

The Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and
Biodiversity
GPO Box 1020
Canberra ACT 2601

Via email: LCommitteeECCB@parliament.act.gov.au

Dear Dr Scott

Submission: Inquiry into Renewable Energy Innovation in the ACT

The ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity Inquiry into Renewable Energy Innovation in the ACT.

About ACTCOSS

ACTCOSS represents not-for-profit community organisations and advocates for social justice in the ACT. In partnership with Care Inc., ACTCOSS leads the ACT Energised Consumers Project which is co-funded by Energy Consumers Australia (ECA) and the ACT Government. Through this project ACTCOSS advocates for residential, not-for-profit, and small business energy consumers in the ACT. Through this project, ACTCOSS also advocates for a just transition to net zero greenhouse gas emissions in the ACT and fair and just outcomes for low-income households in relation to energy more broadly.

Scope of the inquiry

We understand that through this inquiry, the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity will investigate the opportunities and challenges to establish the ACT as a national hub for renewable energy innovation. The Committee will examine areas including research, technology development, innovative financing, collaboration, and energy storage.

The Terms of Reference of this inquiry include:

- a. opportunities and challenges to boost renewable energy research, technology development and new zero emissions industries in the ACT

- b. opportunities and challenges to establish the ACT as a national hub for renewable energy technologies and industries including zero emissions vehicles
- c. opportunities and challenges to innovatively finance and/or manage renewable energy in the ACT
- d. strategies to address limitations to collaboration and innovation between renewable energy stakeholders
- e. the effectiveness of administration and funding of Australian Capital Territory Government policy and regulatory settings relating to renewable energy, climate action and emissions reduction
- f. opportunities and challenges in battery storage including neighbourhood-scale batteries and vehicle-to-grid technologies
- g. any other relevant matters.

In relation to these Terms of Reference, ACTCOSS has identified five high-level recommendations that should underpin and guide measures to address the opportunities and challenges to establish the ACT as a national hub for renewable energy innovation.

Recommendation 1: Renewable energy innovation must contribute to achieving social goals as part of a just transition

Renewable energy innovation is a fundamental component of action on climate change. It is critical that climate action does not cause, entrench, or exacerbate disadvantage. Instead, it must pursue a just energy transition to net zero emissions which contributes to core social goals of reducing poverty and inequality and improving individual and community wellbeing. Renewable energy innovation, particularly that which is publicly funded or receives other community support, should aim to achieve a more equitable, affordable, and sustainable energy system. To do this, innovation must identify and address barriers to individuals, households, and communities participating in and benefiting from the energy transition.

Renewable energy innovation has a critical role to play in ensuring that ACT households – especially those on low income or experiencing disadvantage – have equitable access to:

- affordable, safe, and reliable renewable energy

- the benefits of distributed energy resources (e.g., solar panels, batteries, and electric vehicles)
- healthy and affordable housing that is energy efficient.

Recommendation 2: Renewable energy innovation must include social innovation

To achieve these outcomes, we need to ensure that renewable energy innovation – particularly that which receives public funding or other community support – includes and integrates social innovation with technological, financial, and regulatory innovation.

In the context of energy transitions ‘social innovation’ has been defined as:

innovation that is social in its means and which contributes to low carbon energy transition, civic empowerment, and social goals pertaining to the general wellbeing of communities ...
[I]n addition to contributing to low carbon energy transition [social innovation] seeks to attain particular social goals, like community empowerment, alleviating (energy) poverty, (energy) justice, social equality, and increasing the wellbeing of local communities.¹

Social innovation around renewable energy would contribute to addressing socioeconomic and sociocultural dimensions that contribute to wellbeing across our diverse ACT community.

Recommendation 3: The community sector’s role in renewable energy innovation must be adequately recognised and resourced

Civil society – including the not-for-profit community sector – is a key site of social innovation and diversity. The community sector has a vital role to play in renewable energy innovation in the ACT to ensure that it contributes to achieving social goals so that no one is left behind in the energy transition. Social innovation practiced by the community sector needs to be adequately recognised and resourced as a fundamental element of renewable energy innovation in the ACT. This needs to include additional resources to support the development of the ACT community sector’s capacity to contribute to renewable energy innovation as part of a just transition.

¹ T Hoppe & G de Vries, Editorial: Social Innovation and the Energy Transition, *Sustainability*, 11(1), 141, 2019, pp. 8-9, <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/11/1/141>

Recommendation 4: Cross-sector collaboration in renewable energy innovation needs to be supported and encouraged including through the establishment of a mechanism for joint governance of a just transition to net zero emissions

There is a need to ensure that resources and structures are in place that support and encourage collaboration between the community sector and other sectors engaged in renewable energy innovation – including the government, for-profit business, and research sectors.

The ACT Energised Consumers Project is a community-sector-led initiative which brings together the community, business, and government sectors to inform energy policies and programs. This project provides an example of social innovation and cross-sector collaboration aimed at achieving a just transition to net zero emissions in the ACT. This project applies an equity lens to the assessment of

- e. the effectiveness of administration and funding of Australian Capital Territory Government policy and regulatory settings relating to renewable energy, climate action and emissions reduction.

It is critical that an equity lens is embedded in renewable energy innovation in the ACT so that it contributes to achieving a just transition.

The ACT Energised Consumers Project also plays an important role in identifying and addressing financial and other barriers to participating in and/or benefiting from the energy transition that are experienced by low-income or other vulnerable households (e.g., rental households).

In terms of broader governance of the transition to net zero greenhouse gas emissions in the ACT, ACTCOSS recommends that the ACT establish a mechanism for joint governance of a just transition by community, government, technical experts, and business.

Recommendation 5: The ACT should aim to be a national leader on renewable energy innovation for a just energy transition

Following from our above recommendations, a key opportunity that we have identified is to establish the ACT as a national hub for renewable energy innovation aimed at *achieving a just transition* to net zero greenhouse gas emissions. This would see the ACT provide national leadership through renewable energy

innovation – including social, technological, financial, and regulatory innovation – that contributes to community empowerment, (energy) poverty alleviation, (energy) justice, social equality, and increased wellbeing across our community while also achieving net zero emissions.

Further engagement

We thank the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity for considering the recommendations we have made in this submission to the Inquiry into Renewable Energy Innovation in the ACT.

ACTCOSS would welcome the opportunity to appear as a witness before the Standing Committee to provide further comment and respond to any questions Committee members may have in relation to our submission.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emma Campbell." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr Emma Campbell
CEO

Email: ceo@actcoss.org.au

23 April 2021