



REGIONAL
ENERGY ACCORD

Central-West Orana
Roundtable

10 February 2026



1. About this Roundtable

As part of the national [Regional Energy Accord](#) Roundtables supported by [The Energy Charter](#), the Central-West Orana (CWO) Regional Energy Accord Roundtable demonstrated the region's readiness to lead the next phase of the energy transition.

Convened with the strong support of Regional Development Australia (RDA) Orana and championed locally by CEO Justine Campbell, the Roundtable brought together a cross-section of regional leadership: local government, business, agriculture, health, education, energy businesses and State agencies. The conversation was further strengthened by the active engagement of Steve Masters, CEO ACERZ and senior energy-sector representatives across EnergyCo and renewable developers active in the region, signalling a shared willingness to move beyond rhetoric toward structural change.

Throughout the day, based on their rich lived experience in the first declared Renewable Energy Zone in Australia, participants showed a strong appetite not just for discussion but also for design and for how the transition can create a durable regional advantage that lasts well beyond build and construction.

The acceleration of the energy transition was not contested. It was seen as a defining shift already underway in the region. The focus instead was on strengthening the systems around it so that energy development translates into long-term regional prosperity.

The room was practical and solutions oriented. Rather than debating individual renewable projects, participants concentrated on structure and follow-through. They asked:

- Who supports regional leadership and coordination?
- What remains after the build phase ends?
- Who holds responsibility for outcomes over time?
- How do we track delivery across multiple projects and proponents?
- How do we ensure reinvestment strengthens the region for the long term?

What distinguished Central-West Orana was this consistent orientation toward coordination, legacy, accountability and regional leverage. The conversation moved quickly from principles to implementation, from values to mechanisms.

This Report captures that ambition: not simply to manage change better, but to shape it in ways that leave the region stronger.

2. Framing

This framing set Central-West Orana as another significant step forward in the Regional Energy Accord process. Rather than focusing on project-by-project negotiation, the room worked at the level of rules, expectations, leadership and shared responsibilities, the conditions required for a fair transition to hold over time.



Three framing anchors shaped the discussion and held the room together:

1. Not project-specific

Participants consistently rejected narrow, transactional thinking. The focus was on principles, shared benefit and co-design that operate across the system, not just within individual developments.

2. Do it differently

There was acceptance that the energy transition was well underway. The challenge to redesign how it shows up, so that it creates real regional advantage rather than cumulative strain.

3. No white knight

There was no expectation that a single actor could “fix” the problem. Leadership and responsibility is shared across the community, industry and government. Outcomes should be engineered through structure, not hoped for through goodwill.

What emerged was a strong regional appetite for an Accord that goes beyond articulating values. CWO participants were oriented toward follow-through, asking how commitments are tracked, enforced, resourced and sustained beyond election cycles and corporate timelines.

This Report captures the priorities, tensions and commitments surfaced in that conversation and situates them within the broader Regional Energy Accord process, not as abstract aspirations, but as practical conditions for a transition that leaves Central-West Orana stronger than it found it.





3. Priorities and commitments

PRIORITY AREA	COMMITMENT	WHAT THE ROOM WAS REALLY ASKING FOR
1. Tangible, legacy benefits	Establish a Future Fund for Regional Development	A visible mechanism that converts energy investment into enduring regional advantage
2. Regional leadership	Coordination + resourcing (human + financial capacity)	A funded “face and function” with authority, not volunteer goodwill
3. Accountability and transparency	Independent oversight body	Credibility through public reporting and measurable KPIs
4. Manage the impacts	Front-loaded, earmarked State funding for infrastructure	Funding arrives <i>before</i> impacts, not after damage
5. Shared values build trust first	Young people engaged and validated in discussions	Intergenerational legitimacy as the foundation for trust over time
6. Meaningful engagement	Communities write the rules	Participation in the decision architecture, not consultation inside pre-set rules



4. Extended: Each priority area

Priority Area 1: Tangible, legacy benefits

What we heard: Energy development is accelerating, but benefits can feel fragmented, inconsistent and unclear in terms of accountability. The region cannot see a system that turns energy investment into an enduring advantage for its future.



Key commitment: Establish a Future Fund for Regional Development: a structured, jointly governed mechanism that captures value from the transition and reinvests it into long-term regional prosperity.

If we got this right, success would feel like...

- *“We’re not being extracted from, we’re being built with”*
- Young people can build a life here and stay
- The region appears to have a trajectory beyond construction

How it shows up in practice (what people would see)

- A visible fund with clear rules and decisions
- Investment in childcare, education/training, connectivity and community infrastructure
- Credible pathways into durable jobs and new industries

How the community will know (signals over time)

- Public clarity: *“Where did the \$\$ come from, where did it go?”*
- Money moving into visible assets, not symbolic announcements
- Youth employment and retention as a clear success measure

Priority Area 2: Regional Leadership

What we heard: There is activity, but not always alignment: LGAs are working in parallel, with duplication, confusion, fatigue and impacts landing unevenly in community. People want coordination that matches the scale.

Key commitment: Establish a clear, well-resourced regional leadership and coordination capacity with named responsibilities and authority. Collaboration across energy businesses is essential.

Secondary commitments

- Regional leadership + collaboration: aligned leadership grounded in a regional vision, with clarity across LGAs.
- Documentation + structures: formal processes to capture commitments, track delivery and preserve institutional memory (“we need a registry”).

If we got this right, success would feel like...

- *“There is someone responsible and we know who it is.”*
- Less repetition, less duplication, less confusion.
- People can participate without burning out.

How it shows up in practice (what people would see)

- A funded co-ordination function with clear accountability lines
- Joint effort across energy companies and government led by regional leadership
- Ongoing resourcing for regional co-ordination roles (not project-by-project funding)



How the community will know (signals over time)

- A visible point of contact and a visible function
- Sentiment shifts (“less fatigue, more confidence”)
- Clear pathways from community input → decision → delivery

Priority Area 3: Accountability and Transparency

What we heard: The issue isn’t lack of information. It’s credibility. People are sceptical of benefits claims unless they are independently verified and they want measurable KPIs throughout the project lifecycle from trusted voices.

Key commitment: An independent body to monitor delivery, measure benefits and publicly report outcomes over time, ideally supported by regional leadership.

Secondary commitments

- Community-led KPIs: communities define success measures, not just proponents or government
- Contextualised local education: build practical literacy about the why of the transition and what’s cumulatively happening across the CWO

If we got this right, success would feel like...

- *“We don’t have to fight for truth”*
- Claims about jobs, skills and local procurement are proven, not promised
- Accountability is stable, not episodic

How it shows up in practice (what people would see)

- Public reporting against agreed KPIs
- A community-defined success framework embedded in strategy
- Education as literacy (not PR) is linked to measurable outcomes



How the community will know (signals over time)

- Regular, public reporting of individual and cumulative impacts and outcomes
- Visible feedback loops and course correction
- Measurable KPIs tracked and accessible

Priority Area 4: Manage the Impacts

What we heard: Impacts are already being felt – roads, housing, tourism, services, workforce and pressure on LGAs. The lag between impact and mitigation is generating resentment.

Key commitment: Front-loaded, earmarked state infrastructure funding: state funding should be pre-emptive, guaranteed early and tied to projected impact, not reactive.

Secondary commitments

- Reserved seats for small rural/remote communities (formal representation, not informal invitation)
- Clear end-of-life asset plans (mandatory, public, developed early)

If we got this right, success would feel like...

- *“We’re not paying the price up-front while funding arrives years late.”*
- Small places don’t get erased by “regional” framing
- Whole-of-life planning reduces long-term landscape anxiety

How it shows up in practice (what people would see)

- Roads are upgraded before heavy use begins
- Housing/service expansion before peak workforce
- Clear decommissioning plans built into approvals early

How the community will know (signals over time)

- Visible infrastructure upgrades early
- Dedicated funding lines and sequencing clarity
- Small community participation is reflected in decisions
- Publicly accessible end-of-life plans with financial provision

Priority Area 5: Shared Values Build Trust First, Then Investment

What we heard: Young people are often being left out of key discussions. Information is often fragmented, technical and hard to trust. Growth is not clearly translating into visible local benefits. Trust will not hold long-term without inclusion, clarity and measurable local outcomes.

Key commitment: Young people engaged and validated. They must be in the room as active contributors. The room signalled: without this, trust won’t hold long-term.



Secondary commitments

- Trusted, centralised, timely communication/data source: accessible, regularly updated, enforced through consent conditions - because confusion is actively eroding trust
- Visible local procurement, local employment, upskilling and long-term economic outcomes, *“real money in real places employing real people”*

If we got this right, success would feel like...

- *“Our kids can see themselves in the future economy”*
- *“We understand what’s happening and why”*
- *“Local benefit is undeniable and measurable”*

How it shows up in practice (what people would see)

- Industry-school partnerships and youth presence in regional forums
- Single source-of-truth information architecture
- Consent conditions requiring local employment, local business use and upskilling

How the community will know (signals over time)

- Young people are visibly in the room and in outcomes
- The community can find clear information easily
- Consent conditions are enforced and independently verified

Priority Area 6: Meaningful Engagement

What we heard: Engagement can feel sporadic or too late. Funding settings shape outcomes before communities are involved. Consultation inside pre-set rules is not enough.

Key commitment: Communities write the rules: Communities, councils and local industry define the rules of engagement and local planning frameworks.

Secondary commitment: Critical concerns addressed early, funding mechanisms (RFS/RFDS, etc.) and program structures could be discussed transparently early, not after the shape is set.

If we got this right, success would feel like...

- *“We’re shaping the framework, not reacting inside it”*
- Proposals carry unity and legitimacy, even where disagreement remains

How it shows up in practice (what people would see)

- Community-led planning processes early
- Clear funding pathways to enable participation
- Transparent frameworks aligned with planning systems



How the community will know (signals over time)

- Proposals reflect community-authored principles
- Fewer late-stage surprises and blow-ups
- Visible unity in regional submissions and advocacy



5. What next: beyond the Roundtable

Individual commitments (what people said they will do next)

Five recurring clusters:

- Keep communicating/share information (plain-English “why”, REZ fundamentals, share findings, keep locals informed, lean into youth conversations)
- Advocate and influence government settings (certainty on funding; coordinated action on housing/workforce/infrastructure; pull proponents together around community needs)
- Strengthen local and regional coordination (with RDA Orana, reconnect councils + RDA + The Energy Charter; join regional groups; work more collaboratively)
- Local economic participation (local suppliers, cheaper power conversations, procurement, training, local business investment, energy literacy)
- Stay engaged (keep turning up; continue the listening; don't disengage).

Group commitments (what follow-through should look like)

This came through as:

- Continue the listening Roundtables
- Proposed follow-up meetings within ~4 weeks
- Centralised information / one source of truth (a coordinator)
- Report back to the community when outcomes are released
- Strengthen regional coordination structures (The Energy Charter + RDA Orana + LGAs + proponents).



“A Regional Energy Accord won’t be one grand thing,
it will be disciplined continuation + visible follow-through.”

The Regional Energy Accord is emerging as a powerful vehicle to reset expectations, build consistency and anchor the transition in transparency, fairness, shared benefit and genuine local leadership. The top commitments identified in this Roundtable provide a clear blueprint for what may sit at the heart of a national Regional Energy Accord: accountable rules, visible benefits, hyper-local participation and regional leadership with real authority.

6. What happens now?

The Regional Energy Accord is being built region by region and ongoing Roundtables will continue to uphold the community-led design process:

- New England (Armidale): 2-3 March 2026
- Upper Hunter (Muswellbrook): 4 March 2026

In 2026, the focus will be on scaling and strengthening the work done so far. We will:

- ✓ Build and test the draft commitments across regions
- ✓ Draft the National Regional Energy Accord
- ✓ Work to co-design a fit-for-purpose governance structure.





Stay connected

You will continue to receive **updates and invitations** as the Regional Energy Accord develops into 2026. You can also stay connected by:

- following the [Regional Energy Accord website](#)
- joining our mailing list, or
- by contacting The Energy Charter – director@theenergycharter.com.au

THANK YOU