

GOULBURN MURRAY CLIMATE ALLIANCE  
SUBMISSION TO CONSULTATION  
Victorian Renewable Energy Zones Development Plan  
Discussion Paper 2021  
Department of Energy, Land Water and Planning



The proactive initiative to plan and develop Renewable Energy Zones is welcome.

The GMCA works with councils in the Central North and Ovens Murray REZs (see attached). The GMCA makes the requests in this submission to aid councils and communities to understand the final Victorian Renewable Energy Zones Development Plan and Implementation Plan.

Understanding the technical and economic benefits of the state distribution network is outside the scope of most Councils.

Councils want to understand the economic and community benefits and impacts of proposed network projects in their regions, for example

- AEMO (ISP 2020\*) notes that solar generation enquires in the Central North REZ exceed 2.5 GW. The VNI West upgrade has been confirmed to route via Kerang. If the Shepparton route option had been chosen, the ability for renewable generation to connect in this zone would have increased by about 2000 MW. Will the projects outlined on page 14 achieve similar capacity increases for the Central North REZ?
- Are the projects in the Central North REZ all committed or are there combinations of transmission and battery options? How do these options match or encourage use of renewable energy within the REZ, or increase export from the REZ? What does this mean to economic development and community benefit in the REZ? What are the timing options for these projects?
- Do the synchronous generators improve voltage issues and power service in major centres in the REZs that could be constraining business development?
- The Ovens Murray REZ is not included in the discussion paper, as it was identified by AEMO for its pumped hydro potential, which AEMO notes may not be needed before 2040. However, AEMO (ISP 2020\*) notes 'Ovens Murray is close to both the Melbourne load centre and the solar generation projected for Central North Victoria and has thus been suggested for storage under this scenario'. Does the proposed transmission connection between Shepparton and Dederang account for the potential for storage interplay between the Central North and Ovens Murray REZs?

It is recommended that engagement occurs with councils and key business and community stakeholders in the REZs to enable discussion of the implications of the proposed developments to medium and long term economic development and community benefit.

The Hume Regional Renewable Energy Roadmap involved extensive consultation with councils and community.

A feature of this project was an engagement and information campaign to help the community understand the community benefits of renewable energy. Interest is high with multiple community energy groups operating in all councils in the Hume region. While the REZ involves transmission infrastructure and not distribution systems, it is essential that all energy programs deliver relevant community information, and build the social capital needed for the success of projects.

#### The Role of VicGrid – Recommended additional responsibilities of VicGrid

- The role to “lead community engagement and benefit sharing” should be broader than REZ projects. The potential projects in REZ development assess the possibility of community concern. Engagement must not be isolated to just project development. Sustained community engagement will aid the transition to renewable energy by building social capital and support for new projects such as the network enhancements. This engagement should commence now as the directions paper is identifying major projects and needs to be matched with active and early engagement. Experience has shown projects that invest in local engagement reduce the barriers to development. The discussion paper does not lend itself to engage with the community and more relevant information should be developed in tandem with REZ planning..
- Benefit sharing is an essential component of energy projects. Renewable energy projects have also financed direct benefits, and communities have shown their willingness, and expectation, to join in decisions about planning suitable community projects.
- ‘Supporting regional economic development opportunities’ should include active development to ensure regional businesses increase knowledge and capacity to participate and benefit from projects of the REZ.
- This includes procurement practice to include regional business as contractors and subcontractors. The work of VicGrid should include business development to enable communities to benefit from labour and materials supplied to these projects.
- An additional part of the VicGrid role is evaluating the preparedness of REZ assets in the Victorian network as a whole to be prepared for major disruption in the system due to severe events of storm, fire, heatwave which will increase due to climate change
- Communities experienced the hazards of network failure during the 2019-20 bushfires. The criteria for new projects should include contingency for such events as well as the criteria to be efficient and deliver an economic return to the state. Mitigating the impact of severe events also has a long term economic and social value.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

Regards

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*The GMCA has recently changed its name from Goulburn Broken Greenhouse Alliance to reflect the geographic expansion of the group to 16 councils and members across the Goulburn Broken and North East areas of Victoria.*

\* AEMO Australian Energy Market Operator, Integrated System Plan Appendix 5, July 2020

## **COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP OF THE GOULBURN MURRAY CLIMATE ALLIANCE**

Alpine Shire Council  
Benalla Rural City Council  
Campaspe Shire Council  
Greater Shepparton City Council  
Indigo Shire Council  
Mansfield Shire Council  
Moirra Shire Council  
Mitchell Shire Council  
Murrindindi Shire Council  
Strathbogie Shire Council  
Towong Shire Council  
Wangaratta Rural City  
City of Wodonga