

Communique

Ag Energy Taskforce: September 2023

Members of Australia's peak agriculture bodies have expressed serious concern that, as Australia's energy transition to renewables occurs across rural and regional communities, infrastructure and renewable developers are not properly considering the social and economic impacts on farmers and broader rural communities.

At a meeting of the Ag Energy Taskforce¹ in August, members highlighted the lack of genuine consultation with landholders who are being asked to host solar and wind generators and electricity infrastructure. Thousands of kilometres of transmission lines are needed to enable renewable wind and solar power to connect to the grid that provides energy to industries, cities, and regional communities.

The 2022 Report of the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner to the Australian Government made a series of sensible recommendations relating to community engagement, designed to improve the way developers consult with farmers and agriculture communities. This is not always happening, and Members urge renewable energy and infrastructure developers to implement these approaches more quickly.

The upcoming 2023 Community Engagement Review led by the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner, Andrew Dyer, is an opportunity for Taskforce members to reinforce the need for stronger commitments to:

1. Address the existing power imbalances between renewable and infrastructure developers and farmers and rural communities.
2. Understand social and economic factors for farmers and in regional communities.
3. Minimise impacts in the placement of transmission towers.
4. Respond to the impacts to third parties not financially benefiting.
5. The impacts on property values: these are significant as equity ratios for landowners are important in their financial capabilities.
6. Safe operation of machinery around renewable energy infrastructure, including insurance implications
7. Consideration and communication on undergrounding transmission infrastructure
8. Genuine community benefit sharing
9. Clear pathways and mechanisms to address complaints.

¹ **Ag Energy Taskforce:** National Irrigators' Council, National Farmers' Federation, Queensland Farmers' Federation, NSW Farmers, Victorian Farmers' Federation, Cotton Australia, Bundaberg Regional Irrigators' Group, Dairy Australia, Australian Grape & Wine, Canegrowers, Pioneer Valley Water (Mackay, Q), Central Irrigation Trust (SA), Murrumbidgee Groundwater Inc., AgForce Qld, Tasmanian Farmers & Graziers, Fruit Growers Tasmania.

The Ag Energy Taskforce will continue to work collaboratively with energy businesses through the [Energy Charter Ag Energy Social Licence Roundtable](#), bringing to life the [National Better Practice Social Licence Guideline](#) co-developed by the sectors in May 2023. It commends recent efforts to train those on the ground to better understand and communicate with regional landholders through targeted Landholder Engagement training.

Background

Both the energy and agricultural sectors are facing unprecedented change. Australian farmers grow food and fibre which is feeding and clothing our nation and the world. As a major trade exposed sector, agriculture seeks competitive advantage at a national and global level to be successful.

Australia's energy transition represents significant policy, regulatory, economic, and land-use reforms and changes which are having massive impact on our regional and rural communities. From an agricultural perspective, farmers and rural communities not only have an interest in securing affordable and reliable energy for the future, but they will also house much of the energy infrastructure that is fundamental to the energy transition.

The Ag Energy Taskforce

The Ag Energy Taskforce was established in September 2014 to enable the representatives of the Australian agriculture sector to collaborate, build capacity and provide advocacy to alleviate the impact of high energy costs on agricultural industries. The remit of the Taskforce has expanded against the backdrop of Australia's energy transition, with a strong focus on land use and relationships with farmers and rural communities, with the rollout of infrastructure across rural landscapes.

August 2023

Contact:

Dale Holliss

0417 009 236