

"Community support for renewables isn't bought, it's earned", Squadron boss says

Rob Wheals highlights the significance of renewable industry working with local communities

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Solar panels wind turbines installed as renewable energy sources. Credit: Shutterstock/Mr Kosal

Squadron Energy CEO Rob Wheals warns that up to 20,000 jobs could be at stake by the end of the decade if Australia's regional communities aren't incorporated in the renewable energy shift.

According to new research by Squadron and the Regional Australia Institute (RAI), renewable energy projects will create 6,400 jobs across Australia by 2030, primarily in the construction, engineering and professional design industries.

The research shows there will be another 7,600 jobs in industries like transport and manufacturing, and the consumption created in the regions – with more people working and living locally – creates an extra 5,700 jobs.

"Regional Australia is where our heart lives," Wheals said.



Rob Wheals addresses at the Regions Rising National Summit. Credit: Squadron Energy

"Our agricultural roots, Indigenous Australians' deep commitment to Country or simply a love of the great outdoors, Australians have an affinity to regional communities.

"Renewables companies must share their knowledge with the entire industry.

"There's nothing that country people hate more than being talked at by folks from the city while not really being able to decide what's best for them locally."

The CEO urged clean energy players to follow three practices when engaging with the regional communities to ensure the transformation is on the right track.

"Through deep listening," he said, "Understand local pinch points and ensure your company has a proper local presence.

"Look to the future. What do job and training opportunities look like in a localised context? What does future growth look like?

"Invest in the heart of a community - invest in what they need to build their capacity and ensure they are sustainable long term for their community."

Wheals also stated that the renewable energy industry and governments at all levels need to explain better the vast benefits of the transition to clean energy.

To make the move to renewables, get the communities engaged

Satya Tanner, the CEO of LAUTEC Australia and a member of the Climate Capital Forum, agreed with Wheals and said the shift in Australia's energy system brings tremendous opportunity for the regions.

"This is our chance to re-invigorate, not only our energy system but the energy and economic security of the regions," Tanner told Energy News Bulletin.

"Where energy flows, money flows and community participation is essential to a prosperous future for all."



Satya Tanner. Credit: LAUTEC Australia

[In a recent opinion piece](#) for ENB, Tanner noted that community planning participation would provide community members with a better-detailed understanding of the project's location requirements, site constraints, and wider concerns and needs of the community.

"Any success will depend on the outcome of engaging with communities, both in specific locations and more broadly across the country, in a way that communicates the opportunity well and invites participation," she noted.

"We know that unsatisfactory consultation processes on renewables projects have caused problems.

Renewable energy company pulls out proposal due to lack of community support

In July, Ark Energy announced that it would [withdraw its Doughboy Wind Farm project](#) in NSW from the federal environmental assessment process following a change of mind from some of the project's involved landowners.

The proposed wind farm involved up to 55 wind turbines, with an output capacity of about 340 MW, 50 km east of Armidale within the NSW government's New England Renewable Energy Zone.

The company acknowledged that the site is excellent for wind energy generation, saying it "may reconsider the project with a different design at a later date, and pending further consultation".

Ark Energy declined to comment further on the project withdrawal.

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