RESPONSE TO PETITION

Petition No. 14 and 16 of 2024
House of Assembly

The petitioners ask the House to:

Call on the Government to

- Immediately stop Renewable Energy Zoning, and approvals, construction of wind power projects and infrastructure, including Marinus Link.

- Thoroughly research the negative effects of wind projects beyond economics.

GOVERNMENT POSITION:

RESPONSE:

- While Tasmania is already able to generate the majority of its electricity from renewable sources, growth in state population and increased electrification in the business and transport sectors are expected to increase future energy demand in Tasmania.

- The Australian Energy Market Operator forecasts around 1000 gigawatt hours of new generation will be required by 2030-31 to support electrification and decarbonisation in the state.

- Additionally, the Government has identified that Tasmania has the potential to aid the national transition to renewable generation that is underway. Much like the exports from our agricultural sector, we can export Tasmanian electricity and benefit the state.

- Developing new sources of renewable energy generation, like wind and solar, will help us meet this increased demand and maintain our renewable energy credentials.

- Consequently, in 2020 we legislated the Tasmanian Renewable Energy Target (TRET), with the aim of doubling our renewable energy generation by our 2020 baseline by 2040.

- The government is agnostic to the type of renewable generation to meet TRET.
- In order to support the development of new generation needed for Tasmania's own future, further interconnection with the mainland is needed. This is of strategic significance for both Tasmania and Australia as it will help secure the state's energy security and increase our ability to aid the transition to renewables underway in the wider National Electricity Market.

- Further interconnection will be provided through Marinus Link; a planned 1500MW electricity interconnector between Tasmanian and Victoria, to be delivered in two 750MW stages. It is supported by upgrades to the transmission network in the north-west of the state, known as the North West Transmission Development (NWTD).

- The Tasmanian Government is undertaking a Whole of State Business Case (WoSBC) to comprehensively consider the opportunities and impacts of Project Marinus for Tasmania.

- The WoSBC will also consider the grid reliability impacts of progressing or not progressing Marinus Link and associated projects.

- The WoSBC will be completed and independently peer-reviewed at least 30 days before a financial investment decision (FID) is due and will be made publicly available.

- The Marinus and NWTD projects are still subject to standard development and environmental approvals, which will be completed in parallel with the FID. These approval processes allow for public representations as a matter of due process.

- For example, Marinus Link has recently lodged its development application for the Heybridge Converter Station site with Burnie City Council. The application includes an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) which covers the environmental impacts of the project as it comes ashore in Tasmania and on the Heybridge site itself.

- Wind and solar farm proposals are required to undergo rigorous planning and assessment processes to ensure they are appropriately sited and designed to minimise environment and social impact. This includes considering factors such as landscape character (capturing shadow flicker), community views, and tourism value.

- Regulatory bodies such as the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and Tasmanian Planning Commission play a role in ensuring that renewable energy developers meet their legal and environmental obligations through the assessment and approval processes, requiring transparency in project reporting and monitoring compliance with environmental conditions. This helps to ensures companies are operating in a sustainable manner and are accountable to both the public and environmental expectations.

- As with any development in the state, windfarms are required to consider and mitigate potential impacts on the environment. Each new wind farm must ensure it meets stringent environmental standards.

- Whether projects meet these standards is assessed by Tasmania's independent Environmental Authority (EPA), who assesses environmental risks of developing new generation and transmission and sets operating requirements for any approved wind farms. There are investigation and compliance powers under both state and federal legislation to assist in the enforcement of environmental requirements.

- Public input is an essential part of these processes, with opportunities for community engagement built into various stages of assessment. This includes a

public exhibition of the approval documentation, which the responsible regulator will advertise.

- As part of the protection of flora and fauna, recent approval conditions for wind projects also require erosion and sediment control plans. The Tasmanian Government also recently committed to ongoing funding to the Save the Tasmanian Devil Program, as well as establishing a new Threatened Species Fund for Tasmania. Such measures help to protect biodiversity through construction and operation phases of new projects.

- A wind farm is expected to have an operational life of approximately 20 to 30 years. After this time, the project owner will either decommission the site and, as part of its environmental approval, be required to restore the area to its previous land use or negotiate with the landowners to repower or upgrade the equipment and extend the wind farm's operational lifespan.

- The EPA and planning authorities require developers to create a decommissioning plan before construction begins, outlining the steps for removing infrastructure, restoring the land, and managing waste.

- In Tasmania, such pollution, including noise, is regulated through strict assessment and approval processes set out under the *Environment Management and Pollution Control Act 1994* and regulated by the EPA.

- The Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner, a Federal statutory position charged with representing landholder interests in disputes with renewables proponents, recommends turbines should be at least 1.5 kilometres from neighbouring residences to address noise concerns.

- BPA levels in food are also monitored to assess the impact on humans. For example, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) undertakes the Australian Total Diet Survey that measures BPA levels in some foods. The results of the most recent survey in 2016 indicated the dietary exposure to BPA in Australia is low and within acceptable safe exposure limits[1].

- TasWater is the responsible authority for the testing of drinking water in Tasmania and their comprehensive water quality testing program is agreed with the Department of Health as required by the Tasmanian Drinking Water Quality Guidelines. These testing programs and proactive risk management of water quality is developed in accordance with the best practise 12 Element framework of the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines (ADWG) published by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)[2.]

- Water impacts, such as groundwater, are a standard consideration in any construction project, including wind farms. These risks are carefully assessed and managed through established mitigation measures.

- Fire risks and mitigation responses are also considered as part of the development process. In the event of a wind turbine fire, or fires in areas

[1] Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ), 2014. 24th Australian Total Diet Study, https://www.foodstandards.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-11/24th%20Total%20Diet%20Study_Phase%202.pdf

[2] https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/australian-drinking-water-guidelines#block-views-block-file-attachments-content-block-1.

surrounding wind farms, the Tasmanian Fire Service and wind farm operators have standard procedures, emergency plans and training in place.

- As part of the approval process for renewable energy projects, a thorough Aboriginal Tasmanian Heritage Assessment is required to ensure that potential impacts on Aboriginal cultural heritage are carefully considered and minimised. This assessment involves a detailed review of the proposed project site to identify any Aboriginal cultural sites, objects, or areas of significance, such as middens, artefacts, or burial sites. It includes consultation with Aboriginal communities and heritage experts to ensure that the project complies with the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1975* and that appropriate measures are taken to protect and preserve any identified cultural heritage.

- In relation to health regulation, there is no proven link to health impacts from wind farms. Seventeen independent reviews by leading health organisations, including the World Health Organization (WHO), Australia's National Health and Medical Research Council, the UK Health Protection Agency, and the US National Research Council, have found no published evidence linking wind turbines to adverse health effects.

- Scientific research around the impacts of infrasound is relatively new, however, the research that exists suggests infrasound does not cause any psychological or physiological impacts. No public health regulations currently govern this issue which suggest it is not deemed necessary to regulate.

- The government understands the importance of communities being meaningfully engaged in the process of new renewable energy development and that they are provided with a range of opportunities to provide input.

- In addition to public consultation processes on individual proposals through the statutory approvals processes, the Tasmanian Government is also exploring further ways in which local communities can have their say on energy generation projects in their area.

- The Tasmanian Government's *Community Engagement, Benefit Sharing and Local Procurement Guideline* (the Guideline) sets a standard for best practice community engagement for renewable energy development in Tasmania. Developers operating in Tasmania are expected to meet this standard.

- In addition to setting expectations for how, when and who is engaged, the Guideline sets out the expectation for a benefit sharing budget to be set aside by the proponent of a new generation or transmission project. This would see funds delivered directly into an impacted community to ensure lasting benefit is delivered and project impacts are mitigated.

- Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) are one way to facilitate additional energy generation for the state and deliver the accompanying transmission that may be required. REZ is particularly useful as a coordination tool if the level of demand requires multiple new generation projects and new transmission capacity.

- The concept of REZ is to identify geographic areas where new renewables can best co-exist with existing land uses while ensuring environmental, cultural and social values are considered.

- REZ models then aim to utilise existing transmission capacity where it exists, share the cost of additional required transmission and reduce the potential for congestion. These features in turn lower a proponent's cost of capital and delivers the lowest cost new generation to consumers.

- A REZ model also provides optionality for parties other than consumers to pay for required transmission infrastructure, in particular the project proponents who would benefit from new REZ infrastructure.

- Ultimately REZ seeks to reduce the amount of transmission being built for a given level of new generation by confining the generation to a geographic area. The alternative is for projects to locate in a dispersed way around the grid, each potentially requiring their own transmission upgrades.

- All projects within a REZ would still be required to undergo standard planning and environmental approval processes.

- Extensive consultation was undertaken on a REZ proposal for Tasmania last year, and the Government is currently considering community feedback.

- The Government must be confident a REZ must add value to the community and to proponents before proceeding.

- While renewable energy projects can promote economic growth and attract workers and families to the host region, this can potentially impact the availability of accommodation and local services.

- Proponents typically speak to local councils early in their engagement to understand the local landscape and I understand there are many innovative solutions to the housing issue being considered. For example, one council has spoken to developers about repurposing any construction phase accommodation so that it could be turned into aged care facilities to cater for its demographics into the next decade.

- Workforce planning is also a key consideration. Government is playing a role through Skills Tasmania who works to forecast labour and skills requirements, helping to ensure that local workers are equipped to take advantage of job opportunities created by renewable energy projects. Jobs and Skills Australia also provides workforce analysis and planning to support industry needs. These efforts help reduce reliance on fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) workers and maximise local employment benefits. As indicated, it is our hope that an extended pipeline of construction over the next decade will ensure long term opportunities for Tasmanians.

- The Tasmanian Government is committed to balancing the development of renewable energy with the long-term prosperity of the state and its foundational industries.

- Progressing the Government's renewable energy agenda does not need to come at the expense of other key industries like agriculture or tourism. In fact, these priorities can complement and strengthen each other.

- Facilitating renewable energy development provides competitive power supply options for businesses—including farms, food producers, and tourism operators. More electricity generation in Tasmania allows existing businesses to expand and

new businesses to establish here, enabling economic growth in many industries in the state.

- A strong renewable energy sector also creates jobs, attracts investment, and can further enhance Tasmania's clean, green reputation, making our agricultural products even more desirable and positioning the state as a world-class eco-tourism destination.

- It is misleading to assert that providing what are small tracts of land over to the energy sector will mean the demise of agriculture, tourism or land values. By pursuing these priorities together, Tasmania can build a more resilient and diverse economy, ensuring long-term prosperity for all sectors.

Hon Nick Duigan MLC

Minister for Energy and Renewables

Date: 05/05/2025