Capricorn Conservation Council — Submission to the Productivity Commission

Period: Net Zero Transformation Inquiry
Prepared: 10th September 2025
Submitted by email to: 5pillars@pc.gov.au

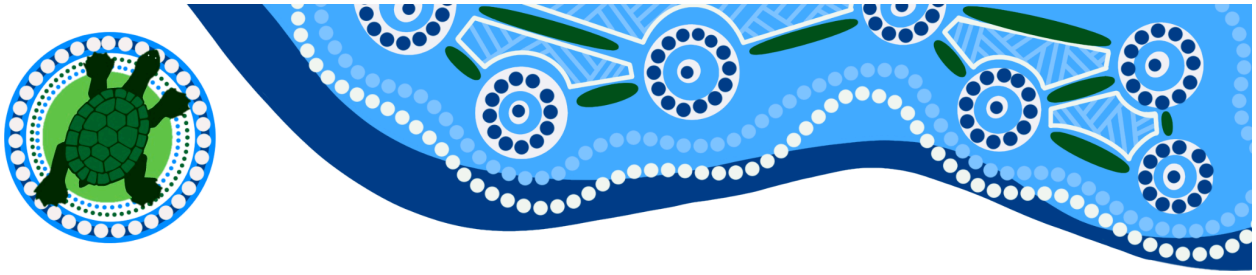
Acknowledgement of Country

The Capricorn Conservation Council acknowledges and respects the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters on which we work, and all First Nations peoples across Queensland. We pay deep respects to Elders past and present, and recognise their enduring connection to Country. Our advocacy for biodiversity and climate action is guided by First Nations knowledge, custodianship, and sovereignty.

Introduction

Capricorn Conservation Council (CCC), established in 1973, is Central Queensland's peak environmental advocacy organisation. We work with communities, government, and industry to conserve biodiversity, strengthen climate resilience, and ensure renewable energy is delivered responsibly. CCC strongly supports the submission of the Queensland Conservation Council (QCC) to this inquiry. We echo QCC's call for urgent climate action aligned with a just transition, responsible renewable energy rollout through bioregional planning, robust environmental safeguards, equitable participation for First Nations peoples, and stronger governance to prevent trading short-term economic gains for long-term ecological and community losses.

Climate Risks and Regional Impacts



Queensland is already experiencing compounding climate disasters, including cyclones, floods, fires and record-breaking heatwaves. In Central Queensland, these impacts are exacerbated by social vulnerability and biodiversity decline. The cost of inaction is far greater than the cost of ambitious decarbonisation, and communities are already paying the price through infrastructure loss, health impacts and economic disruption. The Great Barrier Reef, coastal wetlands and inland habitats are under increasing pressure, and these ecosystems underpin livelihoods and cultural connections across the state.

Renewable Energy Development and Biodiversity

CCC supports renewable energy expansion but stresses that the transition must not replicate the mistakes of fossil fuel development by sacrificing ecosystems and communities. Proposals such as Moonlight Range Wind Farm demonstrate how large-scale development can clear thousands of hectares of threatened species habitat and erode biodiversity corridors. Without rigorous cumulative impact assessment, the renewable transition risks creating new environmental crises. National bioregional planning frameworks must be established that map biodiversity corridors and cultural heritage values and guide project approvals away from high-value landscapes. Environmental assessments must follow a clear hierarchy of avoidance first, minimisation second, and offsets only as a genuine last resort. Transparent project portals with monitoring data accessible to the public are also needed to build trust in the renewable rollout.

First Nations Leadership and Consent

The First Nations Clean Energy Strategy provides a strong framework for embedding equity and cultural protection in the energy transition. CCC has consistently advocated that free, prior and informed consent must be treated as a non-negotiable standard for all energy projects. Benefit-sharing agreements must be designed to deliver lasting economic participation and capacity building for First Nations communities, not simply tokenistic gestures. Traditional Knowledge must be incorporated into environmental assessments and offset strategies, and First Nations liaison officers should be embedded in government offices such as the Coordinator-General to ensure culturally competent decision-making. Embedding these

principles will not only deliver fairness but will also strengthen the social licence of the renewable energy industry.

Governance and Safeguards

CCC supports strengthening the Safeguard Mechanism to ensure it genuinely drives down emissions. A declining cap on emissions aligned with carbon budgets is essential, and new coal and gas projects that are incompatible with net zero must not proceed. Existing inflated baselines must be tightened, and offsets should only be used as a last resort where abatement is not possible. Any offsets used should be scientifically robust and deliver biodiversity co-benefits, ensuring they contribute to ecological restoration as well as emissions reduction.

Social Impact and Community Benefit

Current planning frameworks often impose heavier requirements on renewable energy projects than on fossil fuel projects, which undermines fairness and slows down the transition. For example, renewable developers may face mandatory social impact assessments and community benefit agreements, while coal and gas projects can avoid equivalent scrutiny. This imbalance discourages investment in clean energy and risks public trust. CCC recommends that all large-scale industrial projects, including fossil fuels, be subject to consistent social and ecological assessment. Landholders and communities must be offered fair compensation and meaningful opportunities to participate in the benefits of renewable energy development. Regional energy hubs, staffed and resourced locally, would improve ongoing engagement, communication and accountability between industry, government and communities.

Adaptation and Resilience

The Commission's work must also consider adaptation alongside emissions reduction. Queensland needs greater investment in adaptation programs to safeguard vulnerable regions. For Central Queensland, this includes a national coastal resilience program modelled on QCoast 2100, a national heat adaptation program that funds green infrastructure and housing retrofits, and long-term funding certainty for local councils so they can plan beyond the cycle of short

competitive grants. Supporting resilience is essential to protect biodiversity, infrastructure, and communities as climate impacts continue to intensify.

Conclusion

The Productivity Commission has a vital opportunity to ensure that Australia's net zero transformation delivers not only cheaper, cleaner energy, but also stronger communities and ecosystems. This requires strong governance, transparent processes, robust environmental safeguards, and meaningful inclusion of First Nations leadership. CCC supports QCC's recommendations in full and stresses the importance of embedding biodiversity protection, cultural heritage safeguards, and regional equity into all aspects of the transition. Without these, Queensland risks undermining the very communities and ecosystems that the renewable energy transition is meant to protect.

Respectfully,

Capricorn Conservation Council

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We respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land and waters we conserve and protect. We pay respect to the Elders and Ancestors for they hold the memories, the culture and the dreams of Country.