

## Report Back - Regional Energy Accord Business Workshop - Riverina + Murray

Where: Mawambul Training Centre, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga

When: Thursday 27 November 2025

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### Purpose

Business leaders from across the Riverina and Murray came together with a clear and urgent message:

**The energy transition will not succeed unless it aligns with the realities and needs of regional businesses.**

This workshop brought together employers, investors, manufacturers, educators, health providers, logistics operators, energy representatives and regional development leaders to explore one central question:

**Could a Regional Energy Accord help reset the relationship between regional businesses and the energy sector in the energy transition?**

Participants arrived carrying decades of lived experience: growth, disruption, broken promises, stalled investments and systems that often move faster than people can keep up. They also brought optimism, capability and a shared determination to shape a transition that genuinely strengthens the region.

Over the course of the day, a consistent theme emerged: *"We want to invest. We want to grow. But we need enough certainty to act."*

The commitments below reflect what the business community hoped a Regional Energy Accord could help enable to unlock confidence, investment and long-term regional prosperity.

### The top commitments businesses want to see

#### 1. A clear, end-to-end Regional Energy Plan

Participants repeatedly described the value of a shared roadmap, informed by regional intelligence and updated to align with actual investment cycles.

Comments reflected a sense of operating within a system *"full of ambition but empty of certainty"*:

*"Everyone wants development, but we need a beginning-to-end plan."*

*"We have no idea where we're going."*

*"I need enough information to make an investment decision. Right now, I'm a deer in the headlights."*

Many businesses indicated that greater clarity around the region's energy future: capacity, upgrades, constraints, sequencing and affordability would significantly improve their ability to plan.

As one business owner explained:

*“I’ve got more than \$2 million ready to go in Wagga, but how can I invest when I don’t know where the power’s coming from, or what it will cost?”*

A Regional Energy Accord could instigate the development of a regionally grounded plan that brings visibility to the next 5-10 years.

## **2. Reliable, affordable power that enables growth**

Energy constraints were described as the region’s biggest commercial barrier:

*“I can’t expand because I can’t get enough energy.”*

*“Energy should be no issue for the communities carrying the burden.”*

Participants shared examples of stalled expansions, lost productivity and supply chain impacts caused by unreliable or insufficient power.

Many saw value in a Regional Energy Accord that supports work toward clearer expectations, measurable reliability standards and stronger transparency from networks and generators.

## **3. Tangible, shared local benefits**

Across all pillars, this was the strongest and most consistent theme.

*“When you can’t access the benefits of all this land, it doesn’t feel fair.”*

Participants expressed a desire for outcomes that are visible, lasting, and clearly connected to hosting infrastructure: local jobs, local contracts, population retention, community assets and long-term value sharing.

Many participants suggested that a consistent benefits framework or a public commitment register, supported by transparent reporting, could help build trust and ensure communities understand where benefits are flowing.

## **4. A Skilled, Local Workforce Pipeline**

Workforce shortages were described as *“the iceberg under every conversation.”*

*“Where are we going to get the workers from?”*

*“Young people aren’t coming into these roles. How do we train them?”*

*“Skilled migration options are worse than ten years ago.”*

Participants emphasised the need for regionally aligned training, stronger partnerships and better coordination across TAFE, universities and industry.

A Regional Energy Accord could help encourage a region-wide workforce strategy that supports local training, reskilling and retention, particularly for young people.

## **5. Clear, enforceable local procurement pathways**

Businesses described local procurement as inconsistent, unclear or difficult to navigate.

*“Local means different things to different people.”*

Participants expressed interest in clearer definitions, more transparent reporting and support to meet accreditation or compliance requirements.

One example highlighted the complexity:

*"The only way to achieve the required neighbour rating was to install gas, and now we need helicopters to remove the 10-year old gas system."*

A Regional Energy Accord could foster greater consistency and transparency for procurement processes across the region.

## **6. A regional 'Front Door' for information and navigation**

Businesses described an overwhelming environment: noise, duplication, misinformation and uncoordinated actors.

They expressed a desire for one trusted place to go: *"One place to understand what's happening, why and how."*

A navigation hub could help by providing:

- Clarity on timelines and sequencing
- Education for households and businesses
- Coordination across councils, industry and government
- A single, regionally grounded source of truth

Participants saw this as one of the clearest opportunities for visible early value.

## **7. Stronger accountability, transparency and independent oversight**

Participants spoke of a *"vacuum of responsibility"*:

*"No transparency, no structure, no penalties."*

*"We need the full picture."*

Many expressed interest in mechanisms such as:

- Public Commitments Register
- independent monitoring
- annual reporting
- clearer visibility of who is responsible for what

Participants viewed these elements as tools to help build confidence, not as enforcement mechanisms.

## **8. Region-led decision making**

Participants want decisions brought closer to local knowledge and regional intelligence.

- *"Government needs to have the confidence to let regional people make decisions."*
- *"Outsource or partner with communities, we know our region."*

They stressed that a project-by-project approach is dividing communities and obscuring cumulative impacts.

Participants expressed that a region-first model, supported by the Regional Energy Accord, may help bring greater coherence to sequencing, approvals, engagement and benefits across the energy transition.

### **What business needs from the Regional Energy Accord (at a glance)**

Certainty. Reliability. Visibility. Local opportunity. Skilled people. Clear rules. Accountability. A trusted front door. A plan that is honest about capacity and constraints.

Or, as one participant summed it up: *“People will believe it when they see value.”*

### **The Southern Star Vision (Business Version)**

Across the Workshop, a unified long-term aspiration emerged: **Regions that are unquestionably better off because it hosted the energy transition.**

Participants described what success would feel like:

- reliable, abundant, affordable energy
- local businesses thriving, expanding and competing
- young people trained and retained in regional jobs
- contractors engaged early and upskilled
- a planning system with courage, clarity and honesty
- coordination across councils, providers and industry
- whole-of-life cycle thinking
- fair returns for hosting infrastructure
- visible wins people can point to

The message: **Business wants visible value, real partnership and a Regional Energy Accord that supports different behaviours, not just different language.**

## **Closing reflection**

The Workshop confirmed that the business community is ready for a smarter, fairer, and more region-led transition, built on trust, commercial reality and long-term certainty. As one participant said: *“I think there’s a lot of resilience in this region, but you can only stretch trust so far.”*

## **What happens next**

The Regional Energy Accord is being built region by region, and the next round of Workshops and Roundtables continues this community-led design process:

- Mudgee (Central West Orana): February 9- 10
- Muswellbrook (Upper Hunter): February 11- 12
- Armidale (New England): March 2-3

In 2026, our focus turns to scaling and strengthening the work done so far. We will:

- Test the draft commitments across 20+ regions
- Draft the National Regional Energy Accord

**The Energy Charter**

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- Work closely with Community Champions, the CEO Council, the Community Outcomes Group and the Industry Impact Group.
- Build a region-led framework that can guide the transition across Australia for decades.

You will continue to receive **updates and invitations** as the Accord develops into 2026. Keep connected by following our website and joining our mailing list

<https://www.regionalenergyaccord.org.au/>