



Submission: Jobs and Skills Australia - Australia's Clean Energy Workforce Discussion Paper

Introduction and about the First Nations Clean Energy Network	2
Designing an energy system that is inclusive of First Nations rights, interests and responsibilities	3
Best Practice Principles to inform renewable energy infrastructure projects	3
Comments on the Discussion Paper	4
The First Nations Clean Energy Strategy as a key Government strategy	4
First Nations - employment policies and programs	6
Lessons from Canada	6

Introduction and about the First Nations Clean Energy Network

The [First Nations Clean Energy Network](#) (the **Network**) thanks Jobs and Skills Australia for the opportunity to comment on the April 2023 “Australia’s Clean Energy Workforce Discussion Paper”.

The Network is made up of First Nations people, groups, community organisations, land councils, unions, academics, industry groups, technical advisors, legal experts, renewables companies and others - working in partnership to ensure that First Nations people, groups and communities are key participants in and share in the benefits of Australia’s rapid transition to clean energy. The Network is led by a Steering Group of First Nations leaders.

Australia’s rapid transition to renewable energy will require access to vast areas of land and waters, including for thousands of kilometres of new transmission infrastructure.

Enabling and empowering First Nations to play a key and central role in Australia’s renewable energy transition goes beyond just social licence issues - it presents a unique opportunity for Australia to design an economic system around energy and renewable energy infrastructure developments (and upstream and downstream supply chains, including employment outcomes) that is fair and just and which can also positively impact and result in a range of other social and economic benefits for First Nations.

The Network supports communities to address the barriers to clean, affordable and reliable power, securing good jobs and strong economies, so First Nations can have the choice to continue to live and work on Country.

As a national, First Nations-led coalition, the Network aims to enable and empower First Nations to participate in, benefit from, respond to and shape an energy system in rapid transition as Australia rapidly transitions to renewable energy and seeks to meet legislated emissions reductions targets.

The Network’s approach is built on three pillars:

1. Community The Network supports First Nations communities address issues of energy security and affordability, and to shape the design, development and implementation of clean energy projects at every scale
2. Industry partnerships The Network acts as an innovation hub, promoting best practice standards and principles that companies should adopt and investors should require before committing capital to a clean energy project
3. Policy reform The Network advocates to lift significant federal and state regulatory barriers and stoke government investment, removing regulatory barriers to energy security and clean energy generation

Designing an energy system that is inclusive of First Nations rights, interests and responsibilities

There is a massive global and domestic renewables energy transition underway that is driving generational shifts in energy systems. First Nations people can, and should benefit from this revolution, whether from small community-based projects, to large scale, export-focused initiatives.

With many First Nations communities at the forefront of the devastating impacts of climate change and struggling with unreliable and expensive power, coupled with the substantial rights, interests and responsibilities (through traditional ownership, cultural heritage, native title and land rights schemes) held by First Nations across Australia's land and seas, now is the time to position First Nations as co-designers and drivers of systems, policy, legislation, and projects needed to facilitate the transition.

Put simply, by including and embedding First Nations as partners in the transition and the right to free, prior and informed consent in systems, planning processes, policy and legislation, the transition can be fair and just, avoid legal contestation to occur at the pace necessary, and will deliver mutual cultural, social, economic and environmental benefits to people and country.

With the Federal Government committing to enshrine a First Nations voice to Parliament, now more than ever is the right time to ensure First Nations play a central role in, and benefit from the opportunities that the transition will establish. Through the First Nations Clean Energy Network, we're excited to bring together First Nations people, industry and government leaders to help chart this way forward.

We also appreciate that there are real challenges to getting this right.

While there is broadly goodwill from the renewable energy industry, we must translate this into action, working in a respectful partnership. Engaging early, and in a genuine manner, will be critical - we don't want Traditional Owners hearing about projects for the first time through the media or on schematic diagrams on government websites.

Companies, regulators and the industry could do well to listen to and learn from traditional knowledge and culture about proposed renewables sites - we need to consider what the benefits look like over generations.

We also need to make sure that First Nations are properly resourced and equipped to engage with the industry and the pace and scale of the transition, and that planning and resourcing commences early to ensure that First Nations are equipped to participate in and benefit from the clean energy transition, including through jobs and business opportunities.

Best Practice Principles to inform renewable energy infrastructure projects

The First Nations Clean Energy Network advocates for the development of a renewable energy sector which supports the aspirations and objectives of First Nations people across Australia, and

an active network of Traditional Owners and First Nations representative entities, businesses, employees, organisations and groups engaged in the renewable energy sector.

To assist in the shaping of such a sector, the First Nations Clean Energy Network has developed and launched a set of Best Practice Principles for Clean Energy Projects (“Principles”).¹ These Principles place First Nations people and their communities at the centre of the development, design, implementation and opportunities for economic benefit from renewable energy projects.

The First Nations Clean Energy Network has developed the Principles anticipating they will aid governments with the design of policy and regulatory frameworks and also assist industry in its efforts to engage and partner with First Nations in the development of renewable energy projects.

Comments on the Discussion Paper

As noted above, the First Nations Clean Energy Network welcomes the opportunity to provide comments on the Clean Energy Capacity Study Discussion Paper, and with the engagement in the Discussion Paper with opportunities and barriers for First Nations Australians and the clean energy workforce.

Our comments are made in the context of the Network’s activities seeking to ensure that First Nations participate in and benefit from Australia’s clean energy transition and data from the recent Clean Energy Council 2023 report² which noted that only 0.8% of the clean energy workforce identify as First Nations, compared to First Nations comprising almost 4% of the Australia population.

There is clearly much work to be done both to support and enable First Nations Australians who wish to take up employment opportunities in the clean energy sector, particularly as policy frameworks begin to emerge that seek to prioritise First Nations employment outcomes.³ Unless there is a coordinated approach developed and led by First Nations communities and organisations to jobs and skills in the clean energy sector, the statistics highlighted by the Clean Energy Council will not likely improve.

The First Nations Clean Energy Strategy as a key Government strategy

In August 2022, Energy Ministers agreed to work with First Nations Australians to co-design a [First Nations Clean Energy Strategy](#) as a priority action under the [National Energy Transformation Partnership](#).

The strategy will help ensure First Nations Australians have a greater say in the priorities for the National Energy Transformation Partnership and participate in the design, development and implementation of clean energy policies and programs in the transition to net-zero. This is an opportunity to review laws, regulation and policy, to lift barriers and implement regulatory reform,

¹ See https://www.firstnationscleanenergy.org.au/mr_launch_guides and https://www.firstnationscleanenergy.org.au/tool_kit.

² See <https://assets.cleanenergycouncil.org.au/documents/Clean-Energy-Australia-Report-2023.pdf>.

³ E.g. See for example the guidelines issued under section 4(1) of NSW’s *Electricity Infrastructure Act 2020* which are intended to provide for increased employment and income opportunities for local Aboriginal communities.

to stoke government investment in innovation, technology and infrastructure, so First Nations people can share in and benefit from the benefits of the renewable energy revolution.

The Commonwealth has committed \$5.5 million to support the co-design process and strategy development. This funding will leverage and build on the best practice work of jurisdictions, First Nations communities and organisations to shape the Strategy, including identifying priority reforms and investment needed to deliver what's needed into the future.

The Strategy will be developed over 12- 18 months of work involving roundtables and consultations in collaboration with partners including the First Nations Clean Energy Network.

Through these roundtables we will bring together representatives from the First Nations community, the network, industry, key government departments and Federal, State and Territory representatives, lawyers and policy/technical experts.

These roundtables will be an opportunity to come up with recommendations for actions, policies and programs that the Federal Government should implement as part of the strategy. The outcome will be a First Nations co-designed strategy that will be a priority action in the National Energy Transformation Partnership.

The First Nations Clean Energy Strategy was additionally listed in the Jobs and Skills Summit Outcomes document.⁴

Page 17 of the Clean Energy Capacity Study Discussion paper includes a graphic listing Government strategies, but the graphic on that page does not list the First Nations Clean Energy Strategy (which is, as outlined above, a priority action under the National Energy Transformation Partnership).

Government strategies	
National Energy Workforce Strategy	National Hydrogen Strategy
National Electric Vehicle Strategy	National Energy Performance Strategy
National Battery Strategy	

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

⁴ <https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/inline-files/Jobs-and-Skills-Summit-Outcomes-Document.pdf>

The First Nations Clean Energy Network considers that the First Nations Clean Energy Strategy should be included in the list above and considered relevant for informing the other strategies and frameworks, including that current and planned jobs and skills initiatives should align to produce improved First Nations outcomes, ultimately supporting the whole national energy transformation for all Australians.

First Nations - employment policies and programs

Since governments in Australia commenced becoming directly involved in funding First Nations economic development programs (for the Australian government this didn't occur until 1969), there have been numerous employment policy and program approaches.

There has been significant analysis and discussion about First Nations employment programs and policies, and employment outcomes are measured and reported as part of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.⁵ In 2021, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs conducted an inquiry into Pathways and Participation Opportunities for Indigenous Australians in Employment and Business.⁶

Similarly in 2007, the House Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs tabled its report on the inquiry into Indigenous Employment entitled "Indigenous Australians at Work: Successful Initiatives in Indigenous Employment".⁷

The Network makes these points to respond to the questions in the Discussion Paper about First Nations and barriers to participation and involvement in the clean energy workforce.

These are the sorts of questions that have been examined in numerous processes and inquiries, and in identifying solutions, it is critical that First Nations Australians be equipped and enabled to lead the design of the system.

Lessons from Canada

Lessons from Canada, where First Nations have been engaged with the renewable energy sector for the past 20 years, help to highlight some of the potential for renewable energy projects to generate significant beneficial economic outcomes for First Nations. In Canada, in the last decade alone, First Nations-led initiatives have fostered 200 medium to large renewable energy projects, which have helped to generate \$1.5 billion in Indigenous and employment contracts.

These outcomes were achieved through actions by Governments acting with foresight, including mandating project ownership targets for the First Nations on whose lands the projects were proposed.

⁵ See <https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard>.

⁶

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Former_Committees/Indigenous_Affairs/Indigenousoportunities/Report.

⁷

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Committees_Exposed/atsia/indigenousemployment/report

In the words of the Network's sister organisation from Canada, the Indigenous Clean Energy Network:

Indigenous communities are the second largest clean energy asset owners and partners in Canada with thousands of small to large scale projects underway and ongoing. These projects have led to community training and job creation, reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, advanced gender equity, materially improved economic stability, cultural revitalization and much more. Globally more action needs to be taken to amplify Indigenous voices in dialogues on the development of clean energy resources and climate leadership.

First Nations have the capacity, skills and resources needed to help drive the clean energy revolution. There is no reason that the outcomes described by the Indigenous Clean Energy Network in Canada cannot also be part of a renewable energy economic development narrative in Australia.

We also note, and drawing from lessons and approaches in Canada:

- that in the recent (March 2023) Budget in Canada, the Canadian government committed \$2 billion over 5 years to support green jobs and skills training, and
- on 17 February 2023, the Canadian Government released its interim Sustainable Jobs Plan, part 6 of which includes a focus on promoting Indigenous-led solutions and Indigenous-owned clean energy projects across Canada, “*which hold the potential to be a significant driver for the growth of sustainable jobs and long-term economic opportunities for communities across Canada.*”⁸

⁸ Government of Canada: interim Sustainable Jobs Plan 2023-2025 - available: <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/jobs/training/initiatives/sustainable-jobs/plan.html>.