

“What we need you to know”

Themes and messages from the
inaugural Regional Leaders Summit 2025



A facilitated network-building event for Australian
rural and regional leaders navigating large-scale
renewable energy development

RURAL AND REGIONAL LEADERSHIP IS THE KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL ENERGY SHIFT

Across Australia, rural and regional communities are in the midst of an extraordinary change to the nation's energy system, shifting from a grid powered by fossil fuels to be replaced by renewable sources. However, this shift is often uncoordinated, with multiple renewable energy projects competing with each other for access to land and to the grid.

For some regions, the renewable energy shift represents the most significant infrastructure and investment they have ever seen. There are cumulative impacts to mitigate, as well as many opportunities, which will require careful local planning to ensure they are fully realised.

In this context, rural and regional leadership is strained. Local government and community leaders are having to become energy system experts to evaluate claims being made by developers and understand an ever-changing policy and regulatory landscape.

When they are well equipped, rural and regional leaders are strongly positioned to navigate community concerns, facilitate cross-sector collaboration, maximise local outcomes and build trust with their communities, mitigating the spread of misinformation.

However many leaders have been left to do this work with little support, in under-resourced rural and regional local governments and as volunteers within community organisations.

This Regional Leaders Summit was born from the need to support rural and regional leaders navigating the energy shift.



“ Coming together like this, it's clear that local governments are the ones who create the environment for things to happen. It's up to us to get the right people in the room, and equip those with influence to pull the levers that ensure our community is better off following Australia's energy transition. ”

Tracy Lefroy, Shire President of Moora, Western Australia





THEMES – WHAT WE HEARD

1 Local leaders have a *significant* role in the shift to renewables

In a largely uncoordinated renewable energy shift where the ***risks are inherent, but the opportunities must be negotiated***, local governments have a pivotal role. They are often best placed to see that renewable energy investments are leveraged into meaningful and sustainable regional development, resulting in strong and vibrant futures for rural and regional communities.

It was agreed that local governments across Australia are in an excellent position to:

- **Help their communities understand** the renewable energy shift imperative and the opportunities for localised legacy benefits.
- **Understand and communicate local community concerns and desires** in the context of renewable energy development.
- **Facilitate regional and/or local collaboration** with industry, state and federal government, energy stakeholders and community.
- **Facilitate information sharing and relationships at the local level** between industry, community, First Nations groups and other stakeholders.
- **Negotiate with industry to secure legacy outcomes for local communities** in partnership with community and First Nations groups.
- **Partner with industry** to plan and develop appropriate supporting infrastructure, such as roads, housing and utilities.
- **Build the capacity of local businesses and community groups** to play an active role in the local energy shift.

Working together with First Nations, regional development and community organisations is also pivotal to the work of local governments in managing successful local energy transitions.



“ We want to make the most out of 30, 50, 100 year assets... how can we change the way we're working to drive long-term and generational outcomes for communities all around the country? ”

Lani Johns, General Manager,
Indigenous Energy Australia

2 Local capacity gaps are real – and capacity must match the scale of the task at hand

For local government and community organisations to fully realise the potential of their strategic positioning, recognition and support for the work they are already doing, and want to do (on top of business as usual) is critical.

A repeated theme across the Summit was that organisations and key individuals are overwhelmed, stretched and stressed.

Participants could clearly see the difference in councils that had the advantage of dedicated staff working on regional development and renewable energy, versus those that didn't.

Differences in local government resourcing are due to a number of factors including:

- State jurisdiction
- Size of rate base/population
- Community needs and operational demands
- Mechanisms that enable renewable energy projects to contribute to host regions such as Payment in Lieu of Rates (PiLoR) in Victoria or Voluntary Planning Agreements (VPAs) in New South Wales.

Critically, the quantum of renewable energy planned for a local government area is not commensurate with the resources that local government has to coordinate a successful local energy shift.

This leaves the smallest and most rural local governments the most stretched for capacity. This is particularly the case in South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania, where there are currently no formal mechanisms for renewable energy projects to pay rates or otherwise contribute to local development funds as part of the “cost of doing business” in a region.

3 Regions need support for Australia's energy shift to succeed

To realise local government and community group's full potential in the renewable energy shift, we heard they need:

- **Appropriate staffing and resources** to enable strategic coordination in the energy shift at project, local and regional levels.
- **Willingness from governments and industry stakeholders to build a coordinated approach** that minimises cumulative impacts and risks for communities, as well as maximising local opportunities.
- **Increased contribution from State Governments in strategic regional discussions**, for example, the sharing of region-level data and projections on renewable energy capacity and planning, demographics, industry, housing, transport, health and education.
- **A national renewable energy shift narrative** that clearly articulates, in plain language, the why, who and how, acknowledging the critical role for regional Australia and the opportunities for regional uplift through a hyper local lens.
- **Continued and consistent peer support** for rural and regional leaders to build skills, share expertise, develop further confidence in their leadership and feel less isolated.



ABOUT THE REGIONAL LEADERS SUMMIT

Hosted by the Renewable Energy Alliance (RE-Alliance), more than 90 rural and regional leaders working in or alongside local government, regional development and community organisations gathered at Newcastle City Hall over two days. They connected with each other, and shared stories, lessons and experiences as they work at the local level to maximise opportunities and reduce risk in the shift to renewable energy.

Summit supporters

RE-Alliance was supported by an Advisory Committee made up of members from leading organisations across regional development, local government and energy shift including the Australian Local Government Association, Community Power Agency, Environmental Leadership Australia, Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal, ProjectsJSA, the Regional Australia Institute and The Next Economy.

The Clean Energy Council, Essential Energy, PoweringWA, TasNetworks and VicGrid generously supported 17 organisations (23 individuals) to attend the Summit. This support enabled the attendance of those who represent under-resourced councils or nonprofit organisations, or volunteer their time in leadership roles.

Participants – who was there

Participants included regional leaders from local government, regional development and community organisations representing communities from Western Australia, Tasmania, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales (see Table 1 below). They brought perspectives from Australia’s most advanced renewable energy zones through to regions at the beginning of their journey.

1. REPRESENTATION OF PARTICIPANTS BY STATE

State (where organisation is based)	% of participants from each State
NSW	31%
WA	13%
VIC	13%
QLD	9%
TAS	6%
SA	1%
National	27%

PROGRAM – WHAT WE DID

The event provided direct support, via facilitated peer to peer learning, to rural and regional leaders experiencing large-scale renewable energy planning and development in their region.

Facilitated open discussions

Discussions were facilitated on the following topics, with participants able to choose the topics they were most interested in:

- Leadership and the energy shift
- How renewable energy development happens
- Community benefit sharing and coordinating regional benefits
- Nature and renewables
- Communicating the energy shift in rural and regional communities
- Decommissioning and end of life for renewables
- First Nations locking in legacy outcomes
- Green-industrial precincts
- Training and workforce development
- Housing

Workshops: Identifying levers of influence

If there's one thing we know about rural and regional leadership, it's that it is creative and resourceful. We tapped into the wisdom of the group in two workshops to identify levers of influence available to local government and community organisations respectively.

Workshops: State-based action planning

The Summit included state-based action planning workshops with the aim of unlocking collective power and working out how, together, networks of regional leaders in each state can keep moving forward, securing legacy outcomes important to their respective communities.

Every session centered on the leaders' experiences and incorporated a significant amount of time for discussion. The full program can be found [here](#).



“ Whether you believe in climate change or not, it doesn't matter... We're going to renewables so we've just gotta try and get the best out of them. ”

Neville Ferrier, Mayor,
Banana Shire Council, Queensland

EVALUATION – THE SUMMIT EXPERIENCE

Over 40 participants gave us feedback on the event. They said:

- The Summit was a deeply valuable experience of connection, sharing and learning for participants
- The facilitated peer learning and discussion focussed framework worked well
- Favourite sessions included:
 - State-based action planning workshops including 2030-35 visioning, identification of what's working and not working, and exploration of collective actions
 - First Nations panels: hearing about First Nations led projects, specific First Nations available resources and discussing ideas for better engagement
 - Ask a developer: discussing industry behaviour and drivers with an experienced renewable energy developer
- There is a strong desire to hold another Summit next year, around the same time of year.



“ Being together with people from all over the country with such a diversity of expertise, interests and insights has been incredible – I've walked away with a lot, including instant collaborations that will benefit our region and the Councils we work with. ”

Veronica Terry, Cradle Coast Authority, Tasmania



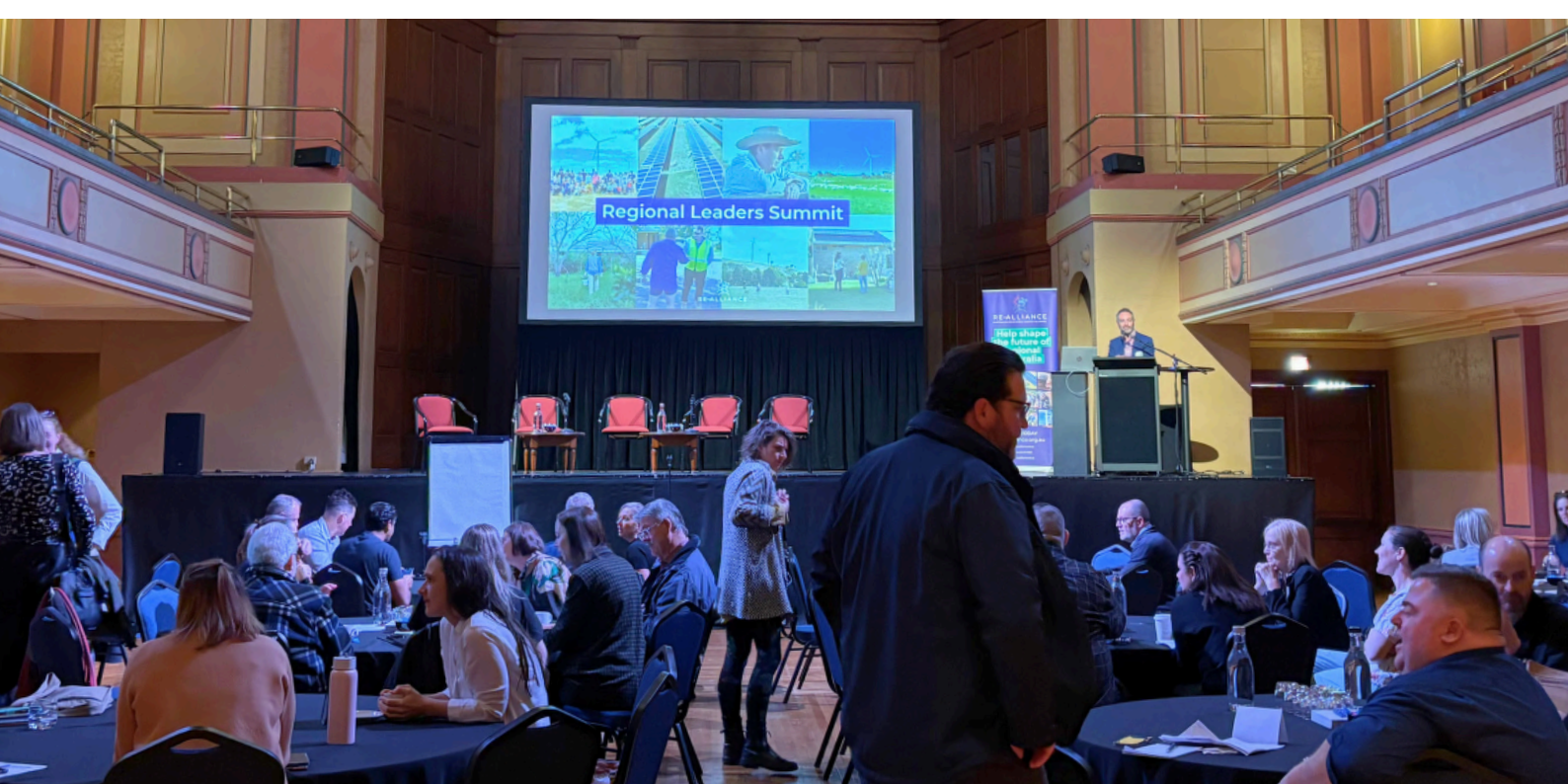
NEXT STEPS

Regional Leaders Network

RE-Alliance will continue to support rural and regional leaders across the country. One of the ways we do this is through the Regional Leaders Network, a facilitated peer network that helps members understand and chase opportunities for regional uplift that are possible in the shift to clean energy.

Regional Leaders Summit 2026

Due to significant interest and demand amongst rural and regional leaders, RE-Alliance will seek to host the Regional Leaders Summit 2026, to take place in the second half of the year at a regional location. If you are interested in supporting the Regional Leaders Summit 2026, please get in touch.



CONTACT

Please reach out if you'd like to discuss the outcomes of the Regional Leaders Summit or how to work with us in the future.

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