



Policy Brief

Beyond the grid: Regional perspectives and community priorities in Queensland's energy transition

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About the Hub

The Queensland Decarbonisation Hub brings together knowledge, people and innovation to co-create solutions to accelerate Queensland's clean growth future. We connect Queensland universities, industry, communities, First Nations people and government to build and share the knowledge needed to reduce emissions. The Hub's vision is for Queensland to become a leading decarbonised economy in which communities, industry and the environment thrive.

About this policy brief

In 2024, the Queensland Decarbonisation Hub initiated a funded research stream, inviting proposals for research that could contribute to understanding and supporting Queensland's decarbonisation transition. The Hub's Advisory Committee, which brings together representatives from industry and other sectors, helped inform the selection process by identifying areas where research could add value to emerging policy and practice. Eight projects were selected across a diverse range of topics, including the research featured in this brief.

Each project has produced a detailed technical report, which is undergoing review prior to publication. Alongside these reports, the Hub has worked with the research teams to consider a different question: what does the research mean for policy and practice?

This question was explored through a series of workshops and the Hub's Research Showcase, where researchers presented their findings to an audience drawn from government, industry, research and the wider community. These policy briefs build on that process. They are intended as short, accessible companions to the technical reports, highlighting the findings that matter most beyond the research itself and the questions and opportunities they raise for Queensland and Australia more broadly.

About this research

Jeremy De Valck and his team have undertaken an important piece of work that contributes to our understanding of how regional Queensland communities view the energy transition.

Beyond the grid: Regional perspectives and community priorities in Queensland's energy transition shows that regional economic development opportunities are likely to be one of the strongest influences on community support for the transition. Good local jobs, affordable and reliable energy, and visible community benefits were consistently identified as factors shaping attitudes towards change.

The study also shows that regional priorities are shaped by local economic structures, histories and industries. Participants in Townsville and Mackay expressed different perspectives on the transition, while Traditional Owners and coal workers highlighted their own priorities and concerns. This suggests that Queensland's transition will require place-based policy and engagement, with regional strategies tailored to local circumstances



rather than assuming a single statewide approach.

Finally, the research highlights that community support needs to be built over time. Projects were associated with early engagement, genuine opportunities for communities to influence decisions, transparent processes, and credible mechanisms for sharing benefits locally. The findings suggest that community acceptance depends as much on how projects are governed and how relationships are developed as on the projects themselves.

Dr Liz Young

Research Director, Queensland Decarbonisation Hub

From the Showcase Session Facilitator

Local and public support is essential to the success of the energy transition and individual energy projects. Dr De Valck and his team demonstrate through their work that communities do not view renewable energy development in the same way, and that a one-size-fits-all approach to engagement can miss important local concerns.

Importantly, their findings demonstrate how reactions can differ by region and stakeholder group, influencing the topics of concern that matter most and how new developments are received. At the same time, some priorities emerge as being widely shared across groups. Visible benefits for local communities, such as employment and economic opportunity, consistently emerged as important factors shaping support. Their findings generate practical guidance for governments, industry and project proponents seeking to engage with regional communities by highlighting the common priorities shared across groups as well as the need to tailor engagement to the circumstances and priorities of each place.

Dr Sarah MacInnes

Postdoctoral Research Fellow, University of Queensland



1. Why this research matters

Queensland's transition to net zero emissions will bring significant social and economic change to regional communities. Much of the new renewable energy infrastructure and associated investment will be located outside South East Queensland, where different regions are likely to experience the transition in different ways. Communities with strong links to mining, agriculture and other established industries face different opportunities and concerns, consequently, policy approaches that work in one region may not work in another.

This matters because public support for the transition cannot be taken for granted. Jobs, energy affordability and confidence that local communities will share the benefits influence how people respond to new developments. Understanding these priorities is important if investment is to proceed in ways that are supported locally and deliver lasting economic benefits.

This study combined engagement with key stakeholders in North and Central Queensland (through interviews and workshops) with a state-wide survey and choice experiment involving almost 800 regional Queensland residents. It provides new evidence about how people in regional Queensland view the transition, particularly wind and solar energy, and the factors that shape support for different pathways. The findings highlight the importance of local socio-economic benefits in obtaining social licence to implement and operate energy projects towards a net-zero transition.

2. Key findings

Support depends on local benefits

Views on solar and wind energy development varied among survey respondents and stakeholders engaged. Support was strongest where people could identify clear local benefits, particularly employment and economic diversification opportunities, as well as affordable, reliable energy access. The analysis identified distinct preference groups, including a sizeable minority (30%) with reservations about current policy directions. At the same time, concerns were raised about labour shortages, the temporary nature of construction work and the ability of emerging industries to replace existing industries and wage levels.

Different regions and stakeholder groups, different concerns

Stakeholder engagement revealed important differences in perception between regions and stakeholder groups. Townsville participants were generally optimistic about opportunities associated with new infrastructure and industrial development, but expressed concerns about labour displacement and cost-of-living pressures. Views in Mackay were more mixed, reflecting the continuing importance of coal and resource industries to the regional economy. Traditional Owners, on the other hand, emphasised the importance of respect, participation and visible benefits, while coal workers expressed concerns about future employment. Overall, visual impacts were generally accepted unless developments affected large numbers of residents directly.



Why place matters

The findings suggest that regional communities are unlikely to respond uniformly to new energy developments. Regional economic structures, workforce characteristics and local experience shape how change is perceived. Approaches that work in one part of Queensland may not work in another, highlighting the importance of place-based policies and context-specific local benefits.

3. Why the findings matter in practice

This research highlights the main factors that shape support for energy transition projects and policies in regional Queensland and shows that communities do not respond uniformly to change. The findings point to the importance of local jobs, energy affordability and visible community benefits as the main factors, while also revealing differences between regions and stakeholder groups. These findings are relevant for proponents of new renewable energy projects looking to obtain social licence to operate in regional Queensland.

These insights can inform decisions about infrastructure investment, workforce development, economic diversification and community engagement. They suggest that approaches tailored to local circumstances are more likely to align with community priorities than one-size-fits-all policies. More broadly, the findings reinforce the value of understanding how regional communities experience change and the trade-offs they are prepared to accept. Community engagement teams can move beyond generic consultation toward place-based conversations, informed by what different regional groups have already told us matters most to them.

4. Who should pay attention

These findings are relevant to **government agencies** responsible for energy, regional development, employment and skills, and community engagement. They provide insights into the factors shaping support for new renewable energy developments, primarily wind and solar projects, and highlight the importance of aligning transition policies with regional priorities.

Local governments and regional development organisations may also find these insights useful when considering how new infrastructure and investment opportunities fit within broader regional development strategies and when engaging with their communities about change.

Industry groups, employers and unions involved in workforce planning can use the findings to better understand concerns about employment, skills and economic opportunities across different regions and sectors.

Renewable energy developers and project proponents may also benefit from understanding the factors that influence social licence to operate and community support in general, including the importance of visible local benefits, energy affordability and genuine engagement.



Training providers, including TAFE Queensland, can use these insights to inform workforce development and skills planning in regions experiencing economic and industrial change, in line with the expectations from regional communities.

5. What could happen next

Energy affordability and reliability are central to an equitable transition, which aligns with the findings from this study. Ongoing efforts from Australian state and local governments should prioritise place-based engagement that move beyond consultation towards genuine co-design strategies, giving regional communities a meaningful role in shaping transition timelines and infrastructure decisions. The Social Licence Toolkit for Local Government, released by the Queensland Government, supports the applicability of this research to ensure community empowerment and benefits in these projects. Early, visible wins on energy affordability, local job creation, and minimising impacts on landscapes, infrastructure and natural assets are also critical to building the social trust that long-term decarbonisation goals require.

For industry, the message is equally clear: social licence is not a given, and proactive partnerships with local workforces, unions, and training providers will determine whether regional transition projects succeed or not. Engagement with local communities should be early, co-designed, transparent, with inclusive benefit-sharing, and respect for local knowledge and cultural values.

Local governments, industry partners and training providers should coordinate transition efforts to avoid labour market disruption and additional pressure on existing infrastructure while creating ongoing job opportunities. Upskilling the existing workforce to meet the new job opportunities created by the energy transition will require culturally safe, flexible, and accessible training models.

For researchers, longitudinal work tracking how community attitudes evolve as transition projects are delivered on the ground would significantly strengthen this evidence over time. An expansion of this study into other states in collaboration with community-based organisations would add value and strengthen the findings.

6. Points to note

These findings reflect community preferences at a specific point in time (online survey carried out in January 2026) and across two regional contexts (stakeholder interviews and workshops carried out in Townsville and Mackay in November-December 2025). As such, they should be interpreted as directional evidence to inform policy design, not as fixed or universal community positions. Ongoing engagement with regional communities remains essential as the transition unfolds.

7. Contact

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