



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY

Dr Marisa Paterson MLA (Chair), Mr Andrew Braddock MLA (Deputy Chair),

Ms Leanne Castley MLA

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Renewable Energy Innovation in the Australian Capital Territory

Submission Number: 19

Date Authorised for Publication: 25 May 2021

■ ■ ■ weston creek
■ ■ ■ community
■ ■ council

Inquiry into Renewable Energy Innovation in the ACT

Weston Creek Community Council Submission

The Weston Creek Community Council (WCCC) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the ACT Government's Inquiry into Renewable Energy Innovation in the ACT.

As stated in the *Parliamentary and Governing Agreement 10th Legislative Assembly Australian Capital Territory*, the world is facing a climate change emergency. WCCC notes the Government and parties, commitment to zero emissions for the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) with science-based action.

Please find below our comments against the Terms of Reference.

a. Opportunities and challenges to boost renewable energy research, technology development and new zero emissions in the ACT

As the only Australian state or territory to be powered by 100 per cent renewable energy, the ACT is a world-leading jurisdictions in its response to climate change. The ACT's move towards renewable energy has cut the territory's emissions by 40 per cent below 1990 levels, and will help the Territory to move towards its carbon neutral by 2045 target.

Research conducted by the ANU notes that Australia will not achieve net zero emissions until well after 2050 at the rate emissions are declining. However, ANU argue that by accelerating deployment of solar and wind, Australia can reach 80 per cent emissions reductions within 20 years at low or negative cost. This would place Australia within striking distance of net zero in 2050 and should be a goal of all Australian Governments. With the cost of solar and wind energy becoming increasingly competitive with new build coal, and increased investment in electricity transmission and storage, a 100 per cent renewable Australia is a viable prospect.

Despite the ACT's excellent progress, there is more that can be done to boost the use of renewables not just in the ACT, but across Australia. While the ACT is already a strong purchaser of renewable energy, it can play a greater role in helping the rest of Australia move away from 'dirty' energy by contributing to renewable energy research, investing in renewables technology development and deployment, and by playing a strong advocacy role through the National Cabinet process.

There are a range of opportunities for the ACT Government to boost renewable energy.

First, WCCC would welcome the finalisation of the Government's 2020-25 Sustainable Energy Policy. WCCC notes that a final Strategy has not been released, despite consultation throughout 2019. WCCC encourages the Government to finalise this policy as soon as possible.

The draft Sustainable Energy Policy noted that there are currently multiple players in the ACT across research, start-ups and larger corporations and that further work is needed to build better interconnectedness among these players to facilitate wider collaboration. WCCC encourages the Government to invest in initiatives that support research collaboration and technical collaboration on technology development and deployment. Further, the ACT Government can do more to promote Canberra as a place of opportunity for clean energy research, given the world class educational institutions that operate here in addition to being the home of the CSIRO and Geoscience Australia.

Second, WCCC notes the significant support that has been provided by the ACT Government in recent years to support the uptake of solar, especially the Solar for Low Income Program. WCCC supports continued investment in solar programs including extending financial supports and grants to eligible small businesses (building on the previous trial). WCCC would welcome the development of a new program to install solar in all community facilities to reduce electricity costs.

Third, WCCC notes the opportunities presented by the opening of the ACTEWAGL Hydrogen Refuelling Station in Fyshwick, and welcomes the development of more pilot projects using alternative fuels.

There are also a range of challenges for the ACT Government to boost renewable energy.

First, WCCC notes the importance of engaging authentically with the ACT Community on these matters and ensuring thorough consultation on renewable energy projects and programs. WCCC considers the vital ingredients to the success of true energy innovation for the whole ACT community rests with strong foundations of working partnerships with all stakeholders.

Second, WCCC notes the importance of setting clear and measurable goals. Whatever initiatives are eventually determined need to be underpinned by a long term, ambitious and achievable plan that includes measurable objectives and milestones and supported by solid governance arrangements.

b. Opportunities and challenges to establish the ACT as a national hub for renewable energy technologies and industries including zero emissions vehicles

As noted, the ACT is one of only a few jurisdictions globally whose electricity generation is 100 per cent renewable. However, only a small proportion of this renewable energy is actually produced within the ACT, with the rest being purchased from other renewable energy sources across the National Energy Market. While WCCC is supportive of the ACT's transition to 100 per cent renewable energy, WCCC notes that if Australia is to continue to reduce its emissions, more needs to be done to transition the entire National Energy Market to renewable sources.

There are opportunities to establish the ACT as a national hub for renewable energy.

First, the ACT can play an important role in this transition of the National Energy Market towards 100 per cent renewables by investing in building more solar and wind farms within our borders, and in electricity storage technology. The ACT Government should conduct an examination of viable sites for these solar and wind farms across the territory, and consider co-partnering with private industry for their development.

Second, WCCC notes that the ACT Government can invest in a range of demonstration projects including solar energy cooperatives, neighbourhood batteries and roof top solar and gardens.

Third, WCCC encourages the ACT Government to invest in smart technologies to lower electricity demand through such adaptations as smart sensors on streetlights, and movement sensors on footpaths.

Fourth, WCCC supports the development of the Big Canberra Battery, to reduce pressure off the grid.

There are also challenges to establish the ACT as a national hub for renewable energy

First, WCCC notes that a lack of charging infrastructure can be a significant disincentive to consumers purchasing electric vehicles. WCCC supports the ACT Government investing in publically available charging infrastructure for electric vehicles. By providing more electric vehicles charging stations across the Territory, consumers will have more confidence to purchase electric vehicles.

Second, WCCC notes that modern apartment buildings are not built with adequate charging infrastructure as standard. WCCC encourages the ACT Government to change relevant planning and building codes to ensure that medium and high density apartments are provided with adequate electrical infrastructure in their basement and outdoor car parks to allow electric vehicle users to charge their cars at home.

c. Opportunities and challenges to innovatively finance and/or manage renewable energy in the ACT

Globally, according to the International Energy Agency, renewables used for generating electricity grew in 2020 in contrast to other fuel sources. Investor appetite in renewables also remains strong. This strong growth in demand for renewable energy lends itself to increased investment and more innovative approaches to project financing. To date innovative financing for renewable energy has not been widely applied to the energy sector globally.

WCCC supports the government considering more innovative financing options to support the development of renewable energy, such as loan guarantees or other mechanisms that reduce risk and encourage the participation of private capital in energy infrastructure.

WCCC also notes that to effectively manage renewable energy in the ACT, ACT planning laws need a complete overhaul. The Planning Act needs to be codified to protect the environment. Further, the building code, assessment criteria, and appeals processes all need to be rewritten so that developers

cannot put their interest and profits ahead of the environment, and win on appeal due to some minor technicality.

In addition, WCCC notes that the responsibility of financing renewable priorities should not always fall to the consumer and/or homeowner. As taxpayers and rates payers, it is reasonable to expect government investment and accountability of the Budget. WCCC does not consider or agree this to be an invitation to sell off land, reduce plot sizes or rezone open green spaces. Rather, WCCC seek face to face conversations to discuss innovative ideas. Of note, it is entirely reasonable that the fortuitous revenue gained from the current trend of licenced clubs seeking to deconcessionalise their leasehold arrangements be quarantined. This commercial profit of fortuitous revenue should be hypothecated into a renewable energy investment fund. A local example of such a deconcessionalisation is the Canberra Raiders' Weston Creek site.

d. Strategies to address limitations to collaboration and innovation between renewable energy stakeholders

According to the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, of the ACT Government, transport is expected to account for over 60 per cent of the ACT's emissions from 2020. Therefore, efficiencies in all modes of transport need to be investigated.

In response to the *Moving Canberra: Integrated Transport Strategy*, WCCC makes the following suggestions:

First, there needs to be greater attention given to a successful integrated transport network with more active travel. For the Weston Creek area, this could include improving the park and ride facilities so that public transport confidence and usage could be increased to at least pre-COVID-19 levels. In particular, we recommend that the Weston Creek/Duffy terminus at Hindmarsh Drive be designed to include a battery storage station as part of the Canberra battery plan

Second, WCCC recommends the ACT Government continue to consult with bicycle riders to decrease dependence on cars. To reach the Government goals of Australia's Cycling Capital and Most Walkable City, we require well maintained and safe infrastructure.

Third, WCCC supports electrifying the ACT's bus fleet and thinking more creatively in the design of bus routes and other transport infrastructure.

Fourth, WCCC also recommends the ACT Government consider the installation of charging hubs for personal mobility devices such as electric bikes and scooters at various locations around the city.

e. The effectiveness of administration and funding of Australian Capital Territory Government policy and regulatory settings relating to renewable energy, climate action and emissions reduction

As previously noted, WCCC calls on the ACT Government to address the complexities and contradictions in the ACT's planning laws. Other Government climate actions that would show good will to the community would include:

- Rezoning of the affectionately named "Cools Park" to green open space is a high priority for residents and is fully supported by WCCC. Increasing urban heat is a serious issue in Weston Creek. (Source: CSIRO Report. Living Infrastructure Plan: Cooling the City).
- Living infrastructure, trees and green spaces are vital in improving community resilience to climate change. Residents are well-aware of the urban heat island effect which leads to higher temperatures.
- Rooftop gardens and walls can retain temperature stability. Incorporation of these innovations in the upgrades to the Coleman Court precinct would support the community's desire for a better aesthetic as well as address climate concerns for the area.

f. Opportunities and challenges in battery storage including neighbourhood scale batteries and vehicle to grid technologies

WCCC has witnessed missed opportunities from the ACT Government in recent consultations. For example, the Duffy Shops proposal did not appear to have any reference to renewable energy technologies. Simple steps could easily be undertaken in this and other upgrades.

Suggestions include:

- Battery charging stations at high community use sites (including Duffy shops, Arawang netball courts, Fischer shops and Coleman Court).
- Local shop owners and homeowners could be given grants to invest

g. Any other relevant matters

WCCC encourages the Committee to consult on proposed solutions once they are devised.

WCCC notes that care is required when formulating policy responses in order to avoid creating market distortions. For example, there are reports that solar panel installations have troughed while the community awaits the release of the details of the Government's loans scheme.

WCCC is also concerned that any subsidy will see retail prices rise by an equivalent amount.

Finally, WCCC welcome greater transparency on government expenditure in relation to renewables. For example, what proportion of the ACT Budget is spent on renewables.