



# PEOPLE, SOCIETY AND INSTITUTIONS

Chaired by Peter Hansford  
Deakin University

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## **Social licence for offshore wind energy in Australia**

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Offshore wind energy is potentially going to play a key role in Australia's transition to a low carbon future. One area of research that is currently being neglected in the discussion is the Australian public's appetite for, understanding of, and the general social licence to operate offshore wind farms. In other countries, ignoring public perceptions and the social licence has been perilous to the development of offshore wind. Perceived issues such as impacts on visual amenity, marine access, and environmental impacts have dominated public discourse around offshore wind farms. We take an Australian national snapshot of the social licence for offshore wind energy. Using established social survey and economic non-market valuation methods to understand values and preferences, this snapshot captures the current social licence of offshore wind renewables, detect sticking points, and identifies optimal pathways forward for offshore wind in Australia.

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## **Creating 'lasting and meaningful' benefits from new energy projects: what communities in Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) expect for a social licence to operate.**

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Energy transition requires the deployment of new energy infrastructure at unprecedented scales and accelerated timelines, often in regions where there has been very little exposure to new development initiatives. One response to the challenge is to identify Renewable Energy Zones where there are good quality renewable energy resources, suitable land uses and where investment in renewable energy infrastructure is likely to be most cost-effective. To gain the necessary social acceptance, there is also a focus on aligning new energy projects with 'lasting and meaningful' benefits for host communities. This paper presents findings from 5 focus group discussions held across 3 REZ communities in Queensland - chosen to represent a range of previous experiences with large projects, including CSG-LNG development. Participants were asked to describe their expectations in relation to benefits arising from new energy projects, what conditions and factors would facilitate or hinder social acceptance, and what they felt their community needed to be prepared for accelerated energy transition. Key messages are around communication and engagement, thoughtful and strategic planning, strengths-based community development, livability and coexistence.

## Accelerating corporate Australia's delivery and implementation of Net Zero by 2050 strategies

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Countries around the world have widely embraced Net Zero emissions targets to combat climate change and limit global temperature rises to 1.5°C. This momentum has also transferred into the corporate world, with 45% of ASX200 companies committing to achieve Net Zero by 2050 in their own businesses as of March 2022 (Climateworks Centre, 2022). While these commitments and targets represent a positive shift in terms of the energy transition, Australian organisations still have further to progress, and converting these goals to achievable strategies for implementation is no simple task. This research accordingly aims to explore corporate Australia's current commitments to Net Zero by 2050, and specifically, examines company directors and senior leaders' role in leading, and ultimately accelerating this transition process.

While research continues to identify technological and operational pathways for organisations to achieve Net Zero emissions, limited research has explored how boards, directors and senior leaders can best lead, support and implement Net Zero by 2050 strategies. There is some emergent research regarding climate governance, and how climate or carbon policy levers can motivate companies to act in other jurisdictions (see Atif et al., 2021; Bui et al., 2020; Cosma et al., 2021; Crichton et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2023), however we believe an exploration of Net Zero by 2050 commitments in the context of corporate Australia is an important consideration for the nation's wider energy transition ambitions.

This research combines content analysis of ASX200 company's climate and sustainability reports, and semi-structured interviews with directors and senior leaders of ASX200 companies to address this research gap. Preliminary findings about best practice approaches to Net Zero by 2050 in ASX200 companies, identification of challenges that are currently impacting the delivery and implementation of these plans, and what could help accelerate this process will be presented. It is expected that this research will support directors and senior leaders in their roles to deliver Net Zero by 2050 targets, and consequently help Australia achieve its broader energy transition goals.

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## **ESG risks in the supply chain: A blind spot in the energy transition**

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Governments and companies worldwide are pledging to achieve net-zero emissions of greenhouse gases. However, reaching net-zero emissions will require a transformation of the global economy affecting all countries and all sectors of the economy. The Australian Government has promised 82 per cent national renewable electricity generation by 2030 but the current energy transition strategies have fundamental short-term and long-term environmental, social and governance (ESG) risks associated with the critical minerals and energy supply chain. More specifically, the current energy transition policies and strategies do not fully consider the significant ESG risks associated with critical minerals supply chain including labour force disruption, geo-political risks, the lack of diversification and human rights violations, greenwashing, waste management, supplier engagement, data protection and diversity, equity and inclusion. If not properly managed, such risks have significant adverse consequences to economic and social sustainability thereby jeopardising commitments towards the UN Sustainability Goals and Net Zero aspirations by 2050. In our paper, we systematically identify the key ESG risks associated with energy transition supply chain compromising both social and environmental performance and the Social License to Operate. Borrowing from the literature and anecdotal evidence internationally, we then provide strategies and guidelines to manage these challenges to achieve our net zero goals sustainably. Findings from our study therefore have important policy ramifications for regulators, governments, the private sector and communities globally.

