



REGIONAL ENERGY ACCORD

New England Roundtables

2 March 2026



1. About the Roundtables

The New England Regional Energy Accord Roundtables demonstrated that this region is realistic, pragmatic and preparing to act. Participants across all three Roundtables were clear: the energy transition is coming and the New England region intends to shape it.

What emerged was not anxiety but a genuine desire to move from conversation into practical architecture that can deliver lasting regional benefit. Participants repeatedly framed the transition as a historic structural opportunity, one that a well-organised region can turn to its long-term advantage.

'There's an underlying optimism... a cautious optimism... and a willingness to lean into the work required to turn that optimism into real outcomes.'

Convened with the support of Local Leader Dr Lou Conway, the Roundtables brought together three distinct groups:

1. Business Leaders from the New England region
2. Community Leaders from the New England region
3. Youth Leaders from the New England region.



The conversations were not about whether the energy transition should occur, rather the participants broadly accepted that the transition is underway. The deeper focus was on how it is coordinated and governed and whether the region can move quickly enough to claim the opportunities it presents. The challenge is to translate this pragmatism into a practical framework or architecture, for example



through a Regional Energy Accord, so the New England region is not simply hosting the transition but shaping it.



2. Key themes

A. Balanced Regional Leadership Representing Regional Interests

A clear theme around regional leadership called for balanced leaders representing community, business, and government interests. Participants emphasised that bipartisan collaboration is essential for best practice in managing the transition.

In practical terms, this means cultivating a range of leaders including young people, government representatives, business leaders, future energy workforce and credible, trusted voices able to have the conversations needed for good long-term decisions. The community will know this leadership structure is in place when there's a well-supported leadership program for future leaders creating a safe place to have these essential conversations.

A major component of this regional leadership was the need for a ten-year energy transition strategy that federal, state, local government and businesses can align to. Success will be measured by community understanding: when every community member knows and understands what's in this for them, what their role is in the energy transition, and has clear understanding of how it affects them, their family, their community, and the region.

Leadership was described as resulting in infrastructure foundations to capture transition opportunities:

'More training centres, more data centres, available and affordable housing, better transport linkages, access to good health services, more good schools, and vibrant cities and towns.'



This comprehensive infrastructure vision reflects participants' understanding that the energy transition success depends on regional readiness across multiple sectors not just energy generation, but the full ecosystem that supports sustainable economic development and community prosperity.

Across the three Roundtables, there was a striking level of realism and quest for clarity of the process. Participants recognised that the energy system is changing rapidly and positioned the region as capable of leading a well-managed response. The dominant question was not if, but how the transition is managed so the region captures its full potential.

Business leaders were direct about the scale of opportunity:

'The enormous benefits that potentially flow from the energy transition... particularly benefits for regional New South Wales.'

Local leaders consistently framed the region's aspiration in practical terms: to organise around fairness, sequencing and governance so the transition strengthens the region rather than fragments it. The sentiment shared was strategic and risk alert reflecting the confidence of a region that has chased opportunity before and knows what good governance looks like to manage this well.

B. Tangible regional benefits and opportunities are within reach

Across all groups, a key question was: 'what could this actually deliver for the region?'. All participants were ready to tease out answers.

Business leaders, community representatives and young people all pointed to the same opportunity: large-scale energy investment that translates into visible, lasting benefit for the places hosting the infrastructure. Participants identified a clear set of opportunities:

1. Long-term, skilled local jobs
2. Stronger local industries and supply chains
3. Lower energy costs for households and businesses
4. Improved regional infrastructure
5. Real pathways for young people

The Business Roundtable was particularly forward-looking on the economic opportunity:

'I really see this as an opportunity to create a legacy...'

Several participants highlighted the strategic potential for the New England region to attract new energy-intensive industries such as data centres, advanced manufacturing and processing so that energy generation increasingly co-locates with regional areas. Participants also noted the region's strong research and development capability, particularly through the University of New England, as a strategic asset that could support innovation, skills development and the growth of new industries linked to the energy transition.

The transition could enable a genuine new wave of regional industry if policy settings, procurement pathways and infrastructure investment align.

Young people made the same point directly:

'If you're living in one of these renewable energy zones... your electricity should be cheaper.'



The proposed mechanism to capture these benefits was concrete: a Future Fund to receive renewable developer contributions and regional development strategies such as enforceable local procurement pathways and investment in skills and local enterprise. Participants were clear that transparent reporting on local procurement outcomes would be essential to maintaining trust and ensuring commitments are kept.

C. Trust, process and civic space are the core foundation

A defining theme across all Roundtables was that good process is not a soft issue rather it is the core infrastructure of the energy transition. Participants noted that trust must be built and community legitimacy secured, but only if the process is designed to earn it.

Participants consistently noted the opportunity to involve the 'missing 80 per cent'—residents who are neither strong supporters nor vocal opponents of the energy transition. These people tend to be time-poor and working to survive however when given a credible and safe space to participate, have much to contribute. Participants were optimistic that a well-designed coordinating framework could create this space.

'You will never reach the best outcome for this region unless you do the process.'

Participants noted that a well-run national Regional Energy Accord adapted with commitments for the New England region could help protect civic space to allow genuine disagreement to occur without social harm and creating room for the moderate majority to be heard. More coordinated corridor planning was also seen as a practical way to reduce tensions between neighbouring landholders and improve fairness across communities.

D. Coordination is the region's greatest near-term lever

One of the clearest opportunities identified across all Roundtable sessions was improving coordination across projects, agencies, proponents and timelines. Participants consistently pointed to coordination as the single highest-leverage action the region could take to improve outcomes.

Business and community leaders identified practical enablers that could unlock this:

1. Regional Commitments Register that tracks who has committed to what, to whom and by when
2. A clear, publicly accessible source of truth for project pipelines and timelines
3. Improved modelling of cumulative impacts on housing, health, workforce and infrastructure.
4. Additional resourcing and capacity to enable better preparation and coordination.

Participants also highlighted the opportunity to manage project sequencing more effectively which would assist in risk management. This would show up as enabling regional businesses to build capabilities and employment steadily over decades rather than experiencing short-term surges. With better coordination, the region can plan for housing, health, education and skills, workforce, roads and services, turning what has been a reactive challenge into a proactive advantage.



E. Young people see the opportunity and are ready to contribute

The Youth Roundtable brought one of the most compelling perspectives of the process. Young people spoke with clarity about both the urgency of the energy transition and their own desire to be part of shaping it.

'The best time to start implementing renewable energy was 10 years ago. The next best time is now.'

Young people connected the energy transition directly to regional liveability and see that housing, cost of living, job pathways and community resilience connect directly to regional leadership of the energy transition. They see the transition as a generational opportunity, and they want real influence in how it unfolds, not symbolic participation.

Community leaders reinforced the equity dimension: ensuring the transition delivers for renters, low-income households and younger residents and not only for those already well-positioned. For New England a fairness imperative is a practical test of whether the transition is working.

Young people were clear about what success looks like:

'Renewable energy will only work if there are other incentives... cheaper cost of living and increased infrastructure.'

F. Community wellbeing is a practical indicator of success

Across the discussions, participants framed community wellbeing not as a secondary issue but as a direct measure of whether the transition is working. The energy transition is also a social and human transition and the participants noted that the New England region is approaching it with that lens.

Participants noted that large-scale economic transitions, when managed well, strengthen the social determinants of health: employment stability, housing security, education and income. The question surfacing here is whether an Accord has an opportunity to ensure the transition actively improves these foundations for regional communities.

Uncertainty about current projects, impacts on land and livelihoods, and community divisions over renewable energy development are placing a strain on local relationships and individual wellbeing. As one participant noted:

'The psychological wellbeing... is really being impacted...'

Others emphasised that the transition is unfolding in communities that are already facing significant pressures, particularly around housing and the cost of living. In some parts of the region, housing insecurity is already visible:

'We have hundreds of families at any night who have unstable accommodation in motels and caravan parks and sleeping in cars... People are very proud of regional areas. They tend to hide it.'

Health leaders also pointed to the deeper structural context. Community wellbeing is shaped by what are often described as the social determinants of health, including employment stability, housing security, education and income. As one participant explained:



‘Health is really rooted in the social determinants of health... things like employment, housing, education and income.’

Managing impacts on housing, employment pathways and community cohesion was seen as essential and achievable if the transition is coordinated with community wellbeing as a core consideration in a New England coordinating framework from the outset.



3. Priorities and commitments

Priority Area	Commitment	What the room was asking for
Tangible regional benefits	Future Fund; local procurement pathways and long-term regional investment.	A visible mechanism that converts large-scale energy investment into lasting regional advantage : local jobs, business opportunities, skills pathways and enterprise development rather than short-term project spending.



Priority Area	Commitment	What the room was asking for
Local benefit for host communities	Ensure host regions receive clear economic and service benefits, including infrastructure investment and fair energy outcomes.	If communities host energy infrastructure, they expect practical advantages: lower energy costs, improved infrastructure, employment opportunities and long-term investment in regional liveability.
Regional leadership and stewardship	Boost regional coordination and explore the opportunity that a Regional Energy Accord with a specific focus on New England offers to collect action and grow accountability for delivery of activities.	A mechanism that can coordinate across councils, agencies, developers and communities, act as a neutral convenor and provide a clear regional voice in negotiations.
Accountability and commitment tracking	Create a Commitments Register that documents who has committed to what and by when.	Clear accountability for developers, agencies and governments, with timeframes, milestones and public reporting so commitments cannot drift or disappear.
Transparency and 'source of truth'	Publish clear information on the project pipeline, sequencing, infrastructure requirements and impacts.	Communication of where people in the region can go as a single trusted place to see what projects are coming, when they are happening, and what the cumulative impacts will be.
Managing cumulative impacts	Introduce regional planning capability to track housing, workforce, health and education services, infrastructure and environmental pressures associated with the transition.	Practical tools, data and modelling to understand cumulative impacts and plan early for housing, workforce, roads, services and land use rather than responding after problems emerge.



Priority Area	Commitment	What the room was asking for
Housing, workforce and infrastructure readiness	Deliver front-loaded planning and investment in housing, workforce development and regional infrastructure aligned to project sequencing.	Preparation before the workforce arrives, housing supply, training pathways and infrastructure upgrades that prevent local systems from becoming overwhelmed.
Trust, civic space and respectful engagement	Establish a values-first engagement framework that creates a safe civic space for diverse and inclusive regional dialogue.	A process where people can disagree respectfully without social harm, and where moderate community voices, not only the loudest advocates or opponents, can participate.
Meaningful participation in decision-making	Co-design participation structures that allow the region to shape outcomes, not simply respond to consultation.	Communities want agency in decision architecture, including involvement in benefit design, project sequencing discussions and regional planning.
Youth participation and intergenerational outcomes	Embed youth participation in governance and decision pathways, not one-off consultations.	Young people want real influence, opportunities to contribute to regional decision-making, and pathways into the jobs, businesses and industries created by the transition.
Reliable and resilient energy systems	Ensure the transition improves energy reliability and resilience, particularly during extreme weather and outages.	Communities want the transition to improve stability and safety, not create additional risk for regional households and businesses.
Energy affordability and competitiveness	Transparent reporting on regional energy costs and competitiveness.	Businesses want to understand whether hosting energy infrastructure will improve or worsen local energy affordability.



Priority Area	Commitment	What the room was asking for
Landscape-scale planning and land stewardship	Integrate landscape-scale corridor planning and environmental stewardship principles into project development.	A move away from fragmented project-by-project decisions toward coordinated land use planning that reduces landholder conflict and protects environmental values.

4. What the commitments reveal

Across the three New England Roundtables of business leaders, community organisations and young people, the mood was consistent. Participants were not asking for another period of reflection. The region is ready to move from conversation to practical architecture.

Three practical structures were endorsed:

1. A regional coordination mechanism
2. A clear regional investment architecture, such as the Future Fund
3. Transparent planning information that allows communities and businesses to prepare with confidence and clarity.

Each Roundtable closed with a clear sentiment.

Business Leaders Roundtable

Move quickly from discussion to a clear regional investment architecture, the Future Fund, local procurement pathways and project sequencing that converts energy investment into long-term regional industry and employment.

‘I really see this as an opportunity to create a legacy... help them get into a business and start their own business and employ other local people.’

Community Leaders Roundtable

Build a trusted process with clear commitments and accountability, including a Commitments Register and stronger coordination, so communities can see how the transition will deliver tangible benefits while managing cumulative impacts.

‘You have to have this by this time. Otherwise, this can't start.’

Youth Leaders Roundtable

Act with urgency and honesty about the future, while ensuring the transition delivers real improvements in housing, affordability, reliability and opportunity so young people can see a viable future in regional communities.

‘We want to see real opportunities come from this transition — jobs, businesses and pathways for young people in regional communities.’



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- Joining our mailing list
- Contacting The Energy Charter – director@theenergycharter.com.au.

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