



The Energy
Charter

Regional Energy Accord

North East Victoria Roundtable
Report Back

Thursday, 7 August, 2025



Leaders from across North East Victoria gathered in Yackandandah for the 2nd Roundtable in the Regional Energy Accord process. The workshop was opened by Cathy McGowan AO, who offered a clear call to be courageous and closed by Dr Helen Haines MP, current Member for Indi. The day was made possible through the support of Totally Renewable Yackandandah (TRY) and its Chair, Matthew Charles-Jones, whose leadership continues to inspire energy transition work across the region.

The Roundtable brought together a remarkable mix of local leaders, passionate community members and energy stakeholders. The result was a conversation rich in clarity, community, courage, complexity and care.

The Regional Energy Accord was not imagined as just another policy instrument, but as a community-powered framework: one that gives permission, protects values and unlocks possibility. **“We need something we can use at the kitchen table and in the boardroom.”** This report back draws together the insights, truths and aspirations shared across the two-part gathering.

On Wednesday evening, 12 community members from across North East Victoria gathered for a potluck dinner. We shared curries, stories and reflections on the energy transition as it stands today, and what it could become. The following morning, the Roundtable opened with a powerful Acknowledgement of Country performed by the Yackandandah Primary School Grade 4-6 Choir. Their voices, singing with pride about place, Country and care for the environment, reminded everyone in the room what is truly at stake. It was a moment of clarity and legacy, grounding the day’s work in intergenerational responsibility.

With that spirit front of mind, collaborators turned their focus to the Regional Energy Accord: what it could look like, how it might be governed and the values it must carry. Together, collaborators explored how to make the Accord locally led, nationally connected, fair in its outcomes and grounded in shared values that communities can trust. While this is only a beginning: collaborators embraced the uncertainty alongside the opportunity, believing that by leading with openness, trust and purpose, communities and regions can show how the energy transition strengthens communities, now and for generations to come.



What we heard through the potluck dinner?

1. Trust is the currency of change

"If you don't bullshit us, you'll make friends."

Yackandandah's energy transition journey began with trust, not big technology. The energy distribution company was told upfront: **"You won't succeed here unless you treat us as equals."** Totally Renewable Yackandandah (TRY) as a community organisation earned trust early, through transparency, listening and relationships built before funding or infrastructure.

2. Regional Australia should "act like the power is ours"

"Not waiting means the power doesn't lie elsewhere. It lies within."

This region has a history of not "waiting for permission" from government or industry. Stories of how they organised their own festivals, purchased the local petrol station, built their own solar projects and led their own energy transition grounded our conversation. As one participant reflected, **"Waiting implies someone else has the power. We decided to act instead."** The Accord can enable communities to do the same, on their own terms.

3. Communities engage when the benefit is clear, tangible and locally felt

One story involved a retired woman receiving rooftop solar: **"She didn't have to make the decisions. TRY made them for her, based on quality and trust."** The result? Comfort, affordability and pride. Another community group was providing interest-free loans for solar installation. This work makes the energy transition real, felt and better understood at a household level.

4. The power of a catalyst or crisis can rally a community

"Something happened. That brought the community together."

We reflected on how disruption or frustration kickstarts action or sparks collective imagination and action. In Yackandandah, this has resulted in grassroots collectivism and entrepreneurship. In other towns, it has led to intense opposition to energy projects. A catalyst alone isn't enough, but paired with trust and a clear value proposition, it becomes the launchpad for something bigger. Communities can mobilise around fear, of losing control, of environmental collapse or rising costs, but enduring progress comes from hope.

"TRY worked because it offered a hopeful alternative. The Accord must too."

5. Big ideas need local roots

"How do you create a big idea bold enough to hold difference?"

The Accord is an ambitious national idea, but how can it be rooted in community truth? As one speaker said, **"We need something robust enough to unify, yet flexible enough to hold local creativity."** Without that, it risks becoming just another framework from afar. Collaborators cautioned **"The Accord must be above partisanship."** The Accord should keep politics out, as many communities are already divided. One said: **"In Benalla, it's over-politicised. We need this to stay focused on shared values and outcomes."** Neutral, values-based framing is essential.



What we heard through the Roundtable

1. “A just energy transition doesn’t divide communities, it pulls them together”

The same region can hold both thriving innovation and deep division. While communities like Yackandandah offer a model of hope and momentum, neighbouring towns feel unheard, disconnected or even resentful. The Accord must work across this spectrum not just with the empowered.

2. Yackandandah offers more than inspiration, it offers a living set of case studies

“Half the blue-sky ideas we’ve heard today, we’re already trying them in Yack.”

TRY’s leadership, benefits offered through community-owned batteries and EV charging and deep local trust show what’s possible. But collaborators noted: these outcomes cannot be cut and pasted. Instead, the Accord should learn from Yack’s deeply listening process, not just its outcomes.

3. Trust is the currency of change

“Return on trust comes before return on investment.”

Across every story, from community batteries to kitchen table conversations, trust emerged as the core ingredient. Communities engage when they feel respected, heard and confident that their needs will not be traded away for broader ambitions. Listen, listen, listen....

4. From big assets to big collaboration

“We’re nervous about going back to investing only in big assets. What we need is big collaboration.”

The future of energy in regional Australia isn’t just about big or small infrastructure, it’s about relationships, governance and shared purpose. The Accord must be a catalyst for collaboration, not just compliance.

5. Grounding in fairness and built for action

“Good intentions are great. But we’ve seen that before. We need follow-through.”

There is strong support for the Accord if it has governance, structure and accountability. Collaborators want more than another feel-good document. They want a shared collaboration mechanism that shapes how things actually happen. Collaborators embraced the call to think long-term with key aspirations that included:

- Communities helped to see the transition as an opportunity and are excited to be involved
- An Accord that brings together community, business, government and the environment as key stakeholders
- A shared metaphorical bus, taking information from trusted voices to every town
- A national network of empowered, resourced, local champions that connect regularly with each other
- A facilitation model like Landcare - local, credible and connected

“Energy with people, for people and places.”





Emerging vision

As part of the North East Victoria Regional Energy Accord Roundtable, collaborators were asked: “What is a bold aspiration, a South Star, that could guide the Regional Energy Accord?”

- The responses revealed a powerful and consistent theme: **the transition must be seen as an opportunity, not a burden for regional communities.** This central idea was echoed across contributions, with deep resonance from collaborators across sectors and lived experience.
- **“Some communities see the transition as active stewards.”** Rather than being passive recipients of change, communities want to be active stewards of the energy transition. This aspiration centres agency, pride and potential, inviting a future where rural and regional places are not just impacted by the transition, but deeply benefit from and help shape it.
- **A future guided by the question “What if every decision was made thinking eight generations ahead?”** The Accord could think long-term in vision and intergenerational in responsibility. The energy transition is not just today’s issue, it is legacy work, requiring courageous, forward-thinking design and involved our youth.
- **“Access to affordable and secure energy for all, without detriment to people or environment.”** Fairness is foundational. The transition must not deepen inequality. Instead, it must ensure social, environmental and economic equity, especially for those in regional communities who bear the brunt of change.
- **“Make sure everyone wins from the energy transition.”** This idea surfaced throughout the day, from grid equity to participation in decision-making. Communities must feel and see, that this transition is inclusive, just and grounded in their realities. This could mean **“Communities are excited to be involved because they see the opportunity and benefits.”** Collaborators described a positive, energised vision: where the process of transition itself strengthens local identity, pride and capability and where regional Australia feels recognised, respected, and resourced. The opportunity is that **“the transition builds pride and resilience in place.”**
- **Accountability emerged as a core ingredient of trust.** For the Accord to work, it must not only articulate values, but build mechanisms to uphold them, across industry, government and community.





Emerging principles

1. Shared ownership across rural and regional communities

“This can’t be someone else’s Accord. It has to be ours.”

How can ownership sit with the community, not just symbolically, but structurally? Rural leaders and communities want to co-create the transition, not just react to it. From governance models to local benefit schemes, shared ownership builds trust and accountability.

“Communities need to feel like they’re not hosting the transition, they’re shaping it.”

2. Fairness for all and measured in economic, environmental and social return

“If it’s not fair, it’s not working.”

Fairness could be embedded, not as a side benefit, but as a central operating principle. Collaborators imagined a transition that recognises lived experience, restores balance and creates opportunity for all. Fairness is not just moral, it’s practical: the foundation of social licence and long-term success. As one person noted, **“Fairness isn’t just about prices. It’s about dignity, participation and knowing your community matters.”**

3. Energy equity: Comfort, dignity and access for all

“Everyone deserves to live a comfortable life, not just an affordable one.”

Energy is an essential service, not a luxury. Comfort and dignity are part of equity. The Accord could recognise the importance of energy equity and access, especially for those who’ve historically been left out.

4. The Accord could at its heart embed a deep respect for regional lives and lands

“This is about more than energy, it’s about where and how we live.”

Regional identity is not just geographic, it’s cultural, historical and emotional. Land, water, farming and country are not separate from the energy transition, they are central to it.

Decision-making must respect regional knowledge, values and tempo. Generic approaches won’t work. Each place is different, and must be treated that way. Communities want energy projects that align with their aspirations, not imposed from above.

“Relationships, not just infrastructure, will drive successful transition.”

“We need to value the environment as much as the right to build a house or a life.”

“It must be people-centred, self-determined, and future-facing, or it won’t be trusted.”



Provocations to inform the process moving forward

1. How might the Accord create a "Metaphorical Bus," a trusted, moving platform for energy literacy and community dialogue in rural communities?

"If you can see it, it's easier to believe in it. If it comes to you, it's easier to get on board."

Imagine a mobile, highly visible initiative that brings trusted voice information about renewable energy to communities. Designed to counter misinformation, build trust and meet people where they are, literally and figuratively. Could this serve as a storytelling and listening platform for the Accord process itself?

2. How might we build a Community Advocacy Network: the 'Landcare of Regional Energy'?

"We need a two-way, multi-level structure that's owned by the people it's meant to serve."

A nationally connected, community-first movement with legal standing and local autonomy. Mirroring Landcare or Catchment Management Authorities, built around shared values, trusted relationships and local stewardship. It could enable collective engagement, shared benefits and learning and embedded accountability across regions.

3. What if every town had a team of champions, empowered, resourced and connected?

"Belief comes when you see your neighbours leading it."

What could it take to formalise a local energy transition leadership group in every regional town? These teams become the trusted bridge between community, industry and government. It could encourage pride, build capability and avoid burnout of individual volunteers. The collaborators also wondered - What if we had an open-source, standardised toolkit for trusted information and community engagement run by local champions?

4. Could the Accord be a catalyst to reimagine community benefit contributions so they're more transparent, impactful and trusted?

"Break it up: one part for governance, one part for tangible community impact."

Some collaborators imagined splitting financial contributions from industry into two clear streams:

- A contribution to a local Accord process (community-led facilitation).
- A community benefit scheme with shared accountability and local and regional priorities.

5. What happens next and who holds it?

"We're all going to do something. But who's going to help us talk to each other?"

A clear question emerged in Yackandandah: Who will keep this going in this region, as we don't want to wait? There was strong appetite to build on the momentum of the workshop, but without coordination, the risk is fragmentation. Collaborators called for someone to step into a facilitation role to help the region stay connected, share progress and act collectively. **"Let's not let this dissolve into individual to-do lists. Let's meet again and bring others to the table."** A regional invitation: Could this region become a pilot for what community-led coordination looks like? Ideas included:

- TRY, Council or a local network hosting a follow-up session
- A simple, region-wide mechanism to track progress and stay in sync with the national process



Closing note + thank you!

“Language matters, if people don’t understand the Accord, they won’t trust it.”

These words, shared at the close of the North East Victoria roundtable, captured the heart of why we are investing time and energy in this process. The Regional Energy Accord is not simply a plan for energy projects, it is a shared commitment to fairness, community and the future.

The Accord remains in its listening phase, by design and by necessity. It will not be written in isolation, but shaped through real conversations in real places, grounded in local truths and built with care.

This Roundtable in North East Victoria, the second in the process, marked a powerful step forward. As one collaborator put it: “This wasn’t just a warm-up. It was the work.”

Yackandandah showed what’s possible. It became a living, breathing example of what the Accord could help communities achieve when trust, clarity and shared purpose are front and centre.

The challenge now is not to design something perfect, but to take the next step together. To build an Accord that is used, lived and loved, one that sets a new standard for how the energy transition can work with regional Australia, not to it.

There was a clear desire to keep the momentum alive in North East Victoria and a readiness to contribute to the national process when the time is right.

We next visit the **Wimmera Southern Mallee** on 20–21 August for workshops in Horsham.

Follow our journey at **www.regionalenergyaccord.org.au**



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