

An aerial photograph of a rural town, likely in Western Downs, Queensland, Australia. The town features a mix of residential houses and larger commercial buildings, surrounded by green fields and scattered trees. A road winds through the town. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter.

31 January 2025

Industry Leading Practice
Landholder and Community
Engagement Toolkit

WESTERN DOWNS REGIONAL
COUNCIL SUBMISSION

31 January 2025

Sent via email: Signature hidden

Dear Katie,

RE: SUBMISSION OF THE INDUSTRY LEADING PRACTICE LANDHOLDER AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

Western Downs Region Council (Council) oversees a vibrant local government area spanning 37,937 square kilometres, serving a diverse population of approximately 35,000 residents. Our region thrives on a robust foundation of agriculture, intensive agriculture, energy, and manufacturing industries.

We sincerely thank Queensland Renewable Energy Council (QREC) for seeking feedback on the industry Leading Practice Landholder and Community Engagement Toolkit (Toolkit) as this will inform the leading-practice developer Code of Conduct to be developed in 2025 to support strong, sustainable renewable energy industry and communities across Queensland, which is of strong interest to our Council and our residents.

Enclosed is Council's comprehensive submission for your consideration, detailing our perspectives and recommendations on the framework. We believe that the insights provided will offer valuable contributions to the review process and help shape the Toolkit that fosters growth and inclusivity in regional areas like ours.

For any further information or questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or alternatively Lidewij Koene-Sloss, Economic Development Manager, via email lidewij.koene-sloss@wdrc.qld.gov.au or M: 0409 786 759.

Yours Sincerely,

Jodie Taylor
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

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About the Western Downs Regional Council

The Western Downs is located on the Darling Downs, approximately 207 kilometres north-west of Brisbane and 83 kilometres north-west of Toowoomba. The region encompasses the centres of Dalby, Chinchilla, Jandowae, Miles, Tara, and Wandoan, covering nearly 38,000 square kilometres. Combining country lifestyle with modern living, excellent retail offerings and conveniences, the area is home to a population of around 35,000 people and has a large working age population of 60.9% aged 15-64 years.

Built on agriculture and thriving in the intensive agriculture, energy and manufacturing industries, Western Downs Regional Council is focused on making our region a great place to live, work, visit and invest and to ensure our future generation have the opportunity to do what they love whilst enjoying a regional lifestyle and continue the strong economic growth of the region.

Council manage Australia's second largest road network with highways leading into the region including the Bunya, Leichhardt, Warrego & Moonie, an extensive water, gas, and sewage network, and one of Australia's largest cattle saleyards. Located in the heart of the resource rich Surat Basin, the Western Downs has a diversified energy portfolio with five pillars of energy generation: Coal, Gas, Wind, Solar and BESS cementing our reputation as the Energy Capital of Queensland. This contributes to the region's strong economic growth, investment, and consistently high employment with a GRP of \$5.91Billion.

Council's five-year [Economic Development Strategy](#) (2023 to 2028) addresses critical issues and clearly articulates a strategic pathway for the Western Downs to diversify and grow its economy, building on the region's competitive advantage and further attracting business and investment in value-adding opportunities and emerging markets. The Economic Development Strategy focuses on five key pillars:

- **Jobs & Skills** - The Western Downs workforce is growing, optimised and fit for the future.
- **Liveability & Infrastructure** - The Western Downs is equipped with modern infrastructure and quality essential services across the region to enable liveability and wellbeing, whilst sustaining population growth.
- **Population** - The Western Downs demonstrates population growth to meet workforce demands.
- **Productivity & Innovation** - The Western Downs is a recognised leader in agribusiness, energy and manufacturing, and local productivity continues to increase.
- **Sustainability & Resilience** - The Western Downs is future-proofed for a changing climate and transitioning economies, and circular economy principles are stimulated.

This strategy aligns closely with Council's [Corporate Plan](#) and supports one of Queensland's most progressive [Planning Schemes](#) which is committed to attracting and enabling development and ensure the Western Downs is a diverse region at the forefront of the changing world.

Executive Summary

Council highlights the critical role of the renewable energy sector in the Western Downs Region, driving economic growth and creating significant employment opportunities. The region has attracted over \$4 billion in approved renewable energy projects, with \$2.4 billion currently under construction, contributing to an annual Gross Regional Product (GRP) of \$5.91 billion as of June 2023. This complements agriculture, which remains a cornerstone of the economy, with an output of \$1.57 billion in 2022/23, driven by livestock and crop production. The coexistence of these industries underscores the region's commitment to sustainable and inclusive growth, as outlined in Council's Economic Development Strategy. By fostering collaboration between agriculture, energy, and other key sectors, the Western Downs is well-positioned for a resilient and prosperous economic future, ensuring long-term benefits for its communities.

Western Downs Regional Council (Council) commends the Queensland Renewable Energy Council (QREC) for recognising the vital role of local government in the Industry Leading Practice Landholder and Community Engagement Toolkit (Toolkit) and congratulates QREC on its progress to date. Council supports key elements of the Toolkit, including the emphasis on transparent communication, comprehensive information sharing about project stages and timelines, and respectful engagement with landholders, aligning with Council's [Communities Partnering Framework](#).

This framework advocates for proactive dialogue, regular updates, and fostering meaningful partnerships with communities, ensuring traditional owners are respected and supported through employment, training, and procurement opportunities. Council sees opportunities to strengthen the Toolkit by requiring developers to provide evidence of informing local government about prospecting activities and enhancing transparency in community benefits.

Council recommends the development of a dedicated section within the Toolkit specifically focused on Local Government Engagement. Local governments play a crucial role in renewable energy development, influencing project approval processes, land use planning, managing critical infrastructure, and fostering positive community relations. Early engagement with local authorities is critical to understand Council expectations, leverage local expertise, guaranteeing community safety, foster community support, mitigate potential conflicts, and ensure following best practice.

This approach aligns with Council's Communities Partnering Framework, promoting a collaborative and transparent development process. Developers should provide information on project stages, processes, and timelines, including specifics about the construction workforce and housing impacts. This transparency enables Council to assess cumulative impacts accurately and support strategic planning with industry partners and community stakeholders to respond to community needs.

Council underscores the importance of developers providing landholders with comprehensive and relevant information when initiating discussions for development purposes. Providing this information fosters transparency and lasting trust between developers and landholders, minimising potential misunderstandings or conflicts. Developers should address landholder concerns early in the process, detailing potential impacts during the construction phase, such as traffic increases, road upgrades, and dust suppression measures. This proactive communication demonstrates respect for landholders and promotes a positive partnership.

Council emphasises that landholders must have a clear understanding of potential rate increases, classification changes, or other charges, which should be included in the Landholder Agreement. This clarity prevents unexpected financial burdens and fosters trust and transparency. Additionally, Council recognises the importance of property-specific considerations, recommending comprehensive property management plans that address various aspects such as land use and environmental conservation. Developers should also provide clear and upfront decommissioning plans, outlining responsibilities for decommissioning to prevent disputes and environmental issues. Furthermore, developers should seek approval from local authorities during the project design phase, particularly regarding road use, to ensure that local infrastructure can support development activities.

Council encourages developers to work collaboratively with the local community to deliver legacy outcomes. By aligning efforts across multiple projects, developers can maximise the positive impact on the community, addressing larger and more complex regional priorities. The Community Benefit Framework should incorporate the initiatives and investment strategies outlined in the Toolkit, ensuring tangible benefits that enhance the region's liveability. Council also advocates for developers to support local groups through community grants, contributing to the overall well-being and resilience of the region. Further, it is also important that developers review community plans developed by various communities in the region to better understand and address the priorities that matter most to them.

Recommendations

Council offers the following recommendations to the Industry Leading Practice Landholder and Community Engagement Toolkit (Toolkit):

1. Engagement with Local Government:

- Council recommends the creation of a dedicated section within Section 3: Community Engagement & Benefit of the Toolkit, specifically focused on Local Government Engagement. Local governments possess valuable insights into planning, development, environmental management, road networks, flood mitigation, community insights, and housing. These insights are crucial for developers to consider and engage with prior to lodging development applications for any project.
- Considering Council's role as an asset manager, early engagement with local governments is critical to ensure road infrastructure agreements are agreed to and adhered to, stipulating clearly set-out conditions and required permits and supporting the safety of contractors and local communities.
- Council strongly urges developers to approach local authorities at the initial stages of project planning, prior to engaging with landholders and selecting sites. Early and meaningful engagement with Council allows developers to understand Council expectations, leverage local expertise to foster community support, mitigate potential conflicts, and ensure following best practice. This approach aligns with Council's Communities Partnering Framework, promoting a collaborative and transparent development process.
- Council expects developers to share details about the construction workforce and housing impacts throughout the development stages. Ideally, Council would like to see a Workforce Strategy and Accommodation Strategy provided before the development application process. This transparency enables Council to evaluate cumulative impacts and support strategic planning with industry partners and community stakeholders to community needs, ensuring that development pressures are managed effectively.

2. Landholder Engagement:

- Council emphasises the need for developers to address landholder concerns early in the process. Developers should specifically detail the potential impacts of the project, particularly during the construction phase. This includes significant increases in light and heavy vehicle traffic, planned road upgrades and maintenance activities, dust suppression measures, component delivery schedules, and the expected duration of these impacts.
- Council stresses the necessity of developers adopting a transparent and proactive communication strategy with landholders. By providing detailed information, addressing concerns early, and engaging in ongoing dialogue, developers can build trust, mitigate conflicts, and foster positive relationships. This approach contributes to better project outcomes and supports the sustainable development of renewable energy initiatives in the region.

3. Landholder Agreement:

- Council agrees and emphasises that landholders need to clearly understand any potential rate increases, classification changes, or other charges, which may result from the development. By legislation, the landholder is always responsible for any rates on the property. Landholder agreement should detail how such changes will be managed and ensure transparency regarding potential impacts on rates and charges and how landholders will be appropriately compensated.
- Council recognises the importance of property-specific considerations, noting that it would be advantageous for landholders to have a comprehensive property management plan, encompassing more than just a cultural heritage management plan.
- Council emphasises the necessity of having a clear and upfront decommissioning plan when landholders enter into agreements. This plan should explicitly outline the responsibilities of each party regarding decommissioning. Council supports the inclusion of a decommissioning plan as part of the Development Application. Although this is not a mandatory requirement in Council's current process for approving solar farms, developers should provide a concept plan when lodging the application and submit a detailed plan to Council prior to decommissioning.
- Council recommends that developers seek approval from the local authority during the project design phase, particularly regarding road use. Road Infrastructure Agreements (RIA) should be established to manage road use responsibilities throughout the project's lifecycle.

4. Community Engagement:

- Council agrees that developers should first identify whether the community has already developed and documented a long-term community vision and plan to align the project's Community Engagement Plan with the community's aspirations. Council also references Council's Communities Partnering Framework, which outlines expectations for major developers on conducting community engagement. Where feasible, developers should maintain an 'open door' policy to address queries, such as through a shop front or community liaison hotline, to help communities understand the benefits and potential inconveniences of renewable energy projects.
- Council envisions that developers should engage with communities early and continuously. Developers should provide regular updates on the project's progress in the public domain, ensuring that the community has access to and understands the project's development.
- Council suggests that developers leverage existing networks for community engagement, actively connecting with local chambers of commerce and community groups. Utilising various engagement strategies will help achieve maximum reach and effectiveness.

- As part of the Community Engagement Plan, Council encourages developers to prioritise the use of local contractors and suppliers at various stages of their project. Additionally, developers should ensure that their chosen suppliers and contractors adhere to all relevant regulations and standards, conducting the necessary due diligence throughout the supply chain.

5. Local Content:

- Council encourages developers to effectively engage and support communities and businesses at various stages of the project. It is expected that developers and EPC contractors undertake due diligence when considering the local capability of businesses and considering whether work packages can be tailored to elevate local content.

6. Community Benefit:

- Council encourages developers to collaborate with the local community to achieve legacy outcomes through well-planned and coordinated efforts. This approach ensures that major projects leave a positive and lasting impact, supporting the broader economic and social development of the region. By working together, developers and the community can maximise the benefits of renewable energy projects and deliver meaningful outcomes that enhance liveability and resilience.
- Council supports the inclusion of a Community Benefit Framework that aligns with the initiatives and investment priorities outlined in the Toolkit. Council continues to advocate for developers to provide community benefits through grants and support for local groups, contributing to improved liveability and wellbeing across the region. By investing in community projects and initiatives, developers can foster stronger partnerships and create long-term positive outcomes that support thriving communities alongside renewable energy developments.

Submission

Western Downs Regional Council (Council) commends the Queensland Renewable Energy Council (QREC) for its efforts in developing the Industry Leading Practice Landholder and Community Engagement Toolkit (Toolkit) and acknowledges the recognition of local government's critical role in fostering meaningful and sustainable engagement. Council congratulates QREC on its progress to date and strongly supports several elements of the Toolkit that align with our Communities Partnering Framework.

We strongly support the Toolkit's emphasis on providing landholders and communities with comprehensive, transparent, and accessible information on project stages, processes, and timelines. This approach ensures that landholders and local stakeholders are informed and empowered, fostering trust and clarity throughout project development. Council also supports the inclusion of provisions that require developers to maintain proactive and ongoing communication with landholders, including regular feedback and updates. These practices are integral to building and maintaining transparency, accountability, and positive relationships between developers and the local community.

A key aspect of the Toolkit that aligns with Council's values is its focus on respectful and culturally appropriate engagement with First Nations communities. Council supports the emphasis on acknowledging traditional owners and ensuring they are active participants in renewable energy projects. The inclusion of measures to promote employment, training, and procurement opportunities for Indigenous businesses is a significant step toward creating inclusive and equitable economic benefits for all community members.

Council also appreciates the alignment between the Toolkit and Council's Communities Partnering Framework, which advocates for respectful and collaborative dialogue between developers, landholders, and other stakeholders. The focus on co-designing engagement strategies that reflect local needs and priorities is consistent with Council's vision for sustainable and community-driven development in the Western Downs region.

By supporting these elements of the Toolkit, Council reinforces its commitment to fostering a balanced and inclusive approach to renewable energy development. This includes ensuring that landholders are provided with accurate and timely information, all community members are respected, and developers actively collaborate with local governments to deliver long-term benefits to the host community / regions.

1. Early Engagement with Local Government

Western Downs Regional Council (Council) acknowledges and appreciates Queensland Renewable Energy Council (QREC) for recognising the pivotal role of local government in renewable energy development, as outlined in Section 3: Community Engagement and Benefit of the Industry Leading Practice Landholder and Community Engagement Toolkit (Toolkit). To enhance this recognition, Council strongly recommends the inclusion of a dedicated section, addressing specifically Local Government Engagement.

Local government holds a crucial position in renewable energy development, exerting considerable influence over project approval processes, land use planning, managing and maintaining critical community infrastructure and fostering positive community relations. This

unique role enables local government to serve as an intermediary between developers and the community, ensuring that the interests and concerns of local residents are thoroughly represented and addressed. By acting as a conduit, local government facilitates a balanced approach to renewable energy projects, promoting sustainable development while safeguarding community values and priorities for positive social sustainable development.

Council strongly advocates for developers to approach local government in the initial stages of project planning, prior to engaging with landholders and selecting sites. Early and meaningful engagement with Council allows developers to understand Council expectations, leverage local expertise to foster community support, mitigate potential conflicts and follow best practice. This approach aligns with Council's Communities Partnering Framework, promoting a collaborative and transparent development process.

1.1 Road Infrastructure Agreements

Council recommends that developers seek approval from the local authority during the project design phase, particularly regarding road use. Road Infrastructure Agreements (RIA) should be established to manage road use responsibilities throughout the project's lifecycle. This recommendation is important as it ensures that the local infrastructure can support the increased traffic and heavy machinery associated with development projects. For landholders, having a clear agreement on road use helps to mitigate disruptions and maintain access to their properties. For developers, it provides a framework for coordinating with local authorities on necessary road upgrades and maintenance, which can prevent delays and additional costs. For Council and the wider community, it ensures that public infrastructure is protected and that any necessary improvements are planned and funded appropriately, promoting safety and efficiency.

1.2 Accommodation and Workforce Strategies

Furthermore, Council agrees that developers should provide comprehensive information on the project stages, processes, and timelines. In addition, developers are urged to disclose specifics about the construction workforce and the potential impacts on housing throughout the different phases of development. Ideally, Council would prefer to receive a comprehensive Workforce Strategy and Accommodation Strategy before the submission of the development application. This level of transparency allows Council to assess cumulative impacts accurately and to support strategic planning with industry partners and community stakeholders to response to community needs, thereby ensuring that development pressures are managed efficiently and effectively. Putting in place such measures ensure best practices are followed and allows for successful development of projects.

1.3 Strong partnerships

Local governments possess invaluable insights into various critical areas such as planning, development, environmental management, road networks, flood mitigation, community insights, and housing. These insights are essential for developers to consider and engage with prior to lodging development applications for any project. By incorporating a specific section on Local Government Engagement, the Toolkit can better facilitate effective collaboration, ensuring that projects are aligned with local priorities and community needs. This proactive approach not only enhances project outcomes but also fosters a positive and cooperative relationship between developers and local communities, ultimately contributing to the sustainable development of renewable energy initiatives.

2. Landholder Engagement

Council underscores the importance of developers providing landholders with comprehensive and relevant information when initiating discussions for development purposes. This should include a key contact sheet updated regularly, detailed information about the developer and the project, a copy of the Queensland Renewable Energy Landholder Toolkit, the Coexistence Queensland Renewable Energy Information Sheet, which will include contact details for Coexistence Queensland once finalised and contact details for a local government representative. Developers should also provide evidence to landholders that they have informed the local government of their prospecting activities in the region.

2.1 Trusted Relationships

Providing this information is critical for fostering transparency and trust between developers and landholders. When landholders are well-informed about the project and have clear points of contact, they are more likely to feel respected and valued throughout the following process. This proactive approach minimises potential misunderstandings or conflicts that could arise from inadequate or unclear communication. Moreover, involving local government in the communication process signals the developer's commitment to working within established regulatory frameworks and respecting local governance structures.

Council emphasises the need for developers to address landholder and community concerns early in the process. Developers should specifically detail the potential impacts of the project, particularly during the construction phase. This includes significant increases in light and heavy vehicle traffic, planned road upgrades and maintenance activities, dust suppression measures, component delivery schedules, and the expected duration of these impacts. By providing this level of detail, developers enable landholders to anticipate and manage disruptions, reducing stress and fostering a more cooperative relationship. Proactive communication about these impacts demonstrates respect for landholders and the broader community and promotes a positive partnership.

Council welcomes the inclusion of the landholder engagement section in the Queensland Renewable Energy Landholder Toolkit, which aligns with Council's Communities Partnering Framework. This framework advocates for respectful, proactive, and ongoing dialogue between developers and landholders. It also emphasises the importance of providing regular feedback and updates to maintain transparency and trust. By the end of the feasibility stage, developers are expected to have engaged comprehensively with landholders, ensuring they are well-informed about the project and its impacts. This alignment with the Communities Partnering Framework not only ensures developers following best practice but also strengthens community support which is an essential factor for the success and sustainability of renewable energy projects.

Council stresses the necessity for developers to adopt a transparent and proactive communication strategy with landholders. By providing detailed information, addressing concerns early, and engaging in ongoing dialogue, developers can build trust, mitigate conflicts, and foster positive relationships. This approach contributes to better project outcomes and supports the sustainable development of renewable energy initiatives in the region.

2.2 Strong Co-Existence Principles

Council continues to advocate for the co-existence of all industries and landholders in our region and throughout Queensland. Council advocates for industries to mediate potential conflicts together in a productive and proactive manner. Council does not wish to see landholders become mediators of industry conflict. Therefore, Council continues to strongly advocate for proactive engagement and communication between industries and with landholders so to resolve conflict before they escalate. Furthermore, Council continues to view Co-existence as an essential part of our Economic Development Strategy, as it allows for sustainable development and beneficial social outcomes.

3. Landholder Recognition

Council understands that the journey to a clean and sustainable energy future must be inclusive and respectful, and Council is dedicated to listening, learning, and working in partnership with all landholders, custodians, and communities to create positive, lasting change for the benefit of future generations.

Renewable energy developments frequently occur in close proximity to landholders' homes, impacting their daily lives and the landscapes they cherish. It is essential for resource companies to engage meaningfully with these landholders, respecting their history and contributions, and ensuring their voices are heard in the planning and implementation of projects, regardless of their ethnicity.

To foster genuine partnerships with landholders, renewable energy companies are required to build trust and create a more inclusive approach to development. Through collaboration and mutual respect, we can ensure that the transition to renewable energy is not only environmentally responsible but also socially equitable, benefiting all stakeholders involved.

4. Land Agreement

Council agrees and emphasises that landholders must have a clear understanding of any potential rate increases, classification changes, or other charges, which may result from the development. By legislation, the landholder is always responsible for any rates on the property. The landholder agreement should detail how such changes will be managed, particularly any increases resulting from the development, and how landholders will be appropriately compensated. This clarity is crucial as it ensures that landholders are not caught off guard by unexpected future financial burdens. By outlining these details upfront, developers can foster trust and transparency, making landholders feel more secure and respected. This approach also helps to prevent disputes and misunderstandings, which can have unexpected costs to the landholder.

Council recognises the importance of property-specific considerations, noting that it would be beneficial for landholders to have a comprehensive property management plan, going beyond the cultural heritage management plan. A holistic property management plan can address various aspects such as land use, environmental conservation, and future development

potential. This comprehensive approach ensures that all relevant factors are considered, leading to more sustainable and well-planned projects. For landholders, having a detailed property management plan provides a clear roadmap for managing their land effectively, which can enhance its value and utility. For developers, understanding these plans can help in aligning project designs with landholder expectations and regulatory requirements, thereby facilitating smoother development applications.

Council emphasises the necessity of having a clear and upfront decommissioning plan when landholders enter into agreements. This plan should explicitly outline the responsibilities of each party regarding decommissioning. Council supports the inclusion of a decommissioning plan as part of the Development Application. Although this is not a mandatory requirement in Council's current process for approving solar farms, developers should provide a concept plan when lodging the application and submit a detailed plan to Council prior to decommissioning. Having a decommissioning plan in place is vital as it ensures that all parties are aware of their obligations once the project reaches the end of its lifecycle. This prevents potential disputes and environmental issues that could arise from abandoned infrastructure. For landholders, it provides peace of mind knowing that their land will be restored to its original state or repurposed appropriately. For developers, it demonstrates a commitment to responsible project management from start to finish by including its end-of-life and allowing for environmental stewardship. For Council and the community, it ensures that the land remains viable for future use and that environmental impacts are minimised.

5. Community Engagement

Council agrees that developers should first identify whether the community has already developed and documented a long-term community vision and Community Plan that aligns the project's Community Engagement Plan with the community's aspirations. This alignment ensures that the development is in harmony with the long-term goals and values of the community. By referencing Council's Communities Partnering Framework, developers can understand the expectations for conducting community engagement. This framework emphasises the importance of transparent and inclusive communication. Where feasible, developers should maintain an 'open door' policy to address queries, such as through a shop front or community liaison officer. This approach helps communities understand both the benefits and potential inconveniences of renewable energy projects. By being accessible and responsive, developers can build trust and foster a positive relationship with the community, which is crucial for the project's success and acceptance.

Council envisions that developers should engage with communities early and continuously. Early engagement allows developers to gather valuable feedback and address concerns before they escalate. Continuous engagement ensures that the community remains informed and involved throughout the project's lifecycle. Developers should provide regular updates on the project's progress in the public domain, such as through websites, social media, and community meetings. This transparency helps to build trust and keeps the community informed about the project's status and any changes that may occur. By keeping the community engaged and informed, developers can mitigate potential conflicts and ensure that the project progresses smoothly. This proactive approach also demonstrates the developer's commitment to working collaboratively with the community, which can enhance the project's support from the community.

Council suggests that developers leverage existing networks for community engagement, actively connecting with local chambers of commerce and community groups. Utilising these established networks allows developers to reach a broader audience and tap into existing channels of communication. By engaging with local organisations, developers can gain insights into community needs and preferences, which can inform project planning and implementation. This inclusive approach ensures that diverse voices are heard and considered, fostering a sense of ownership and partnership among community members. For Council and the wider community, leveraging existing networks helps to build a cohesive and supportive environment for the project, enhancing its overall success.

6. Local Content

As part of the Community Engagement Plan, Council encourages developers to prioritise the use of local contractors and suppliers at various stages of their project. This recommendation supports the local economy by creating job opportunities and stimulating economic growth. By hiring local contractors and suppliers, developers can also benefit from their knowledge of local conditions and regulations, which can facilitate smoother project implementation. Additionally, developers should ensure that their chosen suppliers and contractors adhere to all relevant regulations and standards, conducting the necessary due diligence throughout the supply chain. This compliance is essential for maintaining quality and safety throughout the project. For the community, prioritising local businesses fosters a sense of pride and investment in the project, as residents see tangible benefits from the development. For Council, this approach aligns with broader economic development goals and demonstrates a commitment to supporting local enterprises.

7. Community Benefit

Council encourages developers to collaborate with the local community to achieve legacy outcomes. A collaborative approach allows developers to pool resources and focus on delivering long-term benefits that address broader regional priorities. By working together, developers can tackle larger, more complex issues such as resilience, infrastructure development, and public health improvements, ensuring their projects contribute meaningfully to the community's economic and social well-being. This approach delivers significant benefits for all stakeholders. For the community, it enables access to enhanced infrastructure, educational opportunities, and improved health services, collectively raising the quality of life. For developers, collaboration streamlines engagement processes, avoids duplication, and demonstrates a commitment to community development. For Council, coordinated efforts ensure that development projects align with regional goals, fostering shared responsibility, resilience, and sustainability.

Council supports the inclusion of a Community Benefit Framework that reflects the initiatives and investment priorities outlined in the Toolkit. Such a framework should address specific community needs and aspirations, ensuring that development benefits are distributed widely and meaningfully. Clear initiatives and investment strategies allow developers to deliver tangible benefits that enhance liveability and strengthen the community.

Council continues to advocate for developers to provide community benefits through grants to local groups, further improving the region's liveability and well-being. These grants can support a diverse range of initiatives, from education and health services to recreational facilities and environmental conservation. For the community, this translates into improved services and opportunities for growth. For developers, it fosters goodwill and enhances their reputation. For Council and the wider region, these contributions strengthen the social and economic fabric, promoting long-term sustainability and resilience.

Council is pleased to see that the Miles Community Investment Plan is given as example of a successful community benefit and partnership program. Council is hard at work to deliver a legacy for all residents, businesses and townships in the Western Downs. The Miles community continues to be an example of successful community involvement and legacy building with the support of energy companies investing in the region. Western Downs benefits from the successful co-existence of all its industries to deliver on its economic development strategy.

Conclusion

Western Downs Regional Council (Council) is optimistic about the future of renewable energy development and the positive impact it can have on our communities. By incorporating the recommendations outlined in this submission, we believe that developers can foster stronger relationships with local governments, landholders, and communities, ensuring that projects are not only successful but also sustainable and beneficial for all stakeholders involved.

Council's emphasis on early and meaningful engagement with local authorities, comprehensive landholder communication, and proactive community involvement highlights the importance of transparency, trust, and collaboration in the development process. By aligning with Council's Communities Partnering Framework and leveraging existing networks and programs, developers can create projects that are in harmony with the community's long-term goals and values.

Furthermore, the focus on legacy outcomes through community benefit and meaningful partnerships with First Nations communities' underscores Council's commitment to inclusivity, respect, and shared prosperity. These approaches ensure that the benefits of renewable energy projects are distributed equitably, contributing to the broader economic and social development of the region.

Council is confident that adopting these recommendations will strengthen project outcomes, minimise potential conflicts, and align with the vision of Council's Economic Development Strategy and Council's Corporate Plan. By fostering collaboration and supporting the sustainable development of renewable energy initiatives, we can create a prosperous and resilient future for our region. Together, we can ensure renewable energy projects not only succeed but also contribute meaningfully to the economic growth, liveability, and well-being of our communities.

We look forward to continued collaboration with QREC, various stakeholders, developers, landholders, and communities to achieve these shared goals and to create a sustainable and prosperous future for the Western Downs region.

Contact Details

Please do not hesitate to contact either myself or Lidewij Koene-Sloss, Economic Development Manager via email via email lidewij.koene-sloss@wdrc.qld.gov.au or phone (07) 4679 4526 should you wish to discuss any aspect of this submission.

Appendix

1. Western Downs Council, Economic Development Strategy 2023 – 2028, [economic-development-strategy-document-ver-22.02.23.pdf \(wdrc.qld.gov.au\)](#)
2. Western Downs Regional Council, Corporate Plan 2021 – 2026, [Plans & Publications Western Downs Regional Council \(wdrc.qld.gov.au\)](#)
3. [Western Downs Regional Council Communities Partnering Framework](#)
4. [Queensland Farmers Federation Queensland Renewable Energy Landholder Toolkit](#)