



RE ALLIANCE

How Australia's shift to renewable energy can deliver *beneficial outcomes for regional housing*



RE-Alliance pays respect to First Nations peoples and their Elders past and present, who, for thousands of generations, have cared for Country and sustained the world's oldest living culture. We acknowledge sovereignty was never ceded. We commit to working alongside First Nations peoples to achieve a just energy shift.

CONTENTS

Introduction	2
CASE STUDY 1: Refurbishing unused buildings for workforce accommodation. <i>Wellington NSW</i>	8
CASE STUDY 2: Housing as an essential consideration in renewable energy development. <i>Rockhampton QLD</i>	12
CASE STUDY 3: Safe emergency housing for women. <i>Mortlake VIC</i>	16
CASE STUDY 4: Local government leading long-term housing legacy. <i>Uralla NSW</i>	20
CASE STUDY 5: Community-led housing delivery in small towns. <i>Wimmera VIC</i>	24
CASE STUDY 6: Building the framework for future housing. <i>Dubbo NSW</i>	28



WHO IS THE RENEWABLE ENERGY ALLIANCE (RE-ALLIANCE)?

RE-Alliance is a member-based organisation. Our members include landholders, farmers, small business owners, climate campaigners, environmentalists and people living across regional Australia.

RE-Alliance is working to deliver a responsible and rapid shift to renewable energy that actively contributes to the strength of our regions.

We listen to and build the capacity of rural and regional Australians to lead the shift to renewables in their communities, we elevate stories that show how people in renewable energy regions are ensuring projects deliver local benefits, and we work tirelessly to ensure that rural and regional voices are at the centre of our advocacy with governments and industry.

We are an independent not-for-profit organisation operating across Australia, with more than a decade of experience working with regional communities navigating all forms of renewable energy, transmission and storage.

We play a unique role in Australia's energy sector and are recognised for our leading work with regional communities to help them get the most out of the shift to clean energy in their regions.



WHO IS THIS REPORT FOR?

If you're thinking about how renewable energy development can deliver lasting housing benefits to regional Australia, this report will be of interest to you.

You might be working in local government, living in a regional community where large scale renewable infrastructure is being built or planned, or perhaps you're working in the renewable energy industry.

This report recognises the challenges associated with the need for temporary workers accommodation for new renewable energy infrastructure, and introduces case studies from existing projects that have sought to address those challenges in a way that delivers a legacy for local communities.

We encourage readers to think about how different aspects of the case studies could apply to their local situation and develop a response that responds to local needs.

REPORT WRITTEN AND PUBLISHED BY RE-ALLIANCE

November, 2025



INTRODUCTION

Australia's shift to renewable energy is well underway. More than 40% of our National Electricity Market is already powered by renewable sources, and that's expected to reach 60% by 2028.

The shift to renewables is happening because we need to reduce carbon emissions and because ageing coal plants are becoming increasingly unreliable and expensive to maintain. To ensure a reliable, affordable power supply for all Australians – across the bush and from the cities to the coast – we urgently need to build infrastructure that replaces the coal and gas plants that have served us well in the past, but no longer can in the future.

With careful planning and proactive local engagement, the development of renewable energy projects can respond to local priorities, bring economic diversification, new jobs, and new business or industry development opportunities.

Local governments and communities at the centre of the shift to renewables have been working hard to identify the opportunities and manage the potential impacts from renewable energy development. In our work with rural and regional communities, we increasingly hear that one issue in need of urgent attention is the potential impact on local housing and accommodation that an increase in workers for renewable energy and transmission projects can bring. Many regions are already experiencing housing shortages, making this issue particularly pressing for regions that are expecting multiple, concurrent project developments, bringing many hundreds of workers into local areas.

The challenges that communities have identified include:

- Temporary workers occupying existing short-term accommodation, impacting on local tourism by booking out hotels for years at a time.
- Temporary workers occupying existing rental or purchased housing, driving prices up and reducing affordable and low income accommodation options, leading to displacement of lower income households.¹
- Building and use of dedicated worker camps, which can reduce pressure on local housing but divert economic benefits away from existing communities, and potentially increase antisocial behaviour.²
- Increased pressure on existing services and infrastructure, such as health systems, water and sewerage systems, and community facilities, from an increased population.³

Mitigating the risks and potential impacts associated with short term workers accommodation is a core requirement for any new development. However, as we show in these case studies, where local communities and local governments are supported to identify and implement opportunities, it is possible to go beyond simple impact mitigation and deliver legacy housing outcomes for regional communities. Innovative solutions that directly respond to local needs and ambitions can be developed through early, open and responsive engagement with local leaders and communities to inform and shape project planning.

Across Australia, innovative renewable energy developers, local councils and community groups are implementing solutions that will not only house temporary workforces, but generate long-term housing outcomes for local communities, and provide other social housing benefits.

Improved housing in the regions is a long-called for outcome that the shift to renewable energy can enable.

These case studies provide real examples of how Australia's switch to an energy system powered by renewable sources can create long-term beneficial outcomes for housing, which supports social and economic resilience in communities. It is a call to action for companies and governments, to lean in and work with communities to find solutions that will deliver improved housing outcomes in our regions.



Bango Wind Farm NSW

¹ Heidi McElnea and Allison Mudford, Short-Term Worker Accommodation with Long-Term Community Benefits: Housing the New England Renewable Energy Zone (Orange Compass and Community Power Agency, 2023) <https://www.orangecompass.com.au/images/Discussion_Paper_Short_term_accommodation_long_term_benefits.pdf>.

² Katrina Raynor, 'Can Australia's Clean Energy Transition Also Be a Vehicle for Social Justice?', Cities People Love (Melbourne, online, December 2023) <<https://citiespeoplelove.co/article/can-australia-s-clean-energy-transition-also-be-a-vehicle-for-social-justice>>.

³ International Finance Corporation and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (2009) Workers' accommodation: processes and standards A guidance note by IFC and the EBRD <<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/604561468170043490/pdf/602530WP0worke10Box358316B01PUBLIC1.pdf>>.



BARRIERS TO OVERCOME

Barriers to implementing better housing outcomes through renewable energy development exist across five key areas.

CONSTRUCTION

Construction costs are increasing and the construction industry struggles to access enough tradespeople to support residential construction needs. This is particularly prevalent in regional, rural and remote locations. Rural locations are often characterised by a smaller number of businesses that can 'scale-up' to address larger scale development needs.

LAND, PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Regional, rural and remote locations generally have sufficient land available, but face high costs of developing the services – such as internal roads, sewerage systems and electricity connections – needed to support new housing.

DEMAND AND INVESTMENT

Historically, developers and local councils have been hesitant to develop new housing in rural locations, as demand is perceived to be low and development risk is perceived to be high. This lack of demand makes it difficult to attract private investment in housing or local businesses.

GOVERNANCE AND PARTNERSHIP

Renewable energy companies have not traditionally delivered, managed or financed housing and tend to have limited capacity in this area. The initial developer of a project may not be the long-term owner, further reducing the incentive to invest in or hold housing assets, and where housing is constructed there may be challenges with the ongoing ownership of housing after the renewable energy construction period ends.

COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL FABRIC

Local communities can be concerned about new temporary workers' accommodation leading to changes to the sense of community, anti-social behaviour, loss of scenic amenity, traffic increases, and pressure on other services and infrastructure such as health systems, water and sewerage.

Local communities and renewable energy companies cannot address these barriers alone. State and federal governments must ensure local governments have the resources needed to implement appropriate planning processes and to coordinate activities with renewable energy companies. Sufficient funding is also needed to support local government to take advantage of this opportunity by being able to provide the underlying infrastructure needed to enhance housing in regional areas.

⁴ Taken from RE-Alliance's principles for best practice community benefit funds: RE-Alliance, Building Stronger Communities: Community Benefit Funds (2023)
<https://assets.nationbuilder.com/vicwind/pages/3152/attachments/original/1702433630/Building_Stronger_Communities_%E2%80%93_93_Community_benefit_funds.pdf?1702433630>.



INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

The case studies presented in this report describe how communities, councils and renewable energy companies have worked together to address barriers to implementing better housing outcomes. Their approaches differ, but each shows the power of local knowledge informing the design of workforce accommodation solutions and the social value of building in long-term outcomes that will leave a positive housing legacy for the local community. The approaches include:

- Collaboration with local councils to drive development.
- Contributions to roads, sewerage and electricity infrastructure.
- New job, industry and supply chain development.
- Locally appropriate, temporary housing solutions.
- Contributions to social services.
- Use of prefabricated manufacturing.
- Collaborations with rental providers.

Each case study has been assessed against RE-Alliance's seven principles for best practice community benefit⁴ to identify how each project delivered value for communities. The principles are:

- 1. DELIVER SOCIAL VALUE** – companies must work to build trust-based relationships with local communities and operate based on fairness.
- 2. DELIVER IN THE LONG-TERM** – community benefits should extend for at least the life of the projects.
- 3. BUILD CONTEXT-SPECIFIC SOLUTIONS** – funds are most beneficial when they go towards programs that are rooted in the local context, either answering unmet local needs or bringing an opportunity that the local community is able to use.
- 4. GIVE AGENCY TO COMMUNITIES TO CO-DESIGN PROGRAMS** – ensure engagement programs create equal opportunities for all members of the community to participate.
- 5. BE TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE** – transparency helps build trust, credibility, and raises the bar. Transparency also ensures that companies are publicly accountable for their commitments.
- 6. MEASURE IMPACT** – activities must be evaluated for their social impact so that lessons can be learned to create better programs in the future.
- 7. CREATE A CULTURE OF COLLABORATION** – there is an increasing understanding of the cumulative impact of multiple renewable projects on communities and an expectation of benefits to unlock the opportunities presented by many projects in the form of cumulative benefits.



INSIGHTS AND LEARNINGS

While each case study highlights a different approach, six key insights are clear:

- 1. START EARLY** - Early consideration of project housing needs and early engagement with the local community is crucial.
- 2. PARTNERSHIPS ARE KEY** - Development of partnerships to deliver outcomes, particularly with local councils, plays a key enabling role in understanding what existing assets and opportunities, such as existing housing programs or refurbishing vacant buildings, could be used to deliver the most cost-effective and socially integrated outcomes.
- 3. ENGAGE WITH COMMUNITY** - Prioritising community engagement and input to approaches to project workforce accommodation and local housing issues is key to identifying and responding to community concerns, and delivering social outcomes that are a high priority for the local community.
- 4. PRIORITISE LEGACY** - Planning to deliver a positive legacy requires consideration of what the project will leave behind and how it can be used to best effect.
- 5. IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL GOVT** - Local government can play a key role in supporting the development of legacy housing activities when they have the resources to do so.
- 6. REGULATORY CONSTRAINTS** - Understanding the regulatory constraints and engaging in a manner that ensures housing outcomes can be delivered when they are needed is vital to deliver long-term social benefits.



LOCATION OF CASE STUDIES





Bellhaven Aged Care. (Image credit: Squadron Energy)

CASE STUDY 1

Refurbishing unused buildings for workforce accommodation



PARTNERS

Squadron Energy,
Bellhaven Aged Care Facility



HOUSING LEGACY

By upgrading an existing, unused facility, this project creates a longer term opportunity for the Bellhaven Aged Care Facility to continue being used, whether as housing, a care facility or other potential uses.



DESCRIPTION

Squadron Energy has a leasehold arrangement with the former Bellhaven Aged Care Facility in Wellington, NSW. Bellhaven Aged Care was an aged care facility that closed in 2018. The buildings have been unused since. As part of its lease arrangement, Squadron has commissioned refurbishment works, with a focus on First Nations employment, to prepare it for use as a temporary workforce accommodation. This refurbishment project will avoid adding pressure to an already-stressed local rental market.



LOCAL CONTEXT

Wellington is a small town of approximately 4,500 people located south-east of Dubbo, within the Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone in NSW. It is known for its rich Indigenous cultural heritage and almost a third of the population are First Nations peoples. Once a gold rush town, its economy now relies on farming and tourism.

Wellington has experienced significant rental price increases in the last five years,¹ partially due to the influx of renewable energy workers servicing surrounding projects. Prior to shutting down in 2018, the Bellhaven Aged Care Facility provided the only high-care aged facility in the Wellington community.



CHALLENGES THE PROJECT IS SEEKING TO ADDRESS

There were 135,000 unoccupied private dwellings in regional NSW at the 2021 Census, with an additional but unknown number of vacant commercial or retail buildings.² The refurbishment of underutilised or vacant buildings for temporary workers' accommodation is a significant opportunity across regional Australia. Vacant buildings have the potential to be renovated and brought back into the housing system often much faster and with lower environmental impacts than new-build construction.³ There is substantial opportunity for local communities, councils and building owners to proactively identify buildings that could be renovated and refurbished for temporary and/or long-term use.



WHAT HAPPENED

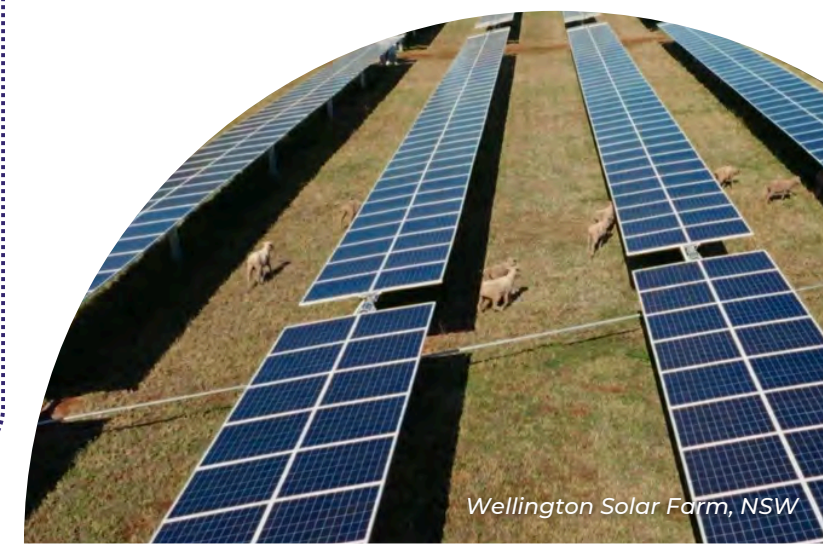
Squadron Energy engaged with Dubbo Regional Council on opportunities to provide locally appropriate housing solutions in Wellington. Bellhaven Aged Care Facility was identified as an unused site that, with refurbishment, would be suitable for temporary workforce accommodation.

Squadron negotiated with the owner for a five-year lease arrangement, with an option to extend for another five years, and agreed to fund all refurbishment costs required to transition the site to workers' accommodation. The 32-room building will be used to house workers on Squadron's Ungula Wind Farm. The company made a commitment to use local First Nations businesses to do the refurbishment work.

"It helps me to be able to keep work in town. I was born and raised here, and I've got my own little family here now, so it's been good. Since starting on the project, I've brought on a first year apprentice. It's been a good opportunity."

Jake Newman, First Nations electrical contractor on site

Local businesses will also be involved with the operations and maintenance of the facility. When the facility is no longer required as workers' accommodation, it will be returned to the property owner to be reused for alternative purposes.



Wellington Solar Farm, NSW



KEY BENEFITS THE PROJECT SEEKS TO DELIVER

- Refurbishment of an existing facility, which supports re-use of a vacant building and reduces the need and impact of temporary rentals and new-build construction
- Support for local First Nations businesses



LEARNINGS FOR BROADER APPLICATION

SUMMARY

- There are mutual benefits to be obtained from refurbishing existing disused assets
- Renewable energy developments provide new opportunities for First Nations economic empowerment both directly and in the broader local economy

POTENTIAL OF REFURBISHING EXISTING BUILDINGS

The Bellhaven Aged Care Facility is an example of the value communities can receive by refurbishing or retrofitting existing buildings in regional and rural towns. Across Australia, there are many disused or underutilised buildings that have the potential to help ease the severe housing shortages facing many communities.

Upgrading Bellhaven to support temporary workforce accommodation will enable additional workers to live in Wellington without increasing demand on the already-stressed local rental market. It also creates the opportunity for the facility to continue being used after Squadron's lease ends, whether as housing, resuming operations as a care facility or other potential uses.



Wellington NSW. (Image credit: Squadron Energy)

FIRST NATIONS ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

This project is an example of how renewable energy companies can support local economies and First Nations workforces – not only through works directly on site, but also through general building works associated with projects. This provides opportunities for local businesses that might not otherwise have direct contact with a renewable energy company.

With a goal to have a local First Nations team complete the Bellhaven upgrades, Squadron Energy first identified First Nations companies in the Wellington region with the capacity to do the necessary work. They then engaged a local First Nations head contractor in Wellington and worked with the head contractor to ensure First Nations sub-contractors could be engaged on the project.



(Image credit: Squadron Energy)

Justin Toomey-White (Squadron Energy), Jake Newman (BLK Power Electrical and Refrigeration), Trai Daley (Tyecon) and Bart Sykes (Squadron Energy).



BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR COMMUNITY BENEFITS ADDRESSED

- Delivers social value
- Delivers in the long-term
- Builds context-specific solutions
- Gives agency to communities to co-design programs

Based on RE-Alliance's principles for best practice community benefit funds: RE-Alliance, *Building Stronger Communities: Community Benefit Funds* (2023)

¹ Umwelt Environmental and Social Consultants, Wellington North Solar Farm Accommodation and Employment Strategy (2022) <<https://lightsourcebp.com/app/uploads/2022/12/Accommodation-and-Employment-Strategy.pdf>>.

² .idcommunity, 'Regional NSW', Regional Profile (Dwelling type, 2024) <<https://profile.id.com.au/australia/dwellings?WebID=180>>.

³ Framework Group, 'Retrofits versus Building New: We Need Whole of Industry Change', Framework Group (2024) <<https://www.fwss.com.au/news/retrofits-versus-building-new-we-need-whole-of-industry-change/>> ('Retrofits versus Building New').



Dulacca Wind Farm, QLD

CASE STUDY 2

Housing as an essential consideration in renewable energy development



PARTNERS

Energy Estate, Hinman Group, Accommodation Solutions Australia



HOUSING LEGACY

This project delivers new workforce accommodation in Gracemere and Rockhampton, designed with the capacity to transition into future permanent housing.



DESCRIPTION

Energy Estate, a clean energy and infrastructure company, and Hinman Group, a workforce accommodation developer, came together to create a new organisation, Accommodation Solutions Australia. The aim: to develop workforce accommodation and legacy housing projects in regional Australia.

The first two villages are located in Rockhampton and Gracemere, Queensland. These projects aim to address current housing shortages while supporting the region's growing renewable energy sector and other large-scale infrastructure projects.

Homes are designed with floor plans that accommodate temporary workers living in single rooms, with the capacity to transition into legacy homes with space for families. Rather than building prefabricated, temporary units that will later be removed, Accommodation Solutions Australia is aiming to build high-quality homes in locations that will become new permanent suburbs.



LOCAL CONTEXT

With populations of around 63,000 and 11,500 respectively, Rockhampton and nearby Gracemere play a central role in Queensland's energy, agriculture and heavy industry sectors.

The region is a critical service hub for coal operations across the Bowen, Galilee and Surat Basins and hosts the Stanwell Power Station. The area has historically experienced boom-bust housing cycles driven by its dependence on mining employment.

The broader Capricorn region has a number of renewable energy projects already underway, and several new projects under planning and development. However, the region is facing a significant housing crisis, with the rental vacancy rate regionally just 0.8% (as of April 2025)¹ and rental prices rising 27% in 2024.²



Gracemere & Rockhampton sites



WHAT HAPPENED

In planning for its renewable energy workforce, Energy Estate identified a significant housing shortage challenge in Central Queensland. So they created a joint venture with an experienced construction and civil works company – the Hinman Group – to deliver long-term housing for the region.

This joint venture – named Accommodation Solutions Australia – has a bigger picture focus to deliver workforce accommodation designed to transition to long-term housing across Australia, beginning in Central Queensland. Planning for each location incorporates a workforce village, including recreational spaces and landscaping.

The **Gracemere site** is designed with the potential to deliver 305 legacy homes



CHALLENGES THE PROJECT IS SEEKING TO ADDRESS

The project aims to avoid exacerbating previous boom-bust housing cycles experienced locally, by delivering workers' accommodation that can be easily transitioned to long-term housing. However, temporary accommodation and prefabricated housing is often seen as low-quality, partly due to historical stigma about this construction style.³

Similarly, short-term worker camp operators often have little incentive to invest in well-designed, comfortable living environments – especially when doing so raises costs.

The Gracemere and Rockhampton projects are seeking to demonstrate that with careful planning, prefabricated housing can offer sustainable, high-quality, liveable homes and neighbourhoods. The project also provides an opportunity for renewable energy companies to lead by example, ensuring homes are energy-efficient, powered by rooftop solar and supportive of electric vehicles.



KEY BENEFITS THE PROJECT SEEKS TO DELIVER

- Delivering sustainable building design, housing diversity and infrastructure such as electric vehicle charging stations within workers' accommodation
- Generation of new business and new opportunities for local supply chain partners and supporting local workforce capacity building



LEARNINGS FOR BROADER APPLICATION

SUMMARY

- Renewable energy companies who make housing a whole-of-business consideration, rather than taking a project-by-project approach, have greater capacity to generate ambitious outcomes
- Prefabricated housing can be high-quality, rapid to deploy and flexible
- Investing in the full supply chain creates multiple opportunities for local business development

MAKING HOUSING A WHOLE-OF-BUSINESS CONSIDERATION

Renewable energy companies often engage third parties to take responsibility for construction-phase workforce accommodation. These contractors have less incentive to deliver best-practice accommodation solutions or to consider their long-term standing in a community, as their involvement in the region is time-limited.

Energy Estate has made a commitment to approach the need for temporary workers' accommodation as an opportunity to contribute to the communities they have a long-term interest in. By considering this as a core component of their own operations, they were able to partner with the Hinman Group to address regional housing needs, rather than a focus on project-by-project solutions.



Modular style housing. (Image supplied by Energy Estate)

PREFABRICATED HOUSING CAN MEET REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS AND BUILD COMMUNITIES

The process and regulatory framework for developing temporary workers' accommodation is more established in Central Queensland than other areas, due to the long history of mining in the region.

The Queensland Government requires that companies consider cumulative workforce management, housing and accommodation, local business and industry procurement, and health and community well-being as part of social impact assessment.⁴

This requirement is complemented by the Major Resource Housing Policy, which sets additional principles for companies to consider in addressing housing supply and affordability.⁵ As these requirements are increasingly rolled out to apply to renewable energy projects, this project is moving beyond simple compliance – it is seeking to deliver housing that is reducing environmental footprint through energy-efficient buildings, waste reduction and water conservation. This sets high standards for workers' accommodation, allowing for easier transformation into future legacy housing.

CONTRIBUTION TO LOCAL SUPPLY CHAINS

New housing builds provide an opportunity to not only support existing local businesses, such as catering and site management, but to build new local industries and supply chains. For these projects, Accommodation Solutions Australia is directly working with Australian manufacturers to source the build components domestically and use local suppliers.

Accommodation Solutions Australia is also exploring options for a manufacturing hub in Gracemere for construction components of modular homes, with an associated training facility. If successful, this means the project will not only deliver legacy housing, but will also provide legacy business development opportunities.



BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR COMMUNITY BENEFITS ADDRESSED

- Delivers in the long-term
- Builds context-specific solutions
- Creates a culture of collaboration

Based on RE-Alliance's principles for best practice community benefit funds: RE-Alliance, *Building Stronger Communities: Community Benefit Funds* (2023)

¹ Real Estate Investor, 'Investment Property Rockhampton City, QLD, 4700' (April 2025) <<https://www.realestateinvestar.com.au/property/rockhampton+city>>.

² Marcia Gil, 'Booming but Still a Bargain: Big Little Queensland City Has \$350,000 House Prices', Domain 3 February 2025, <https://www.domain.com.au/news/booming-but-still-a-bargain-big-little-city-has-houses-that-cost-350000-1347696/>

³ Dale A Steinhardt and Karen Manley, 'Exploring the Beliefs of Australian Prefabricated House Builders' (2016) 16(2) Construction Economics and Building 27.

⁴ State Department, Infrastructure and Planning, 'Social Impact Assessment', State Development, Infrastructure and Planning (2020) <<https://www.statedevelopment.qld.gov.au/coordinator-general/strong-and-sustainable-resource-communities/social-impact-assessment>>.

⁵ Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Committee, Inquiry into Fly-in, Fly-out and Other Long Distance Commuting Work Practices in Regional Queensland (No Report No. 9, 55th Parliament, October 2015) <<https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/committees/IPNRC/2015/FIFO/02-rpt-009-09Oct2015.pdf>>.



CASE STUDY 3

Safe emergency housing for women



PARTNERS

Tilt Renewables,
Women's Housing Limited,
Emma House Domestic
Violence Service



HOUSING LEGACY

This project provides increased capacity in emergency accommodation for women and children escaping family violence, with 10 housing units reserved for women from south-west Victoria.



DESCRIPTION

Tilt Renewables contributed \$500,000 to a new Melbourne housing development built to provide interim accommodation for women escaping domestic violence. The facility was co-funded by the Victorian Government and managed by not-for-profit community housing provider Women's Housing Limited. Tilt Renewables' contribution means that 10 places in the development are reserved for women and children from south-west Victoria escaping domestic violence.

The facility, and the ability to target support for families in the south-west, helps address the shortage of crisis accommodation in south-west Victoria, where Tilt Renewables operates the Dundonnell Wind Farm.¹ Community organisations such as Emma House Domestic Violence Service or Orange Door in Warrnambool can refer women and their children to Women's Housing Limited to receive this support.



LOCAL CONTEXT

The Wimmera south-west region has a critical social housing shortage, with 1,900 households on the priority access waiting list.² To qualify for priority access for social housing, a household must either be homeless, living in unsuitable/unsafe housing or at immediate risk of homelessness, often due to family violence. This makes the delivery of social housing, including crisis housing for those fleeing domestic violence, a priority for the region.

Dundonnell Wind Farm is located north-east of Mortlake, a town of approximately 1,400 in the Wimmera south-west region of Victoria. It is one of a number of wind farm projects in the area, popular due to strong and steady winds and proximity to transmission line infrastructure. As part of its community benefit plan, Dundonnell Wind Farm responded to this community-identified need and provided improved access to crisis housing.



CHALLENGES THE PROJECT IS SEEKING TO ADDRESS

“During planning for Dundonnell Wind Farm, the Emma House Domestic Violence Service identified a significant shortage of housing available for women escaping domestic violence or unsafe housing situations in south-west Victoria. The project team then focused on improving the availability of interim housing to address this urgent need.”

Owen Boushel, Manager Stakeholder Engagement, Tilt Renewables

The safe housing development was built outside the region, which enables women using the service to avoid their perpetrator, access support networks and services, and avoid stigma.³



WHAT HAPPENED

As part of the Dundonnell Wind Farm's planning and development process and application to the Victorian Renewable Energy Auction Scheme, Tilt Renewables engaged with local stakeholders and conducted a Socio-Economic Impact Assessment. Local stakeholders reported there was a pre-existing shortage of accommodation for survivors of family violence in south-west Victoria. Feedback noted that increased pressure on housing, including from temporary workers' accommodation requirements, would impact on vulnerable community members the most.

Tilt Renewables incorporated this feedback when developing its community benefit commitments and entered into an agreement with Women's Housing Limited, committing \$500,000 to support the construction of a 24-unit development in Melbourne. In return for this contribution, Women's Housing Limited made 10 beds available each year for family violence survivors from south-west Victoria.





KEY BENEFITS THE PROJECT SEEKS TO DELIVER

- Housing support for survivors of family violence in south-west Victoria and an opportunity to access safe accommodation
- Community benefit funds targeted at some of the most vulnerable people and households in south-west Victoria



LEARNINGS FOR BROADER APPLICATION

SUMMARY

- Longer term thinking can help to deliver strategic benefits that respond to local priorities
- Flexible and careful targeting of funds, designed in partnership with the local community, can help support community members with the greatest need to access housing



Dundonnell Wind Farm. (Image credit: Tilt Renewables)

ENGAGEMENT SHOULD HELP LOCAL COMMUNITIES SHAPE LONG-TERM PRIORITIES

This example demonstrates the value a Community Benefit Plan can deliver to communities, if it is developed by listening closely to community feedback and thinking creatively about how to address local needs. It requires a willingness from companies to enter into longer-term partnerships and to provide greater funding for strategically important projects.

“We are working with our communities to think of what is possible with these funds and taking a longer view on what programs or initiatives can be funded on a multi-year basis. These programs compound in their effectiveness over time. Ultimately, these funds are under community control and so we are getting ideas tailored to the community coming through.”

Owen Boushel, Manager Stakeholder Engagement, Tilt Renewables

The Dundonnell Wind Farm won the Clean Energy Council's 2020 Community Engagement Award based on engagement conducted to develop its Community Benefit Plan.

CO-DESIGN IS IMPORTANT FOR SUPPORTING LOCAL NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS

The decision to fund housing for women seeking safety was informed by engagement with local stakeholders, such as Emma House Domestic Violence Service, and data highlighting the shortage of crisis accommodation in south-west Victoria.

It is important to note that targeting support for vulnerable households – in areas where there is limited access to affordable or social housing, including crisis housing – will require partnerships with and support from organisations that have high capacity, expertise and ‘shovel ready’ projects.



BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR COMMUNITY BENEFITS ADDRESSED

- Delivers social value
- Builds context-specific solutions
- Delivers in the long-term
- Gives agency to communities to co-design programs

Based on RE-Alliance's principles for best practice community benefit funds: RE-Alliance, *Building Stronger Communities: Community Benefit Funds* (2023)



Mortlake VIC. (Image credit: Mortlake Caravan Park)

¹ Lena Tomkinson, 'Unique Community Alliance Delivers New Housing', Women's Housing (15 September 2019).

² Homes Victoria, 'Applications on the Victorian Housing Register (VHR)', Big Housing Build (December 2024) <<https://www.homes.vic.gov.au/applications-victorian-housing-register-vhr>>.

³ Monica Campo and Sarah Tayton, Domestic and Family Violence in Regional, Rural and Remote Communities: An Overview of Key Issues (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2015).



Uralla, NSW. (Image credit: Uralla Shire Council)

CASE STUDY 4

Local government leading long-term housing legacy



PARTNERS

Uralla Shire Council



HOUSING LEGACY

Uralla Shire Council will ensure a positive housing legacy from Renewable Energy Zone investments, through actions and strategies identified in its *Local Housing Strategy 2025*.



DESCRIPTION

With the 2021 declaration of the New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) in NSW, Uralla Shire Council recognised the need for a strategy to progress renewable energy developments while balancing the needs of the Shire.

Together with other local government areas in the REZ, Uralla negotiated with EnergyCo – the state government-owned energy infrastructure planner – for each council to receive an annual payment of \$250,000 over three years. The payments support councils to resource and prepare for the renewable energy roll-out.

Uralla Shire Council used a portion of its payment to recruit a Strategic Planning Officer to mitigate risks and maximise opportunities associated with key planning themes, such as housing. A key output from this work has been the Shire's *Local Housing Strategy 2025*.



LOCAL CONTEXT

Uralla Shire has a population of around 6,000 residents in the Northern Tablelands of NSW. The region is a popular destination for tourists and tree-changers. It has a tight rental market that further tightened with the construction of the Shire's first large-scale solar project, New England Solar, in 2022.

Approximately 5GW of potential energy projects (enough to power over 2 million homes) are currently in the planning pipeline for the region, along with grid infrastructure that includes two large substations within the Shire. These substations will allow further renewable energy projects to connect into the grid. The workforce associated with this level of construction is expected to put significant pressure on housing supply.



CHALLENGES THE PROJECT IS SEEKING TO ADDRESS

“How do we, as local government, mitigate risk of renewable energy development while maximising the opportunities for our community, recognising that we are part of a much larger effort and context?”

Toni Averay, General Manager, Uralla Shire Council

Uralla Shire Council has recognised the need to unlock housing supply by developing and updating housing and planning strategies to bring forward more diverse and affordable housing options. However, as a smaller council facing a large array of new developments in the area, having the resources to do the necessary planning and preparation is a challenge.



WHAT HAPPENED

As a first step, Council identified their local housing priorities by developing a *Housing Strategy Key Issues Report*. The report drew on stakeholder consultation and a detailed analysis of supply and demand. The most important issue raised in the consultation process was housing availability and affordability. Key findings in the report included:

- Rising demand from renewable energy projects creates a dual challenge of accommodating temporary workers sustainably while leveraging projects to create lasting infrastructure and housing benefits, and
- The significant pipeline of projects has the potential to attract new working-age residents and families to the region.

This report was used as a foundation to develop the *Uralla Shire Local Housing Strategy 2025* to guide local housing development over the next 20 years.

Uralla Shire Council will be supported to implement this strategy through its existing EnergyCo grant, as well as through grant funding from the NSW Government's Regional Housing Strategic Planning Fund. The Council is also collaborating with Homes NSW and Homes North Community Housing to develop new affordable housing on Council-owned land, drawing insights from Shoalhaven City Council's experience with community housing.



New England Solar Farm, NSW. (Image credit: ACEN Australia)



KEY BENEFITS THE PROJECT SEEKS TO DELIVER

- Early strategic planning to identify how workers' accommodation can leave a legacy through the transition of temporary accommodation to affordable and community housing
- Ensuring new temporary workforce accommodation is located and designed in a way that allows for the reuse of trunk infrastructure – such as roads, water and sewerage supply – for permanent housing



LEARNINGS FOR BROADER APPLICATION

SUMMARY

- Consider current and future financing options
- Ensure the correct regulatory settings are in place to facilitate the outcomes a community wants to achieve
- Identify sites that are suitable for both short-term accommodation and long-term housing needs

SECURING FINANCE

Uralla Shire Council expects that financial backing for the development of workers' accommodation will be secured through partnerships with energy companies and through investor arrangements. The Council's role is facilitating partnerships, and providing clear guidance around the location and development outcomes for temporary workforce accommodation. Proactive, forward planning by Council can enable a longer term transition of this accommodation into permanent infrastructure or legacy housing.

While there is uncertainty around project sequencing and the number of workers potentially requiring accommodation within the Shire, the opportunity to leverage investment and possibly direct a percentage of project community benefits into a more secure housing supply was an important opportunity.

The Council has established the Uralla Shire Renewable Energy Community Benefit Fund, which will receive contributions through Voluntary Planning Agreements (VPAs) with renewable energy companies. The next step was to start a program of community engagement with The Next Economy to determine the outcomes the community would like to see as the REZ rolls out, which could include innovative housing projects within the Shire. The Council expects to secure VPAs with all renewable energy projects, receiving funds as they become operational. If all projects currently in planning are developed, the fund could be receiving in excess of \$1.1m per annum by 2032.

ENSURING THE CORRECT REGULATORY SETTINGS

When Uralla Shire initially embarked on this work, state government planning regulations required the Council to enable temporary workers' accommodation through their Local Environment Plans. This had significant potential to delay implementation of its housing strategy.

However, following advocacy from local government and others, the state government amended its housing planning policy to enable accommodation for renewable energy workers to be permitted on suitably zoned land within a selection of local government areas, including Uralla Shire Council. This meant implementation of the strategy could proceed without time consuming and costly changes to the Council's development controls.

IDENTIFYING SUITABLE SITES

Through its investigation work, the Shire identified that consolidation and utilisation of areas currently zoned residential is the most efficient approach to new housing. This meant there was no immediate need for rezoning of additional residential land in Uralla. Supported by EnergyCo, Council has identified potential sites for new developments and engaged with landholders, along with several interested private investors.



Uralla, NSW. (Image credit: Uralla Shire Council)



BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR COMMUNITY BENEFITS ADDRESSED

- Delivers in the long-term
- Builds context-specific solutions
- Gives agency to communities to co-design programs
- Is transparent and accountable
- Creates a culture of collaboration

Based on RE-Alliance's principles for best practice community benefit funds: RE-Alliance, *Building Stronger Communities: Community Benefit Funds* (2023)



Housing construction, VIC. (Image credit: CMC Steel Solutions)

CASE STUDY 5

Community-led housing delivery in small towns



PARTNERS

Communities in the Wimmera Southern Mallee region, Wimmera Southern Mallee Development, Wimmera Housing Innovations Pty Ltd, local councils, Wimmera Affordable Housing Limited, local Town Progress Associations, local Special Purpose Vehicles



HOUSING LEGACY

A community-driven housing model, created by local organisations, that aims to address long-term housing shortages in small towns in the Wimmera.



DESCRIPTION

The Wimmera Housing Innovations model is a community-driven housing pathway designed and governed locally, where every decision from site selection to financing is made with community purpose at its core.

Each town establishes its own Special Purpose Vehicle to lead local housing delivery. These entities make sure housing projects are owned, managed and controlled by the community itself, supported by councils and Wimmera Southern Mallee Development.

The model welcomes participation from a range of local partners including community investors, employers, and industry participants such as renewable energy and transmission companies. Participation is always on the community's terms and focused on delivering solutions for the community.



LOCAL CONTEXT

Many small towns in the Wimmera Southern Mallee region have low rental availability and broader housing options are limited. The region faces challenges with ageing homes, limited builders, and a lack of fit-for-purpose housing for residents and essential workers.

There are a number of proposed major renewable energy, transmission and mineral extraction projects in the region, which will add temporary workforce demand. This will create further strain on accommodation in local towns – unless housing solutions are planned with the community.



Wimmera Southern Mallee region



WHAT HAPPENED

Wimmera Southern Mallee Development is an economic development organisation, established to guide the region's economic, cultural, social and environmental opportunities. For this project, they act as the regional convenor for community-led housing delivery at small-town scale.

Multiple partners play an important role in project delivery:

- **Wimmera Housing Innovations**, a private for-profit company, establishes and supports Special Purpose Vehicles in each town and provides feasibility, procurement, governance and delivery support.
- **Town Progress Associations** hold local decision-making and own or control sites.
- **Councils** enable planning, land assembly and connections.
- **Employers and community investors** inform housing demand and provide capital.
- **Wimmera Affordable Housing Limited**, a proposed non-for profit, is the identified pathway when partners prefer community housing ownership.
- **Transmission and renewable energy companies** co-invest in community housing assets across several towns, rather than standalone camps.

This initiative has led to a replicable legacy housing model, which redirects at least some workers' accommodation construction demand into permanent community assets. Using this model, the program has established four town Special Purpose Vehicles and secured serviced sites, with a pipeline of 13 homes across the four towns of Murtoa, Minyip, Donald and Apsley. The first housing is due for delivery in 2026.



CHALLENGES THE PROJECT IS SEEKING TO ADDRESS

The region is expected to host large numbers of temporary workers in coming years, and while housing options such as workers camps' might provide a short-term solution, they won't help to resolve long-term housing issues. Communities want a solution that will deliver locally appropriate, long-term housing.

"This is about communities solving community problems. Everyone, from residents to regional businesses, can play a part, but no one partner defines the story."

Chris Sounness, Chief Executive Officer, Wimmera Southern Mallee Development



Murra Warra Wind Farm, VIC. (Image credit: The New Joneses)



KEY BENEFITS THE PROJECT SEEKS TO DELIVER

- Creates housing that meets local needs and stays in community hands
- Builds local capacity through shared governance and ownership
- Replaces short-term fixes with long-term community assets
- Provides a model that any town, with or without major projects nearby, can adopt



LEARNINGS FOR BROADER APPLICATION

SUMMARY

- Consider workforce accommodation as housing first
- Start early and set the framework for later investment
- Establish clear finance and governance models

WORKFORCE ACCOMMODATION = LEGACY HOUSING

A guiding principle is to ensure workforce accommodation is developed as legacy housing. This means:

- Upfront planning to design buildings that can be retained or relocated within the town.
- Placing assets on serviced lots so connections serve residents beyond the construction period.
- Finding the housing type that works for the community first, along with the investing company.
- Avoiding new sites and the need for new service connections where possible.

For the Wimmera Southern Mallee project, this meant housing could be modular (helping to manage building scarcity and delivery risk) or built on site – but all housing must meet a 7-star standard for permanent residences and be able to be converted to permanent rental dwellings.

It was also important that the temporary workforce housing was tied to a handover plan to move the homes into the local rental pool when project construction winds down. This included having a plan for how the assets would be owned and managed.

COMMUNITIES AND COMPANIES SHOULD WORK TOGETHER TO SECURE LEGACY OUTCOMES

Wimmera Southern Mallee Development has established the following template for community stakeholders and companies to work together:

- **Start early.** Convene a meeting between the council, the regional delivery partner, the town Special Purpose Vehicle and the company to agree aims and constraints.
- **Select sites with the community.** Use serviced lots close to existing services.
- **Agree on the investment structure.** Seek co-investment rather than donations. This way, company funds flow into dwellings and connections that become community assets.
- **Define dual use.** Specify the share of time used for workforce and the handover date or trigger into long-term rental.
- **Lock operational settings.** Set simple tenant and asset policies, rent settings, maintenance responsibilities and an owner of last resort.
- **Fund connections once.** Ensure water, sewer, power and roads are built to permanent standards.
- **Require a delivery dashboard.** Publish sites, timelines, costs, tenancing and basic running-cost data so progress is visible.
- **Write the handover.** Include decommissioning requirements for any temporary structures and the title or lease transfer into the community vehicle.

BE CLEAR ON FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

Ensuring clear governance and finance arrangements upfront means project delivery will be smoother.

Financial approaches can include blending public co-investment (most useful for utility connections), community equity and employer support. Management approaches can include using town Special Purpose Vehicles for market delivery and an identified agency for not-for-profit ownership when required. Importantly, Special Purpose Vehicles with clear constitutions play an important role in keeping decision-making local.

Housing delivery should align with council planning and housing priorities, and use transparent reporting and a public commitments register, so communities can track what has been promised and delivered.



Minyip, VIC. (Image credit: Visit Wimmera Mallee)



BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR COMMUNITY BENEFITS ADDRESSED

- Delivers in the long-term
- Gives agency to communities to co-design programs
- Builds context-specific solutions
- Is transparent and accountable
- Creates a culture of collaboration

Based on RE-Alliance's principles for best practice community benefit funds: RE-Alliance, *Building Stronger Communities: Community Benefit Funds* (2023)



Keswick Estate render. (Image credit: Squadron Energy)

CASE STUDY 6

Building the framework for future housing



PARTNERS

Squadron Energy,
Dubbo Regional Council



HOUSING LEGACY

This project delivers infrastructure and civil works on a 10 hectare site in Dubbo, designed for temporary workers' accommodation which will then be adapted for permanent housing.



DESCRIPTION

Squadron Energy will develop a 400-bed temporary workers' accommodation facility, located 6km from the centre of Dubbo NSW within the Keswick Estate. The site will support workers on the Spicers Creek Wind Farm, but will be flexible enough to expand in the future to accommodate workers from other nearby projects.

Once the site is no longer needed for temporary workforce accommodation, it will be returned to Dubbo Regional Council with infrastructure and civil works – including electricity, sewerage, roads and water – to support a future local housing release. As part of the project, Squadron Energy also contributed to a stormwater retention basin to support the entire Keswick Estate site.



LOCAL CONTEXT

Dubbo plays a central role in NSW's Central-West Orana Renewable Energy Zone¹ and is the largest population and service hub in the area. With the city's airport and growing infrastructure, it is likely to continue to function as a central hub for workers and businesses involved in the delivery of renewable energy infrastructure in the region.

With a housing vacancy rate of 0.73% in May 2025, the region's housing market is extremely constrained. Dubbo and the surrounding Central West region is likely to host thousands of construction workers employed on renewable energy projects in the next decade.²



WHAT HAPPENED

Dubbo Regional Council identified cumulative impacts on housing across the region as a key risk from an influx of temporary workers, and commissioned an independent study into the risks and opportunities presented by new developments.

Squadron Energy recognised they would need to house large numbers of temporary workers in the region, so met with the Council to discuss options and potential sites for accommodation facilities.

Dubbo Regional Council identified the Keswick Estate site as a location that could house temporary workers while creating long-term benefits for the community through the provision of local infrastructure.

Squadron Energy agreed to fund and deliver a planning proposal to rezone the land at a density that would allow for workforce accommodation, but could also support future development of permanent housing. Land will be leased from the Council and temporary workforce accommodation will be constructed, supported by permanent civil works and infrastructure.



CHALLENGES THE PROJECT IS SEEKING TO ADDRESS

Long planning and development lead times are some of the key challenges in delivering housing solutions to meet temporary workforce needs. To ensure housing is available when construction is due to begin, renewable energy companies need to be progressing housing solutions while simultaneously planning renewable energy projects. This comes with an element of risk, as plans must be progressed before a Final Investment Decision is made.

“It took 12 to 18 months to get to the point where we could submit a Development Application and then we'd expected a 6 to 9 month process to approval. From approval, it's probably another 6 to 9 months before we can have someone sleeping in the village. The biggest challenge for a project like this is a company's appetite to stomp up capital before Final Investment Decision – it's a significant amount of money to commit on a renewable energy project that has not yet received its final approval.”

Bart Sykes, Regional Economic Development, Squadron Energy

The workforce accommodation will consist of single rooms with private bathrooms, grouped in “suburbs” of 100 units. These would be supported by shared amenities, such as dining areas, gyms, recreation and health spaces, and landscaped green areas. An integrated facilities manager will be responsible for managing the site, and prioritising procurement and employment from local people and businesses.

Once the temporary accommodation is no longer required, the accommodation structures will be removed and the site will be returned to Council, ready to be converted to residential housing.



KEY BENEFITS THE PROJECT SEEKS TO DELIVER

- Reduce pressure on existing housing and accommodation when temporary workers are in the area, and prepare for legacy housing infrastructure to support future residential development
- Increase worker attraction and retention, with attention to amenity and recreation as well as accommodation, and encourage workers to become long-term community members



LEARNINGS FOR BROADER APPLICATION

SUMMARY

- Local government understands local priorities
- Planning for temporary workers’ accommodation in a way that benefits the local community is important
- Opportunities to grow regional populations by encouraging temporary workers to become part of the local community should be taken

LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNDERSTANDS THE LOCAL PRIORITIES

Local councils and other local stakeholders are best qualified to identify beneficial housing solutions based on what their community needs.

Communities that proactively gather feedback, investigate opportunities and needs, and develop their own preferred solutions are more likely to be able to shape housing outcomes with long-term benefits. With this project, Dubbo Regional Council played a key role in identifying the land parcel, articulating the region’s housing challenges and opportunities, and proactively seeking solutions.

“The reason we were able to come here and progress a development like this is because there’s an appetite to derive benefit from activity in the Renewable Energy Zone, and we were able to pick up a Council-endorsed report that said what they wanted to do with workers’ accommodation and that aligned with what we were thinking.”

Bart Sykes, Regional Economic Development, Squadron Energy

Doing this work is easier for larger councils with greater access to internal resources or budgets; however, local councils with fewer resources can still have a large impact if planning begins early enough.

PLAN FOR LOCAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BENEFITS

Locating the accommodation within the footprint of Dubbo, rather than in a self-contained camp away from existing population centres, is designed to increase economic benefits to local businesses, as workers can more easily access local retail, entertainment and hospitality services.

Village style accommodation is often not the cheapest option for developers, but it has the least impact on private rental and tourist accommodation. Squadron Energy has committed to engage local trades, particularly First Nations contractors, for construction and ongoing site management.

The Keswick Estate is expected to inject approximately \$250 million into the local economy annually, with ongoing opportunities for local businesses in catering, cleaning, security and support services.

TEMPORARY WORKERS CAN BECOME LONG-TERM COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Workers on short to medium term contracts may decide to permanently relocate or extend their contracts if they enjoy their time in a region.

Migration of skilled workers to regional towns can boost local economies, increase community vibrancy, add valuable skill sets, encourage additional investment in a local area, and support worker retention for companies competing in a tight labour market for skilled workers.

Attractive temporary worker facilities and consideration of worker well-being and community integration may increase this opportunity for longer-term relocation.

“The potential to attract a workforce is often better in a large regional centre. And that bodes well for population growth when we move from construction into operations. If someone’s had a good experience while they were in town, joined a sporting team or met a significant other, they are more likely to consider Dubbo as somewhere they would relocate to permanently.”

Bart Sykes, Regional Economic Development, Squadron Energy



BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR COMMUNITY BENEFITS ADDRESSED

- Delivers social value
- Delivers in the long-term
- Builds context-specific solutions

Based on RE-Alliance’s principles for best practice community benefit funds: RE-Alliance, *Building Stronger Communities: Community Benefit Funds* (2023)

¹ REZ are areas designated by State Governments as locations suitable for hosting a concentration of renewable energy projects, transmission lines and energy storage infrastructure such as batteries.

² EnergyCo, Workforce Accommodation Central-West Orana REZ Transmission Project (NSW Government, September 2023) <<https://www.energyco.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-09/cwo-rez-fact-sheet-eis-workforce-accommodation.pdf>>.



Crudine Ridge Wind Farm NSW. (Image credit: Squadron Energy)



1300 290 982



info@re-alliance.org.au



PO Box 16 COLLINS STREET WEST VIC 8007



reallianceaus



reallianceaus



renewableenergyalliance