerns that people were left isolated.

Participants with disabilities shared that the liveability of Gladstone is compromised by the poor quality of public spaces and public services. Participants particularly noted the poor quality of footpaths and shopping spaces.

**"Gladstone has its community spirit. But what good is that if you can't access it? We need accessible toilets. "Port-a-loos" aren't accessible. A lot of places like East Shores and Lions Park are accessible. But places like Agnes don't have anywhere accessible...Dignity is being able to go the bathroom."**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, community member

**"As well as being a physical thing, it's also emotional. If I want to go somewhere and it isn't accessible, I ask myself if I really want to go to this place. Do I want to go somewhere that doesn't welcome me, or doesn't want me there? It's more than just toilets."**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, community member

## The Connections between Housing, Care and Work

Participants identified that Gladstone's capacity to provide affordable healthcare services, housing and social infrastructure directly related to the city's liveability, which in turn shaped Gladstone's ability to attract a diverse community of residents and workers. If the Gladstone Region could address these challenges, its social infrastructure could begin to create what is known as a "spatial fix," a local economic and social ecosystem that supports a place for all to thrive.

Participants' stories made clear that the loss of one service affected other services and overall liveability in Gladstone.

**"A friend is moving to town and realised there were no doctors [that had availability], so is now considering pulling out of their house purchase."**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, small business owner

The problems participants described were not limited to population retention, extending to a lack of investment in sufficient health, housing and social infrastructure to attract the workers required to produce stable, high-quality services in Gladstone. Transience and a lack of existing services reinforce shortcomings in service delivery by placing additional pressures on overstretched services.

**"Due to high rent, we couldn't attract doctors, nurses, teachers. People also didn't want to go from gas plant money back to fixing toilets."**

– Gladstone Listening Campaign participant, small business employee

The liveability ecosystem in Gladstone described by participants highlights the impossibility of addressing any one "pillar" of Gladstone's transition – health, housing, and liveability – in isolation. Housing and healthcare are imperative to addressing liveability in Gladstone across the life span and across the full breadth of Gladstone's diverse communities.



# A Real Deal Agenda for Gladstone: Pathways and Possibilities

Bringing together 316 residents from more than 30 local community organisations, faith groups and unions, the Listening Campaign for a Real Deal for Gladstone demonstrates that across the Gladstone Region there are shared areas of concern for planning the area's future. Acknowledging that climate change heralds transition for the city, the Listening Process pointed towards three key pillars of a transition that can ensure economic and social benefit for Gladstone's community: healthcare, housing and liveability.

Instead of relying on the abstract promise that economic benefit will arise from renewable energy, this Community Report identifies tangible areas of policy reform to strengthen the three pillars of a community-led transition in Gladstone. Moreover, the policy benchmarks for shared community benefit suggested by participants in the Listening Campaign provide a means for planning and assessing transition in Gladstone to a degree that was impossible to achieve amid the unpredictable "boom and bust" cycles of economic development of the past.

The findings of this Listening Campaign underscore the importance of using community-led processes to guide transition. The practice of asking people about their hopes, fears and needs during a time of instability and change is important. The leadership of community members in this process has generated trust. Instead of Gladstone residents being asked to engage in "another consultation," the conversation about the city's future is led by residents in the city itself.

The Real Deal Agenda is a multi-issue, multi-pronged proposal for change to be negotiated with a variety of institutions and decision-makers. Accordingly, there is no single "deal" to be made. A Real Deal involves multiple and ongoing negotiations with local industry, government, and community institutions, as well as with decision-making bodies beyond Gladstone, such as State and Federal Governments and large industry bodies. This section identifies a variety of policy reforms and tools that can help the community negotiate the transition the Listening Campaign showed it needs. Our policy pathways include Community Benefits Agreements, which are useful for creating benefit in the context of major infrastructure or private sector initiatives, and specific policy reforms that can be negotiated with government.

The Gladstone Queensland Community Alliance will continue to use the Real Deal method to develop the findings of this Listening Campaign into a transition policy agenda. But several potential priorities and suggestions are clear at present. We outline these below as the starting point for a long-term "Research Action" process led by the community and supported by researchers at the University of Sydney and beyond through the national and regional work of the Real Deal project.



## Community Benefits as a Pathway

The energy transition creates an opportunity for Gladstone. There is likely to be an injection of resources to support major infrastructure and economic investment for renewable energy. Upcoming renewable infrastructure projects like the Hydrogen Hub and zero carbon manufacturing offer the potential to grow the local economy. The challenge the city faces is to grapple with the question: who will benefit from these investments?

The First Nations Bailai, Gurang, Gooreng Gooreng, Taribelang Bunda Peoples Aboriginal Corporation Registered Native Title Bodies Corporate (RNTBC) are leading the way by negotiating for their interests through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Fortescue Future Industries (FFI) and another MOU with the Hydrogen Utility (H2U).

A Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) is a complementary policy tool with great potential in Gladstone's investment environment. It provides a mechanism for wider community needs to be identified and met through economic expansion conducted in partnership with community. A CBA is a legally enforceable contract between a coalition of community stakeholders and a developer. It sets out a range of benefits that the developer agrees to provide the community as part of a development project in exchange for the coalition's support or neutrality toward the development.

The recently released Queensland Government's Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) Roadmap indicates that there will be two proposed Renewable Energy Zones in the area, with one in Calliope and another in Biloela. Both are scheduled with a first phase to be planned between now and 2024. As part of the REZ Roadmap, the State Government is exploring models for a coordinated investment scheme, and a Community Benefits Agreement offers one possible blueprint.

The Queensland Government and industries can draw on a range of models for local investment schemes. In some circumstances, projects will establish individual funds and processes for providing access to investment. The government also has a track record of setting up impact-driven funds that support communities to benefit from development and change such as the Regional Economic Futures Fund. Another possible pathway for a coordinated mechanism would involve input from local communities and the REZ Readiness Assessment in alignment with Queensland's draft Regional Energy Transformation Principles. As part of the release of the draft REZ Roadmap, we are actively engaging with a range of stakeholders on the design and development of a coordinated investment scheme.

The community benefits provided by a CBA vary widely depending on the needs of the affected communities. For example, community benefits agreed by developers and communities can include: living wages for workers employed in the development, job training and employment opportunities, funding for environmental projects, community services and facilities, the construction of parks and recreational facilities, and the construction of housing, including affordable housing.

CBAs are particularly well-suited to the development of new infrastructure, and they have been used widely in the United States. For example, in 2001, the development of the Los Angeles Sports and Entertainment District became subject to a CBA. A coalition of 28 community and union groups from the neighbouring Figueroa Corridor, made up of primarily working-class communities of colour, entered negotiations with the developers. Over a period of several months, this coalition of residents secured a series of community benefits including job training, public space commitments, money for parks, residential parking, commitment of 20% of the housing in the development to affordable housing, and commitment to 70% of the jobs in the development to be paid at a living wage.

A CBA is the result of a negotiation process between the developer and the organised representatives of affected communities, in which the developer agrees to shape the development in a certain way or to provide specific community benefits. In exchange, the organised community groups commit to support – or at least not oppose – the proposed project in public debate and as part of government approval processes, or in the process of the developer applying for permits and subsidies.

Critically, the degree to which a CBA results in powerful outcomes and represents the diverse needs of the community depends on the relative bargaining power of the organised community. CBAs will only be as effective as the coalitions that help create them.

The Real Deal, Queensland Community Alliance and the Sydney Policy Lab are leading the development of this policy approach in Australia and pioneering how this tool can be used in the context of energy transition. One of the key ways in which the Gladstone community might secure some of its specific healthcare, housing and liveability needs is through Community Benefits Agreements with new infrastructure projects and in partnership with decision-makers in Gladstone.



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## Policy Possibilities

The policy ideas that follow developed from the Listening Campaign in combination with broader discussions among the local organisations and researchers that are part of a Real Deal for Gladstone. These ideas will be further developed and expanded as we enter the research and action phases of the Organising Cycle (see Page 17). These policy ideas could be achieved as discrete policy reforms negotiated with local, State or Federal Governments. They could also be developed as community benefits agreed in Community Benefits Agreements that may be created to facilitate new renewable or other infrastructure in Gladstone.

### Access to Quality Healthcare

The need to improve healthcare in Gladstone is a longstanding issue. There is no “silver bullet.” Some of the challenges that we identified have previously been examined, with initial policy reforms identified. To create more accessible and quality healthcare we seek to implement some of the policy work that has already been undertaken while also identifying new potential policy reforms. In this section, we identify policy ideas that could strengthen the first pillar of a Real Deal for Gladstone: healthcare.

#### Hospital Services

Findings related to hospital services from our Listening Campaign reflect insights in the Central Queensland Rural Health “Gladstone Health Plan,” which provides recommendations for initial reforms.

Aware that the Gladstone Health Plan recommends the provision of Clinical Services Capability Framework (CSCF) Level 4 services from the Gladstone Hospital, the Gladstone organisations engaged in developing a Real Deal for Gladstone support initiatives to improve Gladstone’s health services, including exploring the possible upgrading of the Gladstone Hospital.

The Real Deal for Gladstone also seeks to work with the Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service (CQHHS) and governments to attract more healthcare professionals, psychologists, nurses, doctors and specialists to Gladstone, and many of the policy recommendations in this Community Report would amplify this effort.

#### Mental Health

Beyond possible hospital reforms, there is widespread support for the implementation of the immediate solutions in the Gladstone Health Plan’s proposal to “improve access to mental health services.” These include: developing a co-responder model for Gladstone, through which a mental health clinician works with Queensland Ambulance service to assess people in their own homes, and providing a mental health clinician for the Gladstone Emergency Department.

The Real Deal for Gladstone places value on mental health services that are person-centred and prioritise relational care in response to both chronic and acute needs. We emphasise the importance of culturally responsive services that respect and value cultural strengths and differences.

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#### A Social Prescribing Approach to Healthcare

Social prescribing is a practice where health professionals, such as GPs, link patients with services or groups that can remedy the social determinants of poor health and redress social isolation.

We propose that a community link worker works with GP clinics and community services to connect clients into groups of their interest. This would ease the pressure on the health system and reduce the number of people frequently attending practices. This social prescribing model has been developed and implemented by the Queensland Community Alliance and Mount Gravatt Community Centre in South-East Queensland with funding from the Department of Communities. The Queensland Government has also committed in principle to a state-wide trial of this approach in response to the recommendations of the Queensland Parliamentary Inquiry into Social Isolation and Loneliness.

#### Healthcare and Transport: Improving the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme

The Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme (PTSS) exists to provide financial assistance to eligible patients, and in some cases to their carers, to access specialist medical services from which they are isolated or that are not available locally. While the PTSS is crucially needed, difficulties with existing registration and reimbursement processes prevent the PTSS from fulfilling its purpose.

As our Listening Campaign showed, patients and carers find the present PTSS system to be cumbersome and difficult to navigate. In certain circumstances, experiences with health services have even had a re-traumatising effect due to negative bureaucratic experiences, overly complex forms and unnecessary official medical signoffs that render the scheme inaccessible. In essence, while the goals of PTSS are commendable, its implementation is not fit-for-purpose.

We propose that Queensland Community Alliance advocate to work with the Queensland Government to develop and co-design access and administrative processes to strengthen the PTSS. Through collaboration with the Queensland Government, civic organisations and patients and carers based in Gladstone, we can formulate, trial, implement and scale effective user-centric solutions in Gladstone and other regional areas.

#### Redressing the Closure of Gladstone’s Maternity Facilities:

##### Social Prescribing for New Mums

Gladstone’s maternity ward was on bypass for 399 days, forcing many women in the region to give birth elsewhere. While we are relieved and celebrate the return of the maternity wing in June 2023, there is greater restitution required to remedy the problems that its closure caused.

There is a need to connect the women who were forced to travel to give birth into local support networks and social services. For some, further effort will be required to rebuild trust in the Gladstone Hospital. A social prescribing approach could identify the “missing mums” who live in Gladstone and ensure they have the connection and wrap-around support needed to thrive and to raise happy babies. In addition, we propose the exploration of a Community Maternity Hub for Gladstone by CQHHS, taking inspiration from the model that operates in Logan. Such a hub would re-establish continuity of care for new mothers in safe and accessible community spaces.

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## Housing

Gladstone has experienced distinctive ongoing housing stress in the property and rental markets related to local economic “boom and bust” cycles, which have intensified pressures associated with care and work. In previous booms, the demand for greater housing supply was not well-coordinated, and it fell to the Gladstone Regional Council to address the lack of supply through greater leniency for caravans and temporary housing.

We need better planning for housing supply that is linked to investment and approval cycles often planned by the Queensland Departments of Energy and State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning. This may involve temporary housing planned by large project proponents during the construction boom phase. In this section, we identify policy ideas that could strengthen the second pillar of a Real Deal for Gladstone: housing.

### **Increasing Affordable Housing Stock and Investment in Innovation**

More affordable housing is needed to address the significant shortage in affordable homes. Gladstone’s need for housing is varied. In addition to seasonal pressures, Gladstone requires permanent housing for essential workers in healthcare and teaching and adequate accommodation to account for long-term population growth created by the expansion of new industries and the local workforce. Existing infrastructure can also be creatively used as crisis accommodation. The challenge is not always a lack of available space, but rather a failure to link existing opportunities with unmet needs. For instance, the Blue Care Gladstone Hibiscus Aged Care Facility is currently empty. It could be temporarily repurposed to support people in crisis or newly arrived essential workers.

In addition to increasing housing stock, specific attention and investment should be paid to current innovations in supported tenancy service models designed to increase housing security. One example that could be trialled is the ‘Shelteristic’ solution, pioneered by organisations such as Roseberry Qld. Roseberry Qld is a Community Housing Provider and charity operating in regional Queensland with a mandate to create strong, vibrant and compassionate communities through investment in young people. The Shelteristic model adopts a mutual obligation arrangement in affordable housing, which includes wraparound support for tenants and client-centric and responsive connections to services. The model focuses on increasing self-development, independence and resilience, and it responds to young people’s needs for support to maintain tenancy, learn life skills, connect with employment and training and access health and welfare services. The implementation of supported tenancy services could form part of a Community Benefit Agreement.

### **Easing Cost of living for renters**

The Minister for Energy, Renewables and Hydrogen and Minister for Public Works and Procurement identified that the Department of Energy and Public Works will “invest in conceptual and applied research with universities to work with stakeholders such as Solar Citizens and the Queensland Community Alliance to identify and design solutions to facilitate the roll out of solar for renters.” These solutions could be trialled in Gladstone in partnership with Central Queensland University and the Sydney Policy Lab.

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## Overall Liveability

There are enormous opportunities to make Gladstone a more liveable city, including the extension and expansion of human services, the creation of precincts that make the city more vibrant, and investment and support for key industries such as tourism. In this section, we identify policy ideas that could strengthen the third pillar of a Real Deal for Gladstone: liveability.

### **Support for People with Disabilities**

People with disabilities have communicated that economic transition must be inclusive and accessible. Any master planning by governments about the region must respond to diversity, including when improving footpaths and accessibility.

Two areas for short-term improvement are immediately evident. First, the Gladstone Disability Community Network has acknowledged that the Gladstone Region needs to improve its use of “companion cards.” A companion card holder receives a second “companion” ticket for free to attend community activities, attend venues and ride public transport. Second, Portable Adult Changing Places are facilities for people who cannot use standard accessible toilets and instead require specialised equipment for people with high support needs. The Gladstone Region urgently needs a portable adult changing place to support participation in civic life by people with disabilities.

### **“Renew Gladstone?”**

We need to attract more small businesses, artists and entrepreneurs to Gladstone to build on our industrial heritage and make this community a vibrant place to live. While significant work has been undertaken to develop Goondoon Street and Gladstone Central in recent years, we propose exploring ideas such as “Renew Australia” to support this effort in the future.<sup>37</sup> “Renew Australia” places artists and emerging small businesses in vacant local spaces for thirty-day periods free of cost to encourage tourism and to revitalise city centres.

### **Real Transport Solutions: Demand Responsive Transport**

Demand Responsive Transport is a flexible shared transport option, which brings together people who live close to each other and want to travel when buses aren’t available. People can pre-book a vehicle to pick them up and take them to nearby facilities. In 2017, Queensland Community Alliance won commitments from the Queensland State Government and Logan City Council to implement an Australia-first Demand Responsive Transport Scheme. The model has since been trialed in the Gold Coast and Hervey Bay. Demand Responsive Transport has the potential to improve transport across the Gladstone Region, given the disparate nature of the suburbs and surrounding towns. In particular, it would support the needs of young people, people accessing support services and anticipated new migrants and workers required for the growth of the area.

## Supporting Children and Families

### Evidence-Based Supported Playgroups

Local organisations such as Strong Communities, Stronger Together – Gladstone Multicultural Programs and Integreat run playgroups for social connection, support and learning for children.

Strong Communities is currently the only organisation funded to deliver one supported playgroup in the Gladstone Region. The Supported Playgroup Model brings about positive and sustained change for children, families and the communities in which they live. Designed and delivered with qualified early learning and parent support workers, Supported Playgroups aim to build parental capacity, increase family wellbeing and improve early learning outcomes for children. Some families need more support than others, and with evidence-based support playgroups, families can then transition into parenting programs, support groups or more specialist services when required. It is critical that these supports are available to the growing population of the Gladstone Region.

The Real Deal for Gladstone will investigate the expansion of programs like Supported Playgroups, aware that there is demand for six Supported Playgroup programs in Boyne Island, Tannum Sands and Calliope.

### Local Neighbourhood and Community Support

Local organisations have identified a serious need for more support for children and families in Calliope. A permanent Calliope Neighbourhood and Family Centre is urgently needed, especially as the population of the region expands through economic transition. There is also an explicit need for a brief intervention worker at the Philip Street Precinct, a role that is supported in other Neighbourhood Centres across Queensland. This worker would meet people, take them through intake and assessment processes, and connect them to appropriate services.

### Domestic and Family Violence

Existing support and services for those experiencing domestic and family violence can leave vulnerable people in unsafe relationships to fall through the cracks, particularly those from migrant backgrounds. We propose greater funding and support for community-led prevention programs which foster women’s leadership. Evidence suggests that prevention programs led by women from diverse backgrounds have more success in engaging communities and achieving greater impacts. Potential models for community education and prevention include The Outback Mind Foundation, which offers men’s health programs and domestic violence prevention workshops.



## Tourism

The tourism industry can be a major generator of economic growth and can assist in recovery from economic crisis, attracting visitor economies and export contributions to the local economy. However, tourism can also be highly seasonal and susceptible to market fluctuations. Globally, tourism accounts for approximately 4% of GDP and is a major source of export revenues. Tourism supports many direct and indirect employees in regional economies, and tourism industries can be established and grown with minimal barriers to entry.

Tourism has been identified as a key growth industry thorough high-profile regional events and nature-based tourism as supported by the Gladstone Region Visitor Economy Strategy 2025 and the Gladstone Region Events Strategy 2019-2024. Tourism contributes \$1 billion and 4% of South Great Barrier Reef’s gross regional product (Capricorn, Gladstone and Bundaberg Regions) with employment numbers at their highest levels in both direct and total employment in 2020-2021. Tourism industries in Gladstone include accommodation, air, rail, road and water transport, regional events, cafes, restaurants and takeaway food services, travel agencies, tour operators, retail and cultural services.

Identified tourism aspirations for the Gladstone Region include:

### Development of an Indigenous Cultural and Marine Harbour Tour

An Indigenous Cultural and Marine Harbour Tour was identified as a core initiative to develop cultural tourism experiences for the Gladstone Region. It is being developed by the Bailai Aboriginal Corporation and Gladstone Area Promotion and Development Limited, along with the Port Curtis Coral Coast Aboriginal Peoples Charitable Trust (PCCC). The initiative has received support from the Queensland Government Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport and is intended to operate a forty-seat tour boat, provide cultural competence training and host a “Harbour Classroom” for school children.

### Converting the Gladstone Golf Course into a “Green Belt”

The Gladstone Golf Club at Kin Kora plans to relocate to a new 18-hole championship course. The existing Golf Club at Kin Kora could be converted into a “Green Belt” of parkland for community.



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## Strengthening the Gladstone Community's Capacity to Respond to Transition

Finally, we recognise that Gladstone's diverse communities need more avenues and opportunities to engage with policies and proposals related to climate, fossil fuel and industry transition. This is an indicative list of some of the ways that the Real Deal for Gladstone will explore linking community members with the development of policies related to transition that stand to affect them.

### **First Nations Clean Energy Fund and Support of the First Nations Chamber of Commerce**

Prioritising First Nations community justice as we build a Real Deal, we are committed to working with First Nations leaders to investigate policy solutions. Emerging and existing industries need to flexibly and diligently support First Nations People through the career pathways that they already promote. Industry traineeships and apprenticeships must lead to secure jobs in the region where they were trained, thereby supporting people to continue to live On Country. The First Nations Bailai, Gurang, Gooreng Gooreng, Taribelang Bunda People Aboriginal Corporation Registered Native Title Bodies Corporate (RNTBC) Chairman, Matthew Cooke, has advocated:

"Several renewable energy projects are progressing through their project lifecycle at a rapid pace. Targeted investment by both levels of government in the form of a First Nations Renewable Energy Fund or similar is urgently required if we are to ensure that these renewable energy projects are designed at every stage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation, targets and commitments."

If governments and private industry are to meet their ESG and human rights obligations, they can no longer afford to take a minimum legislative standard approach that has left First Nations people with great poverty and disadvantage in a resource rich nation, with no shared prosperity or equity in our sovereign wealth.

The Bailai Corporation for Land and Culture has supported the First Nations Chamber of Commerce and Industry as a "mechanism to engage with and build the capacity of Traditional Owners of the region to participate in economic development opportunities and in particular to reduce the chance of First Nations People missing out on the economic prosperity promised with the likes of hydrogen in the Gladstone Region."

On 31 May 2023, the First Nations Chamber of Commerce and Industry hosted a Summit in Gladstone to bring together First Nations businesses, Traditional Owners, industry and government to explore the best practices of engagement among all sectors of the economy. This was a significant local event with state and national implications for integrating First Nations People and their rights and interests in the clean energy transformation.

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### **Community Education about Economic Transition**

The Listening Campaign revealed that there is an urgent need to educate the community about different forms of energy production and transmission, hydrogen, decarbonisation and about the anticipated impacts of climate change and economic transition on the region with specificity. It also made clear that there is a need to develop greater trust at the community level in discussions about renewable energy and Gladstone's future economy, as many in the community have found that current government and industry-run consultation processes lack accountability. To ensure that this type of process would go beyond the "usual suspects" and standard consultation processes, the Real Deal for Gladstone will explore developing a community education project in partnership with the local civic partners of this Community Report, Queensland Community Alliance and Central Queensland University.

### **Supporting Community Negotiation with the Net Zero Authority**

In May 2023, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced the formation of a Net Zero Authority to "ensure the workers, industries and communities that have powered Australia for generations can seize the opportunities of Australia's net zero transformation." Central Queensland has been identified as one of the first regions to be prioritised by the Net Zero Authority. The Net Zero Authority lacks local voices that are embedded in transition communities, and there is no local transition authority in Central Queensland, unlike in regions such as Collie and La Trobe, where the Collie Delivery Unit and the La Trobe Transition Authority play this role. The Real Deal for Gladstone sees a need for a strong Gladstone community voice that includes Traditional Owners and civil society and that can negotiate to influence funding priorities and secure community benefits. It is crucial that community leaders are not engaged in pro-forma "consultation" but rather genuine negotiation and co-design with decision-makers to achieve tangible outcomes.

### **The Future of Gladstone NRG Power Station**

The Queensland Energy and Jobs Plan includes a \$150 million Job Security Guarantee for energy workers in state-owned facilities but does not cover the support and transition of workers at the NRG power station in Gladstone. As this affects the power supply of Boyne Smelters, there must be clarity about the future of this power station and fair warning to ensure that workers are properly supported to continue their careers within the energy sector or to pursue other career pathways.

### **Gladstone Renewable Energy Industrial Precinct**

A Gladstone Renewable Energy Industrial Precinct (REIP) would group local manufacturers together to power their production with reliable, renewable energy.<sup>48</sup> Such a precinct would incentivise local businesses to support the manufacturing of zero carbon steel, minerals, ammonia, batteries and electric vehicle components. It would also facilitate resource-sharing and job creation in heavy industry and renewable energy, with the potential to enable economic diversification and safeguard existing industry. It requires substantial investment from State and Federal Governments. Notwithstanding some community scepticism of renewable projects surfaced in our Listening Campaign, participants actively advocated for the protection and advancement of our industrial heritage and our entrepreneurial business community. To develop innovative initiatives such as a REIP, community partners must play a leading role in co-design and communication.

# Next Steps for Gladstone

## Next Steps for Gladstone

The Real Deal for Gladstone seeks to respond to the rapid changes occurring in Australia's energy market and provide a space for civic leaders to imagine and act for the common good in our region.

This Community Report summarised the findings and policy implications of an expansive Listening Campaign in Gladstone, over the course of which 316 participants from over 30 local groups identified and discussed the key pressures facing residents. Healthcare, housing and overall liveability were the three key pillars of concern to residents as they considered the challenges posed by economic and social transition.

The Real Deal for Gladstone brings together a network of unusual local allies with shared objectives. This can be a platform for negotiating benefits for the community through Community Benefits Agreements and other policy reforms that would be unattainable without such a coalition. Moreover, the Real Deal for Gladstone coalition is connected with other place-based communities engaged in energy transition, a national coalition of community, union and climate groups, as well as researchers from across Australia's university system coordinated by the Sydney Policy Lab. A Real Deal seeks to make a powerful community-led intervention into the process of transition, and this Community Report outlines an important step towards that goal.

If you would like to become involved in this project, or for more information, please contact Elise Ganley via email or phone:

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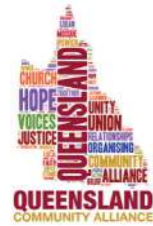
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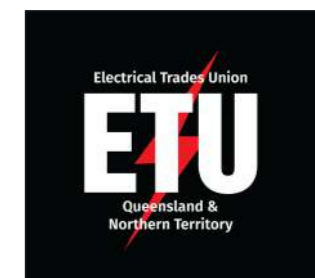
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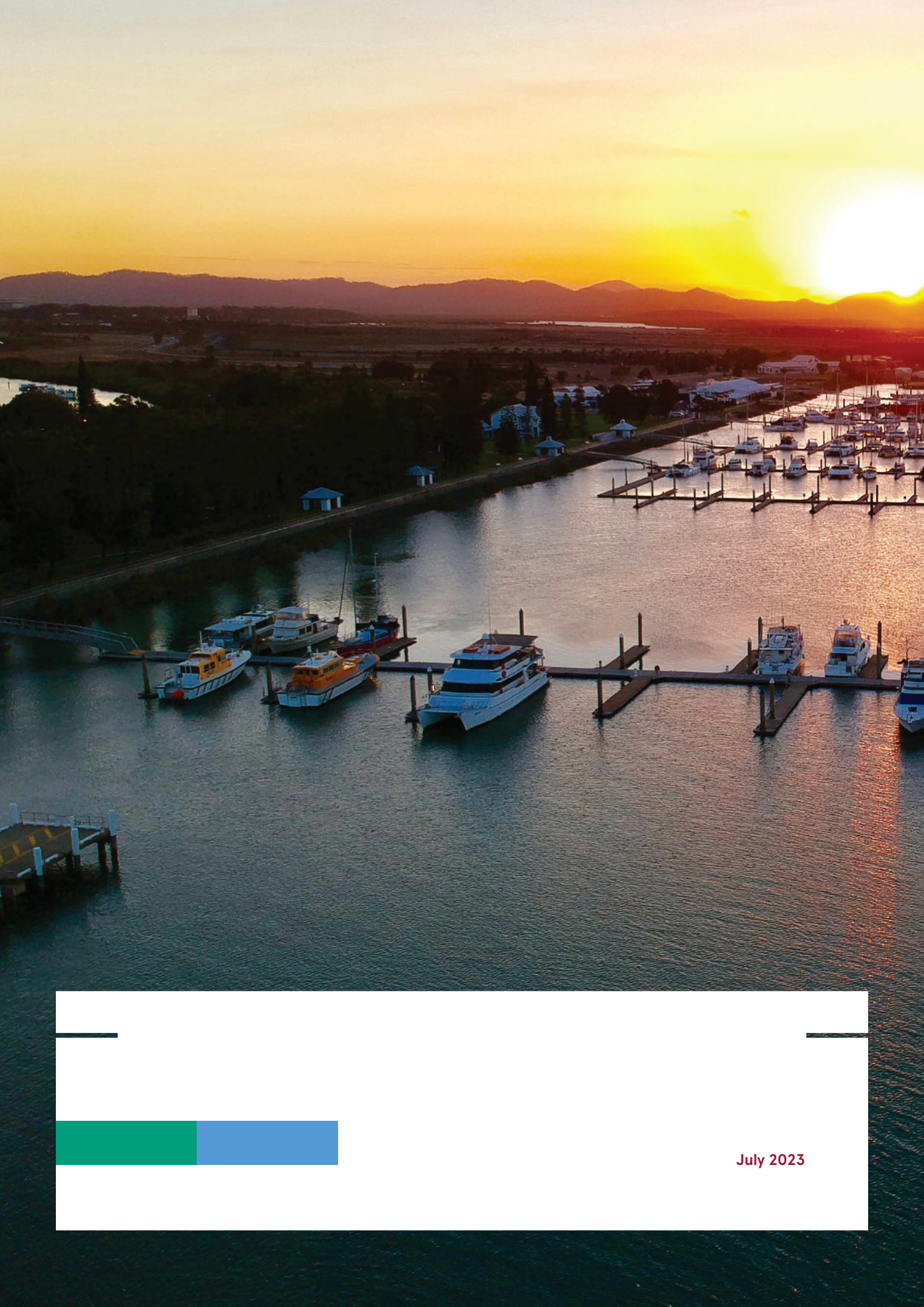


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