QUEENSLAND FARMERS' FEDERATION

Response to the Queensland **Renewable Energy Zone Roadmap**

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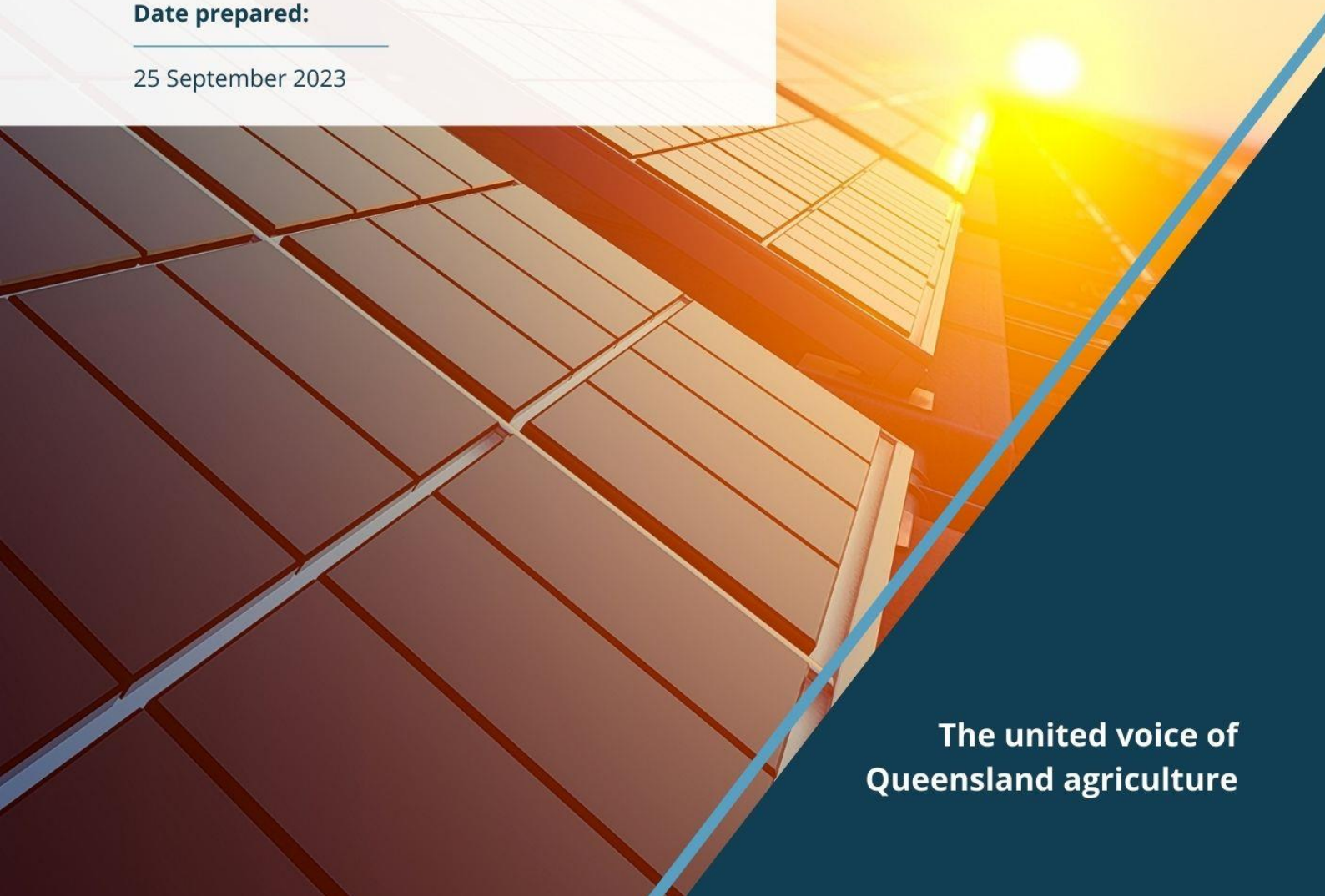

The united voice of Queensland agriculture

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This submission is provided to:

The Honourable Mick de Brenni
Minister for Energy, Renewables and Hydrogen and Minister for Public Works and Procurement
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Submitted via email REZRoadmap@epw.qld.gov.au

Our members

- Canegrowers
- Cotton Australia
- Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers
- Nursery & Garden Industry Queensland
- eastAUSmilk
- Australian Cane Farmers Association
- Queensland United Egg Producers
- Turf Queensland
- Queensland Chicken Meat Council
- Pork Queensland
- Bundaberg Regional Irrigators Group
- Burdekin River Irrigation Area
- Central Downs Irrigators Ltd
- Fairburn Irrigation Network
- Mallawa Irrigation
- Pioneer Valley Water Co-operative Ltd
- Theodore Water Pty Ltd
- Eton Irrigation
- Queensland Oyster Growers Association
- Lockyer Water Users Forum

About the Queensland Farmers' Federation

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the united voice of agriculture in Queensland.

We are a member-based organisation representing the interests of peak agriculture industry organisations, both state and national. Through our members QFF represents more than 13,000 primary producers across the cotton, sugarcane, horticulture, dairy, nursery and garden, poultry, eggs, pork, and intensive animal industries.

We unite the sector to engage in a broad range of economic, social, environmental, and regional issues through advocacy, policy development, and project activity. We work with the government of the day on behalf of industry, farmers, and the community to provide powerful representation and contribution to the policy direction, sustainability, and future growth of Queensland's agriculture sector.

Our Council of member representatives and policy committees set the strategic priorities for policy development and advocacy, while our Executive Board ensures our corporate governance.

QFF draws on the expertise and industry knowledge of our members and through our commitment to collaboration and considered policy development, we lead Queensland's agriculture sector towards a strong future, ensuring our members are ahead of the game and have a voice at the table on the issues that matter to their members.

Submission

QFF welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the Queensland Renewable Energy Zone Roadmap which was released on 14 July 2023.

We provide this submission without prejudice to any additional submission from our members or individual farmers.

Response to the Queensland Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) Roadmap, released by the Queensland Government, Department of Energy and Public Works.

Introduction

The Draft Queensland REZ Roadmap has been proposed as a framework for developing REZs that work with landholders, communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, industry and regional stakeholders. However, this is not a framework that is clear, nor provides a detailed pathway for all the stakeholders mentioned above, nor does it consider the future of renewables past the target dates, or both negative and positive impacts this will have to the agricultural sector. In this submission QFF have provided key points that need to be considered and as such seek to develop a strategic framework together to ensure not only clarity, but affordability, efficiency and reliability of energy remain a priority and that regional communities remain viable well into the future as the transition to renewables unfolds.

Overview

The Queensland Government, as part of the REZ roadmap, have outlined seven principles in which they are guided by:

- Drive genuine and ongoing engagement
- Share benefits with communities
- Buy local, build local
- Increase local jobs and secure work
- Preserve Queensland's environment
- Empower First Nations peoples
- Build local capacity

At the grassroots of these principles, there are billions of dollars' worth of electricity infrastructure required as a result of REZ policy. Queensland's likely REZ capacity based on ISP (Integrated System Plan) transmission upgrade scenarios is about 15,000 MW.[1] Each REZ is unique, with a diversity of suitable resource locations, existing land use and socio-economic conditions that will interact with renewable energy development. The impacts from these principles will predominantly affect rural landholders. Rural land use dominates all REZ with grazing, cropping, cane and some irrigated agriculture in NREZ, and grazing as well as areas of intensive irrigation and horticulture in CREZ and SREZ.

There needs to be revision of the least-cost principle of transmission grid rollout to avert inequity in access to benefits and entrenched community opposition to the REZ model. With proposed new policies to facilitate the implementation of renewables, there is a lack of detail on how the existing policy objectives are integrated into the new policy framework. Prospecting and early negotiations of RES projects (contractual opportunities cost) are necessary for transparency.

There is no transmission or transition without regional and rural Australia. It is proposed that landholders host RES, transmission infrastructure and to see the highest benefit for regions that provides opportunities, and avoid negative impacts, such as boom and bust cycle prevention

Summary of recommendations

REZ Readiness Assessment

- Managing cumulative impacts

Invest in local priorities

- Community and industry benefit sharing
- Protecting finite resources of land and water
- Biosecurity - increased risks
- Local bushfire risk management
- Manufacturing material
- Road infrastructure and competition for police escorts

- Telecommunications and connectivity
- Offsetting negative impacts or disruptions
- Landholder independent information service (hotline)
- Support for peak bodies – drive coordinated, meaningful industry engagement
- Workforce, Competition for skills and workforce in the regions - employment contract
- Community and industry energy opportunities
- Ensuring strong planning frameworks to underpin increased competition for land use and preserving prime agricultural producing land for future generations.

Establishment of Regional Energy Reference Groups

- Establishment
- Key objectives
- Operational guidance

What else do we need to consider for REZ development in Queensland?

Recommendations

Assessing REZ impacts and opportunities

QFF welcomes the Queensland Government's $6 million investment for initial REZ Readiness Assessments of the three REZ regions. As REZs become more defined geographically, this becomes a positive step to ensuring impacted communities can seize opportunities and ensure that cumulative impacts are managed appropriately. The crux of these findings should ultimately guide government planning to ensure communities fully benefit from REZ developments and that any exacerbation of risk is taken into consideration and acted upon. For the REZ Readiness Assessments to be truly effective, it is crucial that these studies emphasise the unique needs and characteristics of each separate REZ region, and the individual localities within those regions.

Whilst the scope of the REZ Readiness Assessments defined in the REZ Roadmap is suitably broad, the scope of the assessments must be expanded to specifically include agricultural and environmental considerations that were not otherwise mentioned in any REZ Readiness Assessment detail. This comes without question given that farmers and agricultural communities will be at the forefront of the construction of renewable energy sources and transmission line developments to support the energy transition itself. To maximise the efficacy of the REZ Readiness Assessments, the assessments must prioritise understanding the adverse impacts that any developments in the region will have on farmers and the agricultural community, and the benefits that must be acted upon to ameliorate these disruptions to the local region.

<u>Managing cumulative impacts</u>

With the great number of developments to be concentrated into the REZ zones, significant cumulative impacts can easily arise. Outcomes from the REZ Readiness Assessments must inform government planning to ensure that cumulative impacts because of REZ developments, are managed appropriately. A strategic and detailed REZ Readiness Assessment must seek to assess the potential implications on farmers and agricultural communities.

The placement of transmission line easements, supporting infrastructure, and other utilities of REZ development can profoundly affect immediate land use, agronomy of prime agricultural land, restrict the use of vital farming machinery, reduce production yields, and disrupt transport networks, among others. For those farmers who will have REZ infrastructure directly built on their properties, the challenges are even more pronounced. The neighbouring farmers, though not hosting the infrastructure directly, may still encounter indirect impacts such as altered drainage patterns, elevated bushfire risk, and visual amenity disruptions. Agricultural communities, especially those previously affected by coal seam gas developments like the Darling Downs, are understandably cautious of the adverse impacts that energy projects bring. This includes aquifer contamination, damage to the surrounding environment and ecosystems, and the displacement of communities.

Considering these negative implications for Queensland agriculture, that are linked to REZ developments, QFF strongly advises that the REZ Readiness Assessments:

- Conduct thorough environmental and agricultural assessments on agricultural land including "Important Agricultural Areas"[1] to ensure REZ developments do not compromise the fertility, integrity, and productivity of these lands, preserving them for future generations. The Assessments must ensure that agriculture and the resources that agriculture depend on are protected to support the long-term viability and growth of the agricultural sector in accordance with the State Planning Policy July 2017.
- Conduct a strategic and detailed REZ Readiness Assessment to evaluate potential implications on regional water availability, mitigation of biosecurity risks, bushfire risk management, and ensure there is active consultation with landholder and the broader agricultural community to identify these potential impacts.
- Strategically schedule and locate projects to avoid concentrated impacts and ensure smoother REZ development phases.
- Establish a feedback mechanism where farmers and agricultural communities can voice their concerns, share experiences, and provide insights on REZ developments in real-time, facilitating continuous improvement in planning and implementation.
- Prioritise the investment in research and development to innovate sustainable methods and technologies that can harmonise REZ infrastructure with agriculture, ensuring minimal disruption to the ecosystem and farming practices.

To harness REZs' potential for regional development and Queensland decarbonisation, thorough spatial planning is crucial and will ensure that REZ developments are socially and environmentally sustainable. Through integrated government coordination and stringent REZ Readiness Assessment processes, the cumulative impacts on regional communities can be minimised and the future needs of Queensland agriculture, community, environment, and agribusiness will be elevated as a priority in a consistent way.

Assessing opportunities and priorities

The REZ Readiness Assessments must focus on maximising benefits and opportunities for those who are or will be most impacted by REZ development. The most important step in these strategic assessments must always involve a thorough identification and evaluation of agricultural community concerns, and the potential to action benefits and opportunities to ensure economic and social enrichment. This will require a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process that ensures all

[1] State Planning Policy July 2017 pp29-30

voices and heard and that local priorities are supported. As mentioned above, farmers and the broader agricultural community stand to be directly impacted by these developments. It is therefore imperative that the REZ Readiness Assessments are structured in a manner that prioritises and addresses these adverse impacts and concerns, ensuring that the affected farmers, neighbouring farms, and agricultural communities are adequately compensated and supported throughout each of the REZ development phases.

QFF recognises that one of the significant challenges posed by the social licence of these types of public development projects is the uneven distribution of their economic benefits, and the subsequent potential harms across communities as a result. Such disparities can cause dissatisfaction and escalate into conflicts. As a result, there is a pressing need to implement mechanisms that ensures a more equitable benefit distribution across all stakeholders. The Queensland Government must work towards formalising benefit sharing arrangements, ensuring inclusivity and fairness. Clear guidelines that embed benefit-sharing requirements and define developer contributions to regional councils and communities are essential. Such frameworks must support transparency, sustained growth, and social equity across host communities.

The Queensland Government must be held accountable for their commitments, ensuring that they deliver on them. This approach is integral for the protection of community interests and for establishing a foundation of ethical responsibility for proponents. While some proactive renewable energy proponents have taken the initiative to launch creditable benefit-sharing and social licence programs, solely depending on voluntary actions is not sustainable. A more structured approach would involve the creation of an aggregated community fund within each REZ. This fund must be integrated with government resources and must be strategically utilised to introduce assets or programs poised for long-term economic growth and robust social sustainability for regional communities.

Investing in local priorities

QFF supports that pooling funds can help to achieve greater outcomes around broader regional community benefits; this will be important to manage risks around REZ delivery and cumulative impacts. As previously mentioned, to maximise benefits to regional communities, department bodies and government planning systems must seek to inform, include, and coordinate with the experiences of impacted communities in the development of renewable energy projects and the construction of REZ transmission lines. The pooled funds must seek to prioritise outcomes that safeguard regional communities from the fluctuations of the boom-bust cycle and encourage inclusivity, diversity, and active participation in local social and cultural activities. Integrating these principles into the REZ Framework will guarantee that transmission and renewable energy developments are not just environmentally sustainable but also socially accountable, contributing positively to the economic fabric of agricultural communities.

QFF notes the key benefits and opportunities we wish to see acted upon throughout the continuous roll out of the REZ development phases, and the potential impacts on farmers and the broader regional communities we wish to see addressed:

<u>Community-centric energy opportunities</u>

The broader economic framework of the REZ Roadmap must not just revolve around the development and support of large-scale renewable energy generation; it should also emphasise the equitable distribution of small-scale, community-centric energy generation. The Queensland Government must consider incentivising energy decentralisation and the promotion of local energy

opportunities. By doing this, Queensland can ensure self-sufficiency is prioritised during the time of accelerated decarbonisation. Additionally, by focusing on local power production and promoting the self-consumption of energy produced within communities, a sustainable energy landscape can be fostered amidst the roll out of large-scale renewable energy generation. This can be achieved by incentivising the rollout of a grassroots level of energy generation and by leveraging technology for energy efficiency, incorporating combined heat and power production, as well as solar and battery storage, into the mix.

REZ developments should prioritise providing communities with consistent and affordable access to locally generated electricity. This can be achieved through innovative models like Distributed Energy Resource (DER)offerings or by establishing community-based energy cooperatives. Such an approach not only ensures energy reliability but also ensures community-centric, sustainable development. Supporting decentralization initiatives, including the integration of micro-grids, virtual power plants, and other community-based energy projects, is essential.

The creation and amendment of laws, regulations, and policies should be directed towards reducing energy consumption and promoting conservation. Direct investments into communities via a dedicated fund would empower community-based organizations to collaborate, organise, and build both energy and climate resilience within their local regions. Regions are increasingly wanting the opportunity to access new ways of securing their energy needs to ensure reliable, affordable energy supports their businesses and communities into the future.

REZ developments offer the opportunity for local communities to develop local energy assets and collaborate to achieve increased energy productivity. QFF research and projects, including the Energy Savers audit programs and Microgrid projects, have identified an opportunity to improve energy efficiency and to allow electricity customers to collaborate to improve the utilisation of energy assets at the farm, business and residential scale. Whilst the Queensland Government's Energy and Jobs Plan and the REZ Roadmap plans predominantly target implementation at the transmission scale, there are significant opportunities at the distribution network scale for local power projects including:

- Supporting decentralisation initiatives for local communities, including the integration of micro-grids, virtual power plants, aggregated buying opportunities and other community-based energy projects.
- Incorporation of privately or community owned local energy assets including smaller renewable energy systems and battery energy storage.
- The creation and amendment of laws, regulations, and policies should be directed towards reducing energy consumption, and promoting energy literacy and energy efficiency for homes and businesses.
- Direct investments into communities through a dedicated fund would empower community-based organisations to collaborate, organise, and build both energy and climate resilience within their local regions.
- Developing energy sharing models and tariff trials to encourage collaboration to better utilise distribution network infrastructure and investing in research and trials into regulatory pathways for councils and community owned energy trading.
- Ensuring clear pathways for social housing and rentals to access clean and affordable local energy resources.
- Encouraging electrification of regional fossil fuel assets with the above measures resulting in greater network utilisation and reliability.

Biosecurity – preparing for increased risks

As previously noted, the risks to biosecurity will increase significantly, due to the increased development activity in the regions. When REZ proponents and transmission providers engage in construction or rehabilitation activities that involve disturbing and relocating soil, bringing in materials and vehicles that can carry pests, weeds and diseases (hitchhiker pests) from one area to another, they inadvertently risk introducing or spreading biosecurity threats. These threats could manifest in the form of invasive species including weeds and fire ants, pests, pest vectors or diseases, which can have profound impacts on both local ecosystems and agricultural productivity.

Any introduction of new pests, weeds and animal and plant diseases will have cascading effects – costs of eradication, reducing crop yields, affecting local economies, and even altering the ecological balance of the agricultural area. As a result, it is essential that developers not only adhere to farm and regional biosecurity plans, such as the Soil Movement Guideline set out by the Biosecurity Act 2014 and the Biosecurity Regulation 2016 but should also be expected to contribute financially to ensure that increased biosecurity risks are appropriately managed and addressed. By contributing funds aimed at lessening these risks, the Queensland Government and renewable energy proponents are actively investing in the protection of the regions in which they operate.

Local bushfire risk management

The REZ infrastructure developments will be built in remote or isolated regions and will be typically situated on or adjacent to agricultural land. As a result, any escalation in bushfire risk due to the REZ development must be deemed unacceptable. It therefore becomes imperative for the Queensland Government to allocate significant funding towards resourcing bushfire management plans and activities. These resources should aim to not only prevent fires during the construction and operation phases but also protect the adjoining agricultural land from potential bushfire threats. It would be highly desirable if funds were allocated for or invested in technologies that can facilitate early bushfire detection and rapid response. By doing so, regions can benefit from a heightened sense of security during the construction and operation, potentially saving both lives and valuable resources.

Workforce – increased competition

Competition for skills and workforce in the regions will increase due to the significant volume of development planned. It is important that consideration is given to existing industries, such as agriculture, to ensure existing businesses are not negatively impacted in their ability to attract and retain a workforce adequate to continue business as usual during the renewable rollout. Innovative thinking and a genuine desire to collaborate and partner with existing industries will be needed. Farmers across the state are already severely challenged by the current workforce crisis and are concerned that with thousands of new jobs intended for the regions over the coming years, that increased competition for workers may have a crippling effect on their businesses.

There may be opportunities for industries to work together in relation to enabling strategic shared solutions for example worker accommodation, training, regional migration attraction and settlement initiatives that can provide a shared benefit to multiple industries. Overall investments in the liveability of the regions will ultimately assist all industries, including agriculture, to attract and retain staff in the regions.

Water infrastructure

Ensuring reliable water access will be a priority for both REZ developments and Queensland farmers. Drawing insights upon the establishment of the water pipeline to the Numurkah Solar Farm, where the solar farm entered into an agreement with neighbouring landholders to lay down a water pipeline leading to the solar facility. This pipeline not only guaranteed an immediate supply of water for on-site firefighting tanks but also proved beneficial for livestock watering troughs. The REZ Roadmap can adopt this model where the pipeline servicing public infrastructure developments serves an additional purpose – to mix and improve bore water quality for irrigation, a pressing concern in many parts of the state. Such an arrangement not only improves the practical utility of water infrastructure but also provides benefits to adjacent landholders. Engaging in such collaborative projects can pave the way for more transparent and positive communication between renewable energy and transmission operators and local farmers, culminating in a win-win situation for all parties involved.

Manufacturing material

Shocks to supply chains from events such as extreme weather, the pandemic, and global geopolitical tensions have led to stresses in agricultural supply chains, borne by Queensland farmers. Once again, such large-scale infrastructure projects like this can lead to increased competition for essential materials, driving up prices and potentially causing supply shortages—as demand is expected to grow significantly faster than supply. To mitigate these challenges, the Queensland government must consider strategies such as securing long-term supply contracts, incentivising local production of required materials (i.e., buy local, spend local), stockpiling essential resources, and collaborating with neighbouring regions for resource sharing. The Queensland government must take proactive measures to ensure an efficient REZ infrastructure development process without driving up prices or causing supply scarcities.

Road infrastructure

Roads and other local town infrastructure (like bridges) are not fit for large-scale infrastructure development and the impact of heavy vehicles, and the cost of repairs is often borne by local governments. It is essential to ensure the transport and OSOM haulage of REZ and transmission infrastructure components and construction materials do not adversely impact the transport networks of local agricultural communities. The development of REZ can significantly strain existing road infrastructure throughout their construction and operation stages. Typically, OSOM trucks navigate through low-volume gravel and asphalt roads leading to REZ and transmission line development sites, putting immense strain on these regional roads. The weight of these vehicles, often exceeding road capacity, not only erodes the road infrastructure but poses a threat to agricultural supply chains if not adequately addressed.

In areas like Queensland's agricultural belts, this can disrupt the timely movement of produce, potentially incurring economic losses borne by farmers. The development of the REZs will have significant impacts on local roads and other infrastructure. This will increase as more generators and transmission corridors are built. The Queensland Government must either directly fund local road infrastructure requirements or create mechanisms for local government to impose levies for renewable energy and transmission developments. It is essential to establish structured contribution strategies for proponents that leverage the resources and expertise that local councils bring to the planning and land management issues of their region.

Telecommunications

The agricultural sector can benefit from technologies like cloud computing, farming apps, and sensors that track vegetation, soil moisture, livestock movements and farm equipment. However, current connectivity services in rural and remote areas and cost concerns hinder this adoption. Government support through expanding broadband, financial incentives, and regulatory frameworks could accelerate this integration and provide benefit to rural landholders in locations with planned renewable energy transmission lines. Investment in improved communications towers and other technology to improve connectivity in rural or remote areas.

Offsetting negative impacts to visual amenity

The REZ and associated renewable energy developments are inherently large structures, constructed of towering steel frames and large concrete bases. These developments often stretch across large tracts of land and will be built on or adjacent to agricultural land. Due to their scale and prominence, these structures can considerably alter the visual landscape and have the potential to negatively impact local ecosystems. It is therefore essential that for every negative impact or disruption caused because of the construction or existence of these structures, there should be a compensatory benefit to the community that is at least twofold. For instance, when transmission lines are built along pre-existing easements or on government-owned land, it offers an opportunity for the enhancement of local community amenities. This could include the development of bike trails, the establishment of biodiversity corridors with low-growing flora, or the creation of community gardens. All such initiatives should be co-designed in close partnership with residents to ensure that the resulting benefits truly resonate with and serve the community's needs

Landholder Information Service

Farmers throughout Queensland are seeking to understand the mechanisms of the transition to renewable energy, especially concerning the opportunities and challenges that may affect their enterprise or their community. Over the next 3-5 years, it is critical for farmers to have access to an independent, reliable source of information to assist them in navigating changes throughout the energy transition. Moreover, a feedback mechanism should be established whereby farmers and agricultural communities can voice their concerns, share experiences, and provide insights on REZ developments in real-time, facilitating continuous improvement in planning and implementation.

This will assist in helping farmers to make well-informed decisions about their own on-farm energy investments and to better strategize to take advantage of opportunities or to manage risks amidst REZ development. Supporting peak body organisations, such as QFF, to have a Landholder or Energy Information Officer employed within their organisation to provide farmers with a readily available information service, all while being delivered at relatively low cost, would greatly assist in this regard.

Support for Peak Bodies

Peak representative bodies are often the first point of call when it comes to policy and project engagement, input and consultation. With the increased requirement for appropriate industry and community engagement in the renewable energy transition, significant demands are being placed on peak bodies to work with government and energy proponents to ensure industry representation. Providing support to peak bodies is a cost-effective way in which to drive a coordinated approach to industry engagement and input into the various consultation processes needed. QFF can provide examples of where government has worked well with peak bodies in this regard to achieve meaningful, coordinated industry engagement.

Establishment of Regional Energy Reference Groups

QFF supports the establishment of Regional Energy Reference Groups that will "provide input to assessments and shape local priorities for investment including through a potential coordinated investment scheme." Establishing this representative group is essential to the success of the REZ development. This process involves the identification of all necessary stakeholders, the initiation of participation through official invitations to collaborate, ensuring that the Reference Group's framework represents all regional perspectives, and laying down the foundational procedures and governance for the group's functioning. Getting 'the right people' in the room and setting a clear set of expectations for the purpose of the group is critical.

Establishment

- List all potential stakeholders – agricultural community members, landholders, Local government, community leaders, First Nations, industry representatives, regional bodies, etc.
- Send out official invitations to identified stakeholders and provide them with clear information on the purpose and importance of the reference group and how often the group will meet.
- Ensure there is a balanced representation from each stakeholder category. This might require a nomination process for each specific region, especially for groups with numerous potential participants. Support the opportunity for communities to have input into nomination process.
- Initial meeting to officially establish the group, decide on governance and operational procedures, and draft a term of reference through a genuine co-design approach.
- Suggest appointment of a skilled, independent chair for reference groups.
- Provide secretariat support to ensure administration of the group runs smoothly, consistently across regions and does not become burdensome to reference group stakeholders.

The key objectives of Regional Energy Reference Groups

The objectives of the Regional Energy Reference Groups must clearly define the group's primary goals and vision. They represent the core values and desired outcomes that the REZ Roadmap seeks to achieve, from fostering effective consultation to achieve informed, collaborative decision-making. Each objective is crucial to ensuring that the REZ development is beneficial and sustainable for each regional community, and appropriately adhere to the principle outlined in the REZ Partnership Framework.

- Ensure that decisions related to REZ development accurately reflect the perspectives and concerns of all stakeholder groups.
- Serve as a conduit for providing timely and accurate information about REZ development stages to the broader community of each REZ.
- Create a structured process for collecting feedback and concerns from the broader community and channelling them to the appropriate authorities. In this case, feedback derived from the use of a feedback mechanism, or an energy information hotline, could be beneficial during this feedback collection process.
- Explore and promote local economic opportunities arising from REZ development, such as job creation, skills attraction alignment, shared energy opportunities and local business involvement.

- Ensure that the REZ is developed in an environmentally responsible manner, balancing renewable energy goals with environmental conservation and maximising opportunities for leveraging key resources such as water and land for future generations.
- Provide opportunities for skill development and knowledge transfer among stakeholders to maximise local participation and benefits and to leave a legacy in building community capacity.
- Act as a forum for addressing and resolving potential disputes or issues among stakeholders.
- Prioritise the recognition of First Nations rights and interests and ensure that cultural heritage and perspectives are respected and integrated.

Operational Considerations

For the Regional Energy Reference Groups to effectively serve its role and sustain the trust of regional stakeholders, clear operational guidelines must be firmly in place. Central to these guidelines is the setting of meeting frequency, which may shift based on each stage of REZ development. Continuous engagement with stakeholders is crucial, encompassing everything from community consultations to workshops and informational sessions but most importantly, ensuring the priorities of each community are at the centre of the groups standing agenda. Regular evaluations of the Group are also integral, encouraging periodic reviews of the Group's efficacy and allowing for necessary adjustments in both operations, objectives, and stakeholder membership.

Ultimately, the Regional Energy Reference Group's success hinges on its commitment to transparent and inclusive operations, where the diversity of regional voices are not only captured and valued throughout the REZ development but also incorporated into actions, future planning and implementation considerations on the ground.

Facilitated effective engagement to ensure the expanded role of the Gasfields Commission Qld and the RERG's complement each other and add value to each others roles. Ensure role clarity.

What else do we need to consider for REZ development in Queensland?

To ensure a robust and equitable transition to renewable energy, it is critical that a coordinated, overarching planning authority is established. This authority must focus on coordinated technical design aspects and incorporate investment in telecommunications, funding, and stringent regulation throughout the REZ development phases. The Authority must act as a conduit for the Regional Energy Reference Group throughout the REZ development process. An ideal planning model for this Authority is the Australian Federal Government's 'Net Zero Authority', which will need to be established at the State level, ensuring the transparent delivery of beneficial investments in regional Queensland. The Net Zero Authority has been critical in:

1. Guiding investors and companies towards net transformation opportunities;
2. Coordinating programs and policies that support regions and communities to attract and take advantage of new clean energy industries and set those industries up for success; and,
3. Support workers from emissions-intensive sectors to transition smoothly into new job roles and acquire necessary skills amid the net zero evolution.[2]

[2] Net Zero Authority | PM&C (pmc.gov.au)

A disjointed system, that does not have the capability to move forward cohesively and efficiently, hindered by technological limitations, insufficient regulatory frameworks, and an absence of coordinated planning, will adversely affect the agricultural sector and regional communities, rather than see true benefits. QFF believes that the goal of the REZ Roadmap, the REZ Readiness Assessments, and any government policy that seeks to mandate the renewable energy transition, must realise the true potential and benefits rather than negative impacts. Despite the coercive nature of government renewable energy targets and policies, Queensland agricultural enterprises are facilitating this transition; it cannot be deemed acceptable that any lack of governing oversight or decision-making would seek to diminish their efforts and thwart them from any merited opportunities and benefits.

For example, DERs stand as a crucial component of Australia's energy roadmap. But their integration must be efficient and affordable for all users, irrespective of their access to DER.[3] Proper planning is the key to this. Yet, to date, Australia still lacks a holistic policy framework to foster any community energy, primarily due to legislative constraints and any lack of governing oversight. While individual States and Territories have made isolated attempts to support renewable energy adoption and implement change, yet without impact. However, the establishment of state-based authorities that possess equal power and can collaboratively work together will enable a more efficient and viable process for community reference groups, such as the REZ Roadmap's Regional Energy Reference Group, to coordinate and deliver outcomes that are of true benefit to their communities.

Summary response to Questions for consideration:

Question 1.

What should the strategic and detailed REZ Readiness Assessments focus on to maximise local opportunities and manage impacts from REZ development?

The QFF Toolkit and capacity building of organisations has enabled the government to have tools to provide help, and through the partnership with QFF has enabled government to have doors opened to a variety of stakeholders, which has built trust through the relationship.

Strong planning frameworks to underpin sound decision making in relation to land use and water use planning. Both are finite resources and strong planning, and consideration is required to ensure these resources are protected and best leveraged to support future generations.

A coordinated approach to other planning demands, requirements and strategies to ensure all aspects are considered and incorporated to achieve the best outcome and various planning processes are not undertaken in isolation.

Effective communication and engagement strategies to ensure correct information sharing, the timely opportunity for community and industry input and involvement and an informed consideration of the impacts from REZ development from the community's perspective.

Question 2

How should Regional Energy Reference Groups be established and what role should they play in setting local investment priorities and shaping REZ outcomes?

[3] Unlocking community energy in Australia (arcgis.com)

QFF supports the establishment of Regional Energy Reference Groups that will "provide input to assessments and shape local priorities for investment including through a potential coordinated investment scheme." Establishing this representative group is essential to the success of the REZ development.

The objectives of the Regional Energy Reference Groups must clearly define the group's primary goals and vision. They represent the core values and desired outcomes that the REZ Roadmap seeks to achieve, from fostering effective consultation to achieve informed, collaborative decision-making.

Question 3

Should there be a coordinated scheme in place to invest in local priorities to leave a positive legacy for REZ communities and how should this operate?

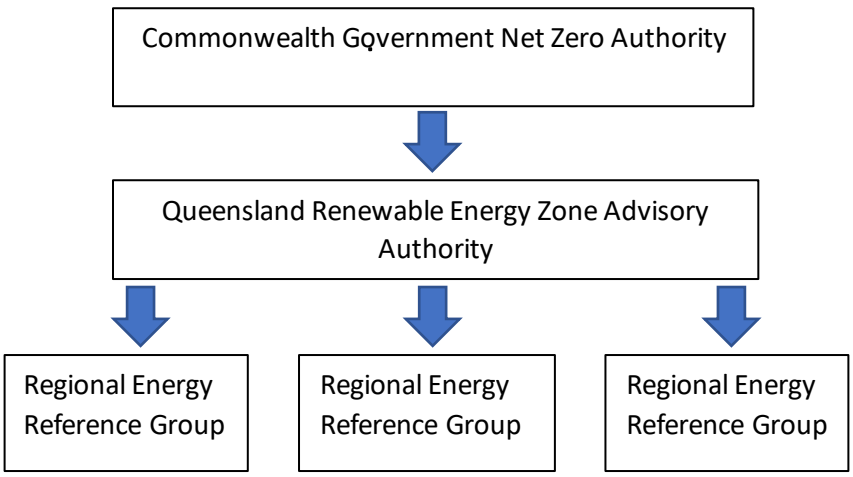
There needs to be a co-ordinated scheme in place that invests in local priorities. Implementing Regional Energy Reference Groups still requires transparency to effectively serve its role and sustain the trust of regional stakeholders with clear framework, with operational guidelines. Continuous engagement with stakeholders is crucial, encompassing everything from community consultations to workshops and informational sessions but most importantly, ensuring the priorities of each community are at the centre of the groups standing agenda.

Question 4

What else do we need to consider for REZ development in Queensland?

The Queensland government requires the establishment of a co-ordinated planning authority, that co-ordinates technical design, investment in telecommunications, funding, regulation and acts as a conduit for the community reference groups in the renewable energy process. As the Gasfields Commission's remit is expanded to work across energy more broadly to support positive coexistence, it is important that there is clear role definition and that all entities work effectively together in a cohesive way to drive best possible outcomes.

Proposed framework:



Summary

A co-ordinated, systematic, efficient approach is key to building Queensland's capability for a renewable and sustainable energy future for the agricultural sector in Queensland. The potential to see regional communities benefit exponentially from the millions of dollars in investments proposed can only be successful if a very strategic, co-ordinated state planning authority is set up, like that of the net zero authority. This will help to oversee programs and policies and support regions and communities to take advantage of clean energy industries, through benefit sharing, changes to regulation and supporting workers through skill development and maintaining workers in rural and regional areas to support economic growth in our food, fibre and foliage industries.

Yours sincerely

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