



## FINAL REPORT

### First Nations Clean Energy Symposium

September 2025

We were excited to see so many familiar and new faces at our 3rd First Nations Clean Energy Symposium.

When we set up the First Nations Clean Energy Network in 2021 we knew we needed to come together and organise ourselves, to speak with a coherent voice to government and industry.

We've had many breakthroughs – and changing the story of our role in the clean energy transition has been central. We are showing by doing and we are capable of not just participating in this transition but leading the way.

It's so critical we keep pushing and really understand what's getting in our way. This is a collective effort – the pace of this transition demands that we make collaboration the new way we do business, that values all of our contributions, and values our land, our country, our culture, our sacred places, and the ability of our people to continue to be stewards.

There's so much to do and it will take all of us.

We spent valuable time together at the Symposium, and we'll continue to do so over the next decade if we do this clean energy transition well, and really work on how we collaborate to move to the action phase of making sure our people really are front and centre.

#### Attendance

The First Nations Clean Energy Network supported by the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation hosted our third [First Nations Clean Energy Symposium](#) - *Powering On!* in Kabi Kabi country from 13-15 August 2025.

Over 450 people attended this gathering of First Nations leaders, Traditional Owners, communities, government, unions, academics, community organisations, industry and allies driving real outcomes for First Nations in Australia's clean energy transition.

The Symposium was about the doing – about showing up, sharing knowledge, learning from each other, working on the challenges and building on the work we are already doing together.

The Symposium dinner was a highlight, offering a unique and meaningful evening of connection, culture, and celebration.

## Photos

There were lots of photos taken by a professional photographer. You can access them [here](#) and from the dinner [here](#).

## Media

We did radio interviews with National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS) and ABC that haven't been published online, had a podcaster doing interviews during the event, and gained coverage in newspapers and online publications, including:

- [Four remote First Nations communities win funding to quit diesel, shift to renewables](#)
- [Indigenous communities plug in to power their future](#)
- [Wiradjuri community involvement in Wellington battery project highlighted at national conference](#)
- [Building capacity for energy justice for generations to come](#)
- [Clean energy symposium a sell-out](#)
- [First Nations Clean Energy Symposium](#)
- [First Nations clean energy symposium eyes Federal strategy leverage](#)

## Social media

There have been \*hundreds\* of posts about the First Nations Clean Energy Symposium from participants and allies alike on [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#).

## Summary of proceedings

Thank you to Aunty Helena who generously welcomed us to Kabi Kabi Country!

### SYMPOSIUM DAY ONE

#### *POWERING ON - working together for change*

Speaking in this session, **Karrina Nolan, co-chair of the First Nations Clean Energy Network** and **Ian Hamm, Chair of the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation** emphasised the following points:

- First Nations are leading Australia's clean energy transition, with over 20 equity partnerships in development.
- Projects are about more than power – they deliver self-determination, affordable energy, and economic independence.
- The call is for collaboration, equity, benefit-sharing and meaningful consent.
- Ian also talked about the Prime Minister's First Nations economic empowerment [announcement](#) at the Garma Festival on 1 August 2025, reminding the audience it is only \$70 million dollars which is akin to a down-payment on a few projects in the clean energy sector.

### ***BREAKTHROUGHS MOMENTS - From the small to the big***

A highlight of the Symposium program, this session involved **Trinity Clarke, a Board director of Jabalbina Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation and Josh Paterson, CEO of Jabalbina, Chantelle Johns and Ethan Godfrey from the community of Marlinja, Gavin Brown, a director of a new organisation, Wambal Bila Indigenous Community Corporation, Alwyn Graham and Travis Tucker, Directors in Mirning Green Energy Limited and Jason Bilney, Deputy Chair of Barngarla Determination Aboriginal Corporation.**

The speakers collectively highlighted a range of successes, noting that:

- Community microgrids like Wujal Wujal (Qld) and Marlinja (NT) are cutting costs and delivering energy security.
- New First Nations-owned community entities are being established to hold equity and deliver benefits.
- First Nations communities are negotiating equity stakes with companies even when they don't have tenure arrangements to leverage.
- Negotiation strategies such as competitive bidding processes are shifting power back to communities, enabling communities to negotiate on their terms.

- Chantelle and Ethan's presentation is [here](#)

### ***HELP US FIX THIS - Problems and possible solutions***

This session was a workshop and each table was tasked with fixing a problem of their choosing that communities and groups are facing.

- Ongoing challenges identified by groups include access to finance, utilities, transmission, project approvals, and skills.
- Symposium groups proposed solutions: a Black Sovereign Fund, Black bonds, stronger community benefit funds, and government support for early-stage project finance.

### ***POWER PURCHASE AGREEMENTS - Spotlight on the techno-commercial interactions within PPA negotiations***

Featuring **Chris Briggs from UTS and Madison Sturges from Original Power and Josiah Fajardo from Ekistica**, this session taught us a lot about Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs), including that:

- PPAs are crucial for financing projects and securing long-term benefits. PPAs demonstrating First Nations social and economic benefits are also seen as more desirable, assisting industry to get good outcomes.
- PPAs can be used to leverage employment, training and community outcomes.
- Remote microgrids show how PPAs can align with utilities to deliver affordable power.

- Chris' presentation is [here](#)

- Madison and Josiah's presentation is [here](#)

### ***LESSONS IN NEGOTIATION - Securing strong clean energy agreements***

This session featured **Professor Emma Lee from Federation University, Beaudine Clark from Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation, Dr Lily O'Neill from University of Melbourne, Katie Hepworth from Electrical Trades Union (ETU), and Kathryn Ridge from Ridge & Associates Pty Ltd.** Key points emerging from this session included:

- Strong agreements protect sovereignty, deliver equity, and uphold free, prior and informed consent (FPIC).
- First Nations communities can build leverage even without formal legal rights like land rights / native title by using political power, community support and strong advisors.

### ***UNPACKING POLICY TRENDS AND ACTION LOCALLY - What States and Territories are doing***

This session involved participants breaking into their respective States / Territories to discuss and explore solutions to issues and barriers. A summary of points discussed is in the Appendix.

### ***BETTER HOUSING FOR A CHANGING CLIMATE - Securing wellbeing for generations to come***

This session featured **Ray Mahoney from CSIRO, Tricia Singer from Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara lands and Lynda Curtis from the Department of Energy and Mining SA, and Andrea Cameron from Aboriginal Housing NT (AHANT).** Key messages were:

- State and territory policy frameworks need deeper First Nations participation.
- Housing retrofits and culturally informed design are reducing energy costs and improving health outcomes across remote communities.
- The [Race for 2030 retrofit project](#) happening on APY lands to improve energy efficiency in desert housing and the [Wilya Janta \(Standing Strong\) Housing Collaboration](#) are examples of projects currently underway.

- Ray's presentation is [here](#)

- Race for 2030's presentation is [here](#)

- Andrea's presentation is [here](#).

### *FIRST NATIONS LANDSCAPE - Taking control*

This session featured **Duane Fraser, CEO of the Council of First Nations, Leah Armstrong, Executive member of the First Nations Economic Empowerment Alliance, Lala Gutchen, from Erub Island in the Torres Strait, Glen Wingfield from the First Nations Clean Energy Network, Danny Kennedy, Director, Global Solar Council and CEO of New Energy Nexus and John Hepburn from the Sunrise Project.**

Touching on national and international issues, this session highlighted that:

- A [National Gathering](#) of First Nations is happening at Port Douglas from 15-17 September.
- The clean energy transition is more than a technical and economic challenge. It's a deeply political challenge and climate justice requires recognising First Nations as rights holders, not stakeholders. And First Nations economic empowerment must be central to this transition.
- The clean energy transition is both economic and political, demanding new institutions and reforms to financial structures.
- Communities across the Torres Strait and South Australia are working for energy security and independence.
- Global examples (China, Pakistan, Asia) show rapid adoption of renewables driven by communities.
- Australia's reliance on fossil fuels and energy poverty on First Nations land highlights the urgency of reform.

- John's presentation can be found [here](#).

### *GETTING DECARBONISATION RIGHT - Government, utilities and community in partnership towards a clean energy future*

This session featured a number of speakers talking about issues and initiatives in their respective jurisdictions to decarbonise utilities. **Aaron Matthews and Alyce Stewart from Horizon Power, Dave Japanangka McCormack from Yuelamu community and Bec Humphries from Central Land Council, Kein Jones, Ergon Energy QLD Isolated Networks Team, Josh Paterson from Jabalbina Aboriginal Corporation, Pat Greechan from Amboranj Power in Western Australia, and Luke Isaacs and Marcus Leong from SEC Victoria.** Key points included:

- New partnership models between utilities and communities are emerging, including in Victoria where there was an acknowledgement by the SEC that First Nations people have been excluded from mining and resources and how their work in clean energy is underpinned by a set of relationship principles created by First Peoples for First Peoples.
- Microgrids, ownership stakes, and governance frameworks are reducing risks and ensuring benefits flow locally.
- How solar is helping community members access more affordable power (particularly those using prepaid powercards).

- Dave and Bec's presentation can be found [here](#)

- Kein's presentation can be found [here](#)

- Patrick's presentation can be found [here](#)

- Luke and Marcus' presentation can be found [here](#)

### **POLICY IMPACTING PEOPLE**

This session opened with a video from **Federal Minister for Energy and Climate Change Chris Bowen** followed by a panel session involving **David Shankey, Net Zero Economy Authority, Luana Cormac from the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW)** and **Nick Llewlyn-Jones from Norman Waterhouse and Professor Duygu Yengin from the University of Adelaide**. Overarching messages that came through were:

- The First Nations Clean Energy Strategy, ARENA microgrid funding, and the Capacity Investment Scheme are creating opportunities.
- Gaps remain: more equity, stronger benefit-sharing, and limits on compulsory land acquisition are needed.
- The discussion about Barngarla-commissioned research highlighted how legislation can have significant impacts on bargaining outcomes for native title holders.

- Watch the Minister's prerecorded message [here](#).

- Nick's presentation is [here](#)

- Yengin, D., & Sun, C. -J. (2025). *The Impact of the Hydrogen and Renewable Energy Act 2023 (SA) on Bargaining Power and Economic Outcomes for Native Title Holders: An Economic Modelling Analysis*.

### **FINDING THE RIGHT FINANCE PARTNER - Not all money is the same**

Focussing on critical role of finance, this panel discussion, **Kristy Graham from the Australian Sustainable Finance Institute (ASFI), Gordon Sue from Indigenous Business Australia (IBA), Dominic Power from the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA)** and **Gloria Chan from the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC)**. The speakers shared insights on managing expectations, risk and different types of investment. Key messages included:

- Investment must align with community values.
- First Nations need access to the right type of finance and advice to progress projects.

- Australian Sustainable Finance Institute presentation is [here](#)

- IBA's presentation is [here](#)

- ARENA's presentation is [here](#)

### ***CULTURAL HERITAGE - Active, relevant, enforced***

This session featured **Cheryl Kitchener, an Anaiwan Elder from NSW, Bec Halliday, from the First Nations Clean Energy Network, and Jason Bilney, from Barngarla.** Key points made by the panellists were:

- Protecting cultural heritage must be central in project planning.
- Communities are building strength, standards, coalitions and reforms to ensure songlines, sacred sites, biodiversity and knowledge systems are respected.

### ***SKILLING UP - Building a First Nations Workforce in Clean Energy***

This session featured **Richard Watson from North Metropolitan TAFE in Western Australia** (plus 2 successful students), **Chrae Tawani from Envision Energy, Anthea Middleton, Powering Skills Organisation.** The key issues raised in this session included:

- Tailored TAFE and apprenticeship programs are boosting completion rates for First Nations students.
- Mentoring, flexible pathways and culturally safe training are key.
- A national skills shortage makes scaling First Nations workforce programs a priority.

### ***BUILDING ENERGY JUSTICE - Drawing on conversations and community energy initiatives from across the globe***

This was a closed session featuring **Robie Halip - Right Energy Partnership with Indigenous Peoples (Philippines), Elizabeth Noble - Community Power Agency and Madie Sturgess - Original Power.**

### ***MAKING EQUITY EQUITABLE - The good and the bad***

This session featured **Tommy Hicks, Indigenous Energy Australia, Gavin Brown, Yamagigu Consulting, Mana Newton, Tauhara North No.2 Trust in New Zealand and Alwyn Graham with Travis Tucker from Mirning Green Energy Limited** talking about the importance of centering equity in processes and systems in the energy transition. Key points made included:

- Global models show how communities can design just transitions.
- Equity participation in projects offers long-term community benefits, with emerging and existing examples from both Australia and New Zealand.

- The market now is becoming used to these sorts of arrangements and open to funding on that basis.

- Mirning’s powerpoint presentation is [here](#)

## RIGHT TO POWER - Preview of report and recommendations

This session involved a snapshot of a report being developed Original Power, Energy Consumers Australia and other stakeholders on prepaid metering. Featuring **Scotty McDinny from Original Power, Tom Longden from University of Western Sydney, Chantelle Johns from Marlinja community, Glen Wingfield from the First Nations Clean Energy Network, and Lauren Mellor from Original Power.** Key points emerging included:

- Around 65,000 First Nations energy customers (14,800+ households) are on mandated prepayment systems in NT, WA, QLD, SA.
- Prepayment means households must pay upfront for power; if credit runs out, supply is automatically disconnected.
- Unlike the National Electricity Market (NEM), these systems lack consumer protections, hardship programs, and proper regulatory oversight. Mandated prepayment creates structural inequities in energy access for First Nations households.
- Prepayment households sit at the intersection of energy insecurity, poverty, and climate vulnerability. Without reform, First Nations communities risk being left behind in the clean energy transition.
- The *Right to Power* report provides a clear, evidence-based roadmap for action - showing that communities want fairer protections and access to solar and microgrids.

- Original Power’s presentation is [here](#)

## CLOSE OF SYMPOSIUM

The Symposium showed that First Nations are not just participants but leaders in shaping Australia’s energy future. With strong partnerships, innovative projects, and bold visions, communities are driving a transition that delivers equity, justice, and resilience for generations to come. In this session several new tools and initiatives were mentioned to keep momentum going:

- [Building Capacity of Proponents Toolkit](#) – guidance for industry, government and investors.
- [Network guides available](#) – including Best Practice Principles for Clean Energy Projects; Renewable Energy Development Guide; Clean Energy Negotiations Guide; and Community Energy Planning Toolkit
- **Investor Benefits Report** – evidence that First Nations participation de-risks projects (soon to be released)
- [First Nations Clean Energy Hub](#) – a new one-stop service to support communities with advice, contacts and pathways.
- [PowerMakers 2025](#) – leadership program (October 2025) building the next wave of First Nations clean energy leaders.

## APPENDIX

### Northern Territory

#### Remote Power Systems Strategy (RPSS)

- Problem: ensuring community participation and benefit in redesign of the RPSS.
- Ideas: build community capacity, set social benefit targets, highlight finance risks, share project costs, require industry partners to engage communities.

#### Housing

- Problem: legacy social housing design causes poor health and energy insecurity.
- Ideas: involve communities in upgrades, use \$800m federal housing investment effectively, ensure cultural design, audits before retrofits, broaden advocacy and allies.

### Victoria / Tasmania

#### Partnerships on Large Infrastructure

- Problem: unclear government accountability on transmission/offshore wind partnerships.
- Ideas: stronger transparency, joint management models, legal mechanisms, energy retail partnerships.

#### Household Access to Renewables

- Problem: limited uptake at household level.
- Ideas: energy literacy education, funding and discounts, retrofits in public housing, support for private homeowners, advocacy through ACCOs.

#### Using CIS and other government tender processes

- Problem: barriers to participation in state tenders.
- Missing: policy certainty, capital access.
- Ideas: First Nations shortlisting, council of Elders for merit assessment, conditional eligibility, independent developer rating scheme, dedicated funding for First Nations governance and priorities.

### New South Wales / ACT

#### Cultural Obligations in Clean Energy Projects

- Barriers: lack of understanding by proponents, no native title in some areas, limited data, resources and expertise.
- Needs: independent advice, commercial literacy, ongoing engagement, Aboriginal employment targets, trust and collaboration.
- Solutions: First Nations seen as enablers, more transparency, mandatory publication of Indigenous Land Use Agreements, flexible engagement for cultural obligations, stronger training and capability-building, centralised resources, state-based toolkits.

### Western Australia

#### Decarbonisation

- Barriers: tenure systems, lack of state targets, regulatory uncertainty, limited pre-feasibility funding.

#### Pilbara Energy Transmission

- Barriers: common user infrastructure, risk-averse investors, low Aboriginal participation.
- Solutions: regional benefit-sharing models, equity or ownership stakes, derisking by working in partnership, embed Indigenous engagement in strategy.

#### Housing

- Barriers: insulation programs not community-led, governance complexity, ineffective rebates, lack of continuity in programs, inappropriate housing design.
- Solutions: improve energy literacy, co-designed programs, appliance audits, flexibility in prepayment systems, ensure vulnerable people supported.

#### Transmission Infrastructure

- Barriers: duplicative projects in NWIS, lack of funding, cultural site risks, supply chain shortages, skills gaps.
- Opportunities: Aboriginal equity ownership (with a mandated % target), training apprentices, shared land use agreements, faster “green light” approvals with community endorsement.

#### South Australia

##### Community Benefits in Projects

- Problem: defining, securing, and maintaining real community benefits as government and industry projects expand.
- Focus: setting standards collectively, making community aspirations clear, and strengthening shared positions to guide negotiations.