

Hon Reece Whitby MLA  
Minister for Energy; Environment; Climate Action  
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23rd July 2024

Dear Minister Whitby,

Many thanks for you and Ms Rachelle Gill taking time out of your busy schedules to meet with myself, Dr Rob Phillips (Vice Chair) and Darren Flynn (Events Coordinator) on the 16<sup>th</sup> of July 2024. We appreciate the open and frank nature of the meeting, and look forward to similar discussions in the future as the transition progresses.

We are supportive of the government's efforts to date in the clean energy transition, and we were pleased to find we are aligned on the scale of the challenge ahead. We recognise that the government is looking for innovative ways to meet this challenge, and we encourage the government to be ambitious in this area.

We discussed the following areas in our conversation and provide additional feedback below:

### **Community Engagement and Communication**

We support the Government's focus on social licence and community social value in WA and protecting natural areas during the clean energy transition.

There has been a gap in clear communication from Federal and State Governments on the clean energy transition. This has allowed bad faith actors to step in with mis-information and deliberate dis-information. This makes the clean energy transition doubly difficult with rising social licence issues you referred to in the Eastern States surfacing in WA, as noted in the ABC Four Corners program "Wind Wars" and their coverage of the Bunbury Offshore Wind Zone.

We encourage the State Government to fully support Powering WA's communications efforts and to engage with community groups in effective and proactive communication well ahead of any specific development plans.

As information about what the state is planning becomes available, SEN stand ready to assist in sharing such information across our networks. SEN is willing to support and work with the State Government on this. We have strong links to the environmental movement and are considered trustworthy by our eNGO peers on energy policy.

### **Electricity Network Infrastructure Investment**

We understand the Government's 'user pays' position, aiming to minimise State debt, although we note that such debt can be subsequently recovered over time via network access fees.

It is positive that the Government is carefully analysing the need for HV transmission, rather than simply accepting the SWIS Demand Assessment figure of 4,000km.

The proposed Goldfields grid will potentially reduce some of that demand for transmission. We look forward to learning how this will be funded and managed. Introducing innovative funding, construction and potentially ownership models for transmission could be important in accelerating

the WA energy transition. Simply placing the onus for transmission investment on electricity market participants (generators or consumers) may have a negative impact on private capital investment.

In considering optimisation of transmission investment, SEN have discussed with leading academics on the East Coast the idea of a substantial increase in rooftop solar and behind the meter battery storage (especially in the commercial and industrial sectors). This contrasts with the model preferred by planning agencies and industry, that is, large-scale development of wind farms and associated transmission upgrades. Notwithstanding the current pipeline of approved renewable energy projects, and Western Power's Clean Energy Link, we think there is scope to look at alternatives to optimise future investment. This idea builds on and extends the success and learnings from Project Symphony. With the right policy settings and supporting rule changes, we think this innovative idea will have support from industry and the wider community.

In closing, we reiterate the scale and urgency of the task ahead, and suggest that transmission should be planned and fast tracked to address decarbonisation via electrification of existing industry sectors, including transport. Priority should be given to renewable energy hubs in areas where wind resources have a different geographical profile and where transmission investment is optimised.

Again, thank you for your and Ms Rachelle Gill's time and, if any of the above is of interest, we look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Fraser Maywood  
Chair

Communication approved by the Management Committee via circular resolution dated 22nd July 2024.

