

Photo: Karl von Moller at Hepburn Wind 2011

Best practice community engagement in wind development

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Introduction

Community engagement is fundamental to delivering positive and effective outcomes for wind projects.

Good community engagement practices increase the likelihood of establishing and maintaining a wind farm that brings the most mutual benefit to, and the least possible resistance from, all stakeholders. Thus, effective community engagement practices can be seen as an investment in two vital outcomes: strong communities and the future success of the wind industry. Wind farms are a commercial proposition that need to be cost competitive on the Australian landscape. However, good community engagement can come at a minumum cost and make projects meet multiple value propositions in the process.

Experience from Australia and overseas clearly indicates that active community engagement and participation are fundamental contributors to the realisation of local benefit from and support for renewable energy development[1].

Best practice community engagement goes beyond the standard consultation processes that developers typically employ to meet planning approval and compliance requirements. Good community engagement fosters relationships, trust, feelings of ownership, and a sense of collaboration through provision of meaningful, ongoing opportunities for the community to participate in a project's development.

This **Best Practice Community Engagement in Wind Development** guide outlines the outcomes of good community engagement and the fundamental principles that underpin such an approach. It presents practical tools for the assessment and implementation of community engagement practices, drawing on best practice examples from Australian and overseas wind farms.

This guide is based around three different approaches to community engagement with wind development. Each of these emphasise a different type of relationship between developers and communities: *'development to'* – inform/consult; *'development with'* – involve/collaborate; and, *'development for and by'* – empower. Within each, a range of development processes, tools and benefit sharing arrangements that can be used throughout the wind farm development process are outlined. This guide closes with a resource list for further reference.

What is community engagement?

Community engagement can be understood as the cooperative and mutually supportive participation of community members in the development process. It is a practice that fundamentally requires a two-way recognition of the existing capacities of people to be *active claim-making agents*, able to identify and participate in devising effective solutions to experienced challenges[2]. Here, the *community* is defined as all the people who live within, and identify with, a common and defined geographic area like a town or region. Marrying the term *community* to *engagement* shifts the focus of engagement from individuals to the collective and to seeking development outcomes that consider the diverse needs that exist within any community[3].

Although *community engagement* has become a commonly used term, its implementation as a practice has been highly uneven and has encompassed varying degrees of commitment to genuine participation in directing the process and outcomes of development efforts[4]. A common way of conceiving these varied levels of participation is the International Association for Public Participation' Spectrum of Public Participation[5] (modified in Table 1[6]) that positions practices along a spectrum from simply informing, through to empowering, in the process of engagement. This spectrum reflects the different degrees of influence and control given to the community through participation in planning and development.

Thus, community engagement can cover a range of activities, reflecting different desired depth of engagement. Paying close attention to which of these depths of engagement is chosen, and why, is an important aspect of designing a community engagement approach - and it is this that distinguishes the three models of wind development introduced below.

It is also important to conceptualise that the three models of wind development are also representative of a spectrum of financial approaches. With a standard development coming from a largely commercial viewpoint and the two following models moving into a blended, then whole community enterprise approach. It is vital that the business case is carefully considered to ensure all projects make commercial sense.

Although links are made here between community engagement practices and certain types of outcomes, it is important to note that every community and each circumstance is different and there is no way of guaranteeing certain outcomes, only of making them more likely.

Table 1: Community engagement spectrum for three development models

Table 1, outlines best practice community engagement across three models of wind development: standard developer; highly-engaged developer; and, community initiated and led. It draws on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation to show the varying degrees of community engagement and their outcomes. Note that outcomes are cumulative from left to right.

	Standard developer approach with compliance level community engagement only *doing development 'to' a community*		**High level of engagement or a community-developer partnership** *doing development 'with' a community*		**Community initiated wind farm** *doing a development 'for' and/or 'by' a community*
	inform	**consult**	**involve**	**collaborate**	**empower**
Community engagement objective	• provide balanced and objective information • assist community in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions	• obtain feedback on plans, options and/or decisions	• work directly with community throughout the process, from feasibility through operations and decommissioning • ensure concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	• partner with community in each aspect of planning, development and decision making , including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	• for the community to lead the development of the wind farm • place final decision-making in the hands of the community
Promise to community	• to keep the community informed	• to keep the community informed • listen and acknowledge concerns • provide feedback on how community input influenced the decision	• to work with community to ensure concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed • provide feedback on how community input influenced the decision	• look to community for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions • incorporate advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible	• to implement what the community decides
Community engagement outcomes	• securing landowner sites • gaining planning permission • meeting compliance regulations	• minimising objections • effectively managing complaints • good landholder relations • a level of community trust	• long term broad local social acceptance of the wind farm • strengthened local relationships and trust • local advocates	• community-developer partnership where a portion of the wind farm is owned by local community • greater community benefit • a welcoming and supportive host community • strong local relationships and trust • timely development of the wind farm • long term social acceptance and local advocates for the wind farm	• benefit sharing model tailored to the local context • community scaled project • harness the skills and capital of the community • upskill community members to manage the project • largely community owned and controlled

Blue represents standard developer level, green represents high level of engagement, orange represents community initiated.

Best practice is founded on being responsive and flexible to local circumstances and input. Each community is a unique context and community engagement must be tailored to local circumstances and history. Ultimately, best practice community engagement comes down to how community engagement is understood and delivered, not only what tools are used and when it happens. Below we offer principles to inform best practice.

What is best practice?

Best practice community engagement requires going beyond what is necessary to meet planning permit guidelines and compliance requirements and working to ensure that wind developments have a social license to operate for the full life cycle of the project. This is an active and ongoing process that takes ongoing negotiation and engagement at the community level.

This guide draws on existing best practice community engagement from the wind sector in Australia, especially those projects which have showcased innovative and effective approaches to community engagement and community-developer partnerships. It also draws on practices from Australian and overseas community-led wind developments that demonstrate cutting-edge community engagement practice and strongest levels of community involvement in wind projects. *Community-owned renewable energy projects* are those in which communities (of location and/or interest) are involved in every stage of initiating, developing, owning, operating and benefiting from renewable energy development. For projects such as Hepburn Wind, Australia's first community-owned wind farm, strengthening and enhancing their host community via as much participation, engagement, education and shared benefit as possible is a primary motivator.

Principles

Community support for a wind development emerges from the community being able to support what the development is trying to achieve and having a majority of the local population agreeing with how it is being delivered. A CSIRO study in 2012 found that community engagement and involvement are key factors to successful project delivery and achieving a broad *social licence to operate*. The term social licence to operate describes a "level of acceptance or approval continually granted to an organisation's operations or project by local community"[7]. This acceptance can extend beyond a specific project to general public attitudes and building a culture of support.

Seeking a social license to operate means asking the community to accept changes in their local area (to which they likely have long lasting and deep connections) because they understand the importance of the project and can see the benefits for their community. The bedrock of this is developing trust and relationships based on mutual benefit, mutual respect, on-going engagement and transparency.

Mutual benefit

Project lifecycles are decades long and it is of vital importance that consideration is given to creating conditions that seek shared outcomes of mutual benefit for the local host community, landholders and wind farm developer. Long term social acceptance has financial implications as it reduces development timelines and complaint mitigation processes.

Mutual Respect

Local communities know their community the best and will likely have good solutions for overcoming issues. Providing a space for genuine dialogue where people can participate in respectful discussions is how mutually agreeable solutions can be identified. Respectful and persistent community engagement is an effective counter to local wind farm opposition as is a continued openness to engage with opposition to seek shared understanding.

Relationship-building

The key to genuine and effective community engagement lies in building local relationships and enabling many avenues for interaction. Building networks and relationships leads to trust, key people can become embedded advocates and feedback loops to the project. It is vital to make links with key local leaders and organisations to do negotiation and relationship building with.

Authenticity

Having a local communications / community relations staff person, even if only part time, shows commitment and care for the local community. Staff on the ground can act as community 'translators' of technical knowledge to explain information to the local community in a simple yet accurate way, allowing for misinformation to be addressed. This provides genuine opportunities for people to be heard and mutual opportunities to be harnessed. A strong authentic local presence can also be sourced through having a local purchasing policy for contractors and services pre and post construction.

Appropriateness

Appropriate development for a local context involves thinking about how the project is integrated into the local area and how it is scaled appropriately for the local environment and needs. How it is modeled in a holistic way that encourages the right scale of benefit in accordance with the scale of project is a good indicator for high community engagement.

On-going Engagement

On-going processes that involve local people in meaningful and substantial ways is key to good community engagement. This might mean community ownership of wind power, but it could also mean partial ownership of a bigger, developer-led project, or simply conventional deveoper projects engaging in deeper, more beneficial ways with the community through benefit sharing models like cheaper electricity or a gift of equity in the development.

Transparency

Demystifying the development process to local stakeholders can be managed through making planning permit documentation available on request and online. Providing transparency about how and why decisions are made is also good practice. Even though community members might not agree with a decision, if they can understand it, they will usually still respect and trust the developer.

Responsiveness

The ability to communicate well and being responsive to emerging issues, concerns and ideas is essential to building trust and acceptance, as is starting engagement early. Being willing and open to negotiate on aspects of project such as benefit distribution, ownership of wind farm, placement of turbines, number of turbines as well as lights and height are aspects of responsiveness.

Linking community engagement & good outcomes

Inadequate consultation and engagement with the community is a factor contributing to social conflict around wind farm development in Australia and overseas. This social conflict can lead to major time delays and cost increases for wind projects. A number of recent studies on public opinion of renewable energy in the UK found, across many instances and contexts, that public support for renewable energy developments is enhanced when active public participation in the project is present[8]. Specifically, Walker and Devine-Wright found in their study of over 500 UK community energy projects that "more direct and substantial involvement of local people in a project . . . contributes to greater project acceptance and support for renewable energy"[9]. Further, renewable energy projects that share the benefits of the wind farm more equitably and more broadly attract a greater and more active base of support .

Similarly, a recent study released by Australia's peak scientific body, CSIRO, reveals the important role that early and well-designed community engagement can play in community acceptance, concluding that "inadequate consultation and engagement with the community is . . . a key process contributing to social conflict around wind farm development in Australia"[10]. The report recommends that local ownership models of wind development can enhance the sense of acceptance and ownership both because the scale of development is more appropriate but also, and "perhaps more importantly"[11], because of the depth of consultation.

Case study: Hepburn Wind

Hepburn Wind is a 2 turbine, community-owned wind farm in Central Victoria that began generating in 2011.

- *co-operative ownership*
- *2000 members, $9.8m contributed towards $13.5m project*
- *leased agricultural land*
- *electricity delivered to local grid, sold to retailer Red Energy*
- *$1m+ to community fund – most generous community fund of any generator, enhanced by Red Energy*
- *profits to members*
- *neighbourhood benefit program: gift of shares, energy affordability program*
- *local purchasing policy for contractors and services, local part time staff*

Hepburn Wind shows how strong, on-going community engagement has lead to overwhelming local support for the wind farm with flow-on effects for the broader wind industry via the community's widespread and active support. Their community engagement approach has successfully lead to higher levels of community knowledge about, and greater positive identification with, wind power.

For example, 720 of Hepburn Wind's 2,000 members wrote submissions to defend the Renewable Energy Target in the 2011 review. Further, Hepburn Wind's community grants program is now experiencing a higher number of applications from local groups wanting to pursue other renewable energy and energy efficiency projects, and several of their members are actively supporting other wind developments.

Good community engagement and benefit sharing mechanisms have significant local benefits for communities, including local economic retention and regional development[12]. Economic benefits flow from returns of investment (when locals own shares), community income (eg. grant funds), land lease payments, local contracts and local jobs and training opportunities. Studies from the US have quantified the economic development impacts of these activities and have found that community-initiated projects have 1.5 – 3.4 times the local positive economic impact of more conventional developer models[13]. For communities, the prospect of increasing local income, funding important local projects and contributing to the long-term sustainability of their regional economies is a primary motivation for supporting wind developments.

International Case Study: The Falck Model

Falck Renewables in the United Kingdom operates several large wind farms. Around 2500 people have invested in these through partial community ownership. The total investment is more than £5 million across various projects.

When local communities are empowered to play a role in renewable energy projects, be it selecting local projects for a community grant or a benefit sharing model appropriate for their unique context, they are able to take part in reducing climate change over and above what they can achieve through domestic-scale energy savings measures. Good community engagement leads to having local advocates for the project. Advocacy organisations can support communities to engage in local advocacy in a way that developers have a limited capacity to. Participating in wind development allows communities to take control of their energy supply, demonstrating commitment to renewable energy and proving to government that there is grassroots support for renewable energy and climate change policies. These have tangible impacts on good policy conditions for wind power development.

Risks of poor community engagement

Criticisms of participation and engagement in wind development processes include that efforts are tokenistic and the terms are used as "a cloak of words to disguise business as usual"[14]. There is also a risk that a poorly designed community engagement process will be seen as *hoop jumping*, where community engagement is a required activity needed to get development approval, rather than a genuine process of feedback and input. Community opposition to wind developments can have negative impacts on overall social and policy environments, making the longer-term conditions for wind development more difficult. Thus, there is a need to ensure positive community relations and benefit, on a project-by-project level, to lead to the cumulative social and political conditions of support and normalisation needed for industry success.

Sharing beneficial outcomes

Benefit sharing models represent a popular methodolody internationally but are still emerging in the Australian landscape. Benefit sharing creates mutual opportunities for beneficial outcomes for both community and developers.

The concept of benefit-sharing is based on acknowledging that the siting of large facilities – such as wind power infrastructure – can result in some amenity impacts on the local community. Sharing the financial and other benefits of a project can ensure social and economic outcomes for the local community, thereby making the change in the community worthwhile. Its basically about being a good neighbour.

Pathways to exploring benefit sharing could involve developers reserving a percentage of financial modelling that can be negotiated with the community. This allows for flexibility in regards to benefit sharing and turbine numbers or placement. Communities sharing in the equity more holistically (via gifted shares or cheaper electricity) from a neighbouring wind farm can also enable communities to perceive developments in a more positive light over the lifecycle of the projects.

Community ownership that unlocks community capital is a largely untapped opportunity for both communities and developers. Hepburn Wind is a signal of this opportunity. With 2000 members who are financial shareholders in the project, Hepburn Wind found that there were a number of sophisticated investors with self-managed superfunds but also an emerging class of investors who will invest in local infrastructure projects due to the benefits to the local area – the community investor. Hepburn Wind characterises the community investor as having modest return expectations, increased expectations of non-return benefits, generally modest sums to invest, low appetite for risk, no appetite for capital loss, high levels of patience, a high requirement for communication and a high expectation of transparency – and they also deliver active support and advocacy for wind power[15].

Examples: Poor vs good community engagement

These two hypothetical examples indicate what constitutes a poor and a good approach to community engagement.

The Smithtown Windfarm has been rife with bad press and community opposition. From the outset, the community felt they were mislead about the sound and visual amenity impacts. Various locals reported representatives telling them there 'would be no noise impact'. In addition, the community was unclear about turbine placement, how big they would be and who would and would not have them: there was no clear plan that was easily accessible to them. This created feelings of uncertainty and mistrust, both towards the proposed development and amongst community members. For a small town, this is a difficult situation and hard to diffuse without local staff on the ground. The final number of turbines in the development was significantly more than the community was originally told. Plus, two of the 80 turbines planned were on a hill of particular significant to local people for its iconic and recreation value. However, there was no opportunity for direct feedback or negotiation around the wind farm design, as the one survey conducted was very guided and had no opportunity to discuss these issues.

This situation created a hotbed of discontentment that meant when the organised anti-wind lobby came to town, they immediately had a base of support. The simultaneous spread of misinformation by the anti-wind lobby and a lack of provision of answers and opportunities for dialogue by the developer meant that the issue compounded. In the end, the project was delayed and became far more costly due to drawn-out public media conflicts and tribunal hearings. When the company did finally introduce a small community grant fund, many saw this as tokenistic and an effort to buy-back support.

The Lakeside wind farm on the other hand, was led by a developer whose intention was to deliver a well-supported wind farm that brings benefit to the community, as well as the company. From the outset, the developer had high levels of one-on-one contact with the proposed landowners and neighbours, both individually and as a group. Members of this group and others from the community became a reference group for the development and acted as a means to channel community ideas and feedback on the proposal in a constructive way. They were also involved in designing, getting feedback on and promoting the community benefit program, which included a generous community grant fund (to be administered by an independent community committee), a gift of shares for near-neighbours and the option to buy shares for everyone within 10km. The developer maintained good communication throughout the life of the project via a regular newspaper column and a monthly presence at the local market. In addition, trained locals who are proud advocates of their wind farm now volunteer to run educational tours for schools, tourists and interested community members. Although the windfarm still received some opposition in the approval process, this was significantly out-numbered by shows of support.

The wind development process and activity examples

The table below (Table 2[16]) will assist in the development and approach to community engagement in wind development through presenting different engagement tools and ways they can used within the three different development models (introduced in Table 1 above) throughout the six standard stages of wind farm development.

In developing a community engagement plan, it will be important to identify where on the spectrum presented in Table 1, the proposed approach will sit: inform, consult, engage, collaborate or empower.

Developing the purpose, approach, tools and timelines for community engagement is the next stage. Table 2 (overleaf) is designed to help with this.

To design a best practice approach to community engagement, the following questions need to be considered:

- What level of engagement will the community have in the project?
- What is the role of the community; are they supporters, advisors, advocates, co-owners?
- How many & what opportunities are there for broad engagement & participation?
- How will community input ideas & feedback be captured and integrated?
- Who makes what sorts of decisions? Which decisions are open for negotiation, & with whom?
- How open and transparent is the processes? How are decisions reported back?
- Who owns the project?
- Who benefits from the project? How equitable & widespread is this benefit? How is the profit distributed?



Photo: Bernanrd Winter at Hepburn Wind 2013

As mentioned previously, best practice community engagement is as much about the delivery (aka the how and when), as it is about the choice of tools. For example, stalls might be used across all three wind development models, but how they are used can be very different and result in very different outcomes.

A conventional developer, for example, might choose to have a stall once a year at an important community event, to build community presence to and provide information. A highly-engaged developer might choose to have stalls more regularly, say once a month at a community market, and to layer the stalls with other engagement functions, such as collecting survey responses. A community-led wind project might have regular stalls at a number of different types of markets and events, using community volunteers to reach out to as many people as possible. The stall might have an additional kids activity, to provide an interactive, fun and friendly element, as well as having information and survey opportunities. Additionally, stalls could be used to sign up members, or attract interest in purchasing shares. Similarly, forums, workshops, media, etc. can be used in different ways across the spectrum of community engagement approaches, to garner different outcomes.

Finally, it is worth noting that any given wind project might sit in between, or even move between, the categories presented in Tables 1 and 2. For example, a developer might draw on elements of the conventional as well as the highly engaged tools and approaches to community engagement. Equally, a community-led project might sometimes lack the human or financial resources to deliver as engaged a process as they might ideally want to.

Table 2: Community engagement tools for the wind development phases

Activity	Wind farm development phase* 1	2	3	4	5	6	Community engagement tools and their application
Stakeholder Research	✔	✔	✔			✔	Baseline study
	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Baseline study; stakeholder identification and mapping
	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Baseline study; stakeholder identification and mapping; one-on-one meetings with local stakeholders and 'snowballing' to identify others; done regularly
One-way communications			✔	✔	✔	✔	Project website; fact sheets
		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Project website; fact sheets; newsletter; press releases
	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Project website; fact sheets; newsletter; press releases; newspaper ads; regular news columns; information in other local organisations publications
Two-way communications	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Telephone lines
	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Telephone lines; one-on-one briefings
	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Telephone lines; one-on-one briefings; social media; regular listening posts
Community education			✔	✔			Publically displayed photomontage
			✔	✔	✔	✔	Publically displayed photomontage, wind monitoring data and/or audio installations to experience wind farm sound; field trips (pre-construction) or open days (post-construction); local employee ('translator') working on the ground – preferably a local resident; stalls at community events and markets
	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Publically displayed photomontage, wind monitoring data and/or audio installations to experience wind farm sound; field trips (pre-construction) or open days (post-construction), local employee ('translator') working on the ground – preferably a local resident; frequent stalls at community events and markets; regular community building gatherings such as film nights on relevant topics or dinners
Community outreach			✔	✔	✔	✔	Meeting with all neighbours within 2km zone
		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Meeting with all neighbours and nearby residents in a zoning size specific to the local environment; drop-in information sessions; public launches at different stages of the project's development; once constructed – wind farm is able to take wind farm tours; host celebratory events that allow the community access to their wind farm such as a turbine raising picnic.
	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Meeting with all neighbours and nearby residents in a zoning size specific to the local environment; drop-in information sessions; public launches at different stages of the project's development, once constructed – wind farm is able to take wind farm tours; celebratory events that allow the community access to their wind farm such as a turbine raising picnic; volunteer and advocate trainings to get people skilled up to talk about the project; local capital raising
Decision making / feedback loops			✔	✔	✔	✔	Public comment, town meeting or community forum; complaints managements mechanisms
		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Public comment, town meeting or community forum; complaints managements mechanisms; community reference group; community representative on development board; workshops, community polling; focus groups; surveys; community planning process for key decisions; decisions and rationale reported back to community
	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Public comment, town meeting or community forum; complaints managements mechanisms; community reference group; community representative on development board; workshops, community polling; focus groups; surveys; community planning process for key decisions; consensus-building participatory decision-making; delegated decisions to community organisation; decisions and rationale reported back to community
Working with local groups & representatives			✔	✔	✔	✔	engagement with local Council
		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	engagement with local Council and State and Federal Government representatives; engagement with local community organisations, environmental and advocacy groups and education institutions
	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	engagement with local Council and State and Federal Government representatives; engagement with local community organisations; environmental and advocacy groups and education institutions; formal collaboration with local groups and representatives
Parnership & local benefit sharing models					✔		Sponsorship of local groups ($0.05 < $0.15 per MWh); neighbourhood benefits – tree planting and radio/television interference mitigation, benefits in kind – road improvements during construction
		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Community fund ($0.15 < $2.00 per MWh); neighbourhood benefits – tree planting and radio/television interference mitigation, benefits in kind – road improvements during construction; gift of equity and/or cheaper electricity; partial community investment in the windfarm; local purchasing policies for contactors and services
	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Community fund ($0.70++ per MWh); neighbourhood benefits – tree planting and radio/television interference mitigation, benefits in kind – road improvements during construction ; gift of equity and/or cheaper electricity; local purchasing policies for contractors and services, community ownership and management of asset; opportunity to purchase local energy retail product

*Phase 1 – Site Selection, Phase 2 – Feasibility, Phase 3 – Planning & Approval, Phase 4 – Construction, Phase 5 – Commissioning & Operations, Phase 6 – De-Commissioning
Blue represents standard developer level, green represents high level of engagement, orange represents community initiated.

Resources

Embark Wiki
The website of Embark provides a very comprehensive overview of community renewable energy, including practical capacity-building tools, including or community engagement. It also showcases different examples of successful community energy projects from around the world. The website features many articles by different authors and its content still growing.

The community section gives very practical assistance and step by step guidance on how to start, run and build a group. Under the funding and finance heading, guidance is provided for funding early stages of projects, developing a financial model, and business case templates.

Embark Australia is a privately funded, non-for profit organisations to support and facilitate a community renewable energy sector in Australia.
www.embark.com.au

Community Engagement Guidelines for the Australian Wind Industry 2013 – Clean Energy Council
The CEC guidelines demonstrate the industry's commitment to involving local communities in the development and management of wind farms. The guidelines were developed by independent consultants the Australian Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility and involved input from the wind industry as well as an external reference group made up of academics, practitioners from other industries, landholders and government representatives.

The guide outlines the community engagement practices common in the wind industry at large, and what these involve throughout the various stages of development and offers a range of templates for develop use.
www.cleanenergycouncil.org.au//cec/technologies/wind/comm-engage-guidelines

Exploring Community Acceptance of Rural Wind Farms in Australia Report – Nina Hall, Peta Ashworth & Hylton Shaw, 2012, CSIRO
This report explores the nature of a social license to operate for wind farms. The study is based on case studies of nine rural wind farms in Australia using interviews from the community, industry and other stakeholders, as well as a review of news articles on wind power.
The study identifies the levels and dynamics of acceptance of wind power in rural Australia. Key findings are that:

- *There is strong community support for the development of wind farms.*
- *Many of the benefits can be shared or communicated in ways that would enhance community support for the development of wind farms in a region.*
- *Existing regulatory approaches provide an appropriate framework for negotiating wind farm developments, but there is scope for improving outcomes.*
- *The emerging notion of a 'Social Licence to Operate' provides a useful framework for wind farm developers to engage local communities in ways that could enhance transparency and local support.*

www.csiro.au/Organisation-Structure/Flagships/Energy-Flagship/Exploring-community-acceptance-of-rural-wind-farms-in-Australia.aspx

Advocacy

Advocacy from independent and high-credibility groups is an efficient way to engage communities in wind development. Advocates can support communities to do grassroots organising and campaigning work.

Developers have limited ability to engage with the community in local politics. Though proponents may attempt to combat misinformation, opponents can make the argument that the developer is merely acting in self-interest. Additionally, wind farm developers are in the business of development—which involves energy market forecasting, project planning, engineering, construction and finance. They are not in the business of activism and campaigning.

When considering collaboration and advocacy – who are the other stakeholders that can strengthen the supportive voice of wind energy in the local area? Yes to Renewables from Friends of the Earth and the Australian Wind Alliance/Victorian Wind Alliance are two such support mechanisms for local communities around wind development.
www.yes2renewables.org / www.vicwind.org.au

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Case Studies

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Hepburn Wind Case Study: www.embark.com.au/display/content/Hepburn+Community+Wind+Park+Co-operative
Middlegrunden Wind turbine Co-operative: www.embark.com.au/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=2294076
Minwind: http://embark.com.au/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=2294986