

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

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

When: Thursday 27 November 2025

Prepared by: Bryce Ives, YoBou Pty Ltd

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

- 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/>