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SUBMISSION

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Submission to the Senate Inquiry on Information Integrity on Climate Change and Energy

The World Wide Fund for Nature-Australia (WWF-Australia) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Select Committee on Information Integrity on Climate Change and Energy.

WWF-Australia is part of the WWF International Network, the world's largest independent conservation organisation. WWF's global mission is to 'stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature'. WWF-Australia has approximately two million supporters.

Climate change and biodiversity collapse are the two greatest threats facing both humans and nature today. These crises are intertwined, compound global inequalities, and must be addressed together. WWF-Australia supports a fast, ecologically sound and just transition to a net zero future.

WWF-Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry. We have witnessed firsthand how misinformation and disinformation are undermining public trust, delaying climate action, and distorting the national conversation on energy transition and environmental protection.

This submission focuses specifically on disinformation relating to environmental impacts of the energy transition. The submission is structured as follows:

Section 1: Evidence of disinformation impacting the energy transition

Section 2: Solutions and ways forward

Section 3: Recommendations

If you require further information, please contact **Rob Law**, Senior Manager, Energy Transitions at rlaw@wwf.org.au or **Nat Burke**, Head of Regenerative Climate at nburke@wwf.org.au .

Section 1: Evidence of disinformation impacting the energy transition

Disinformation is negatively impacting upon the ability of the energy transition to deliver benefits for climate, nature and communities. This section focusses in on some of the common tactics used to misconstrue the environmental impacts of the energy transition.

Misinformation and disinformation have emerged as major global risks, consistently ranking among the most immediate global threats in recent World Economic Forum annual Global Risk Reports¹. In the context of the energy transition, disinformation is particularly disruptive - spreading false or misleading narratives that erode public trust, polarise communities, and delay essential policy and infrastructure decisions. These campaigns often target the reliability, cost, and broader social, economic, and environmental implications of renewable technologies, creating confusion and resistance. Disinformation campaigns often take the legitimate concerns that genuine community groups have with specific project proposals or developments and inflate and conflate them to make negative generalisations about climate solutions such as renewable energy as a whole. Just as issues with one project should not be used to undermine the urgent need to transition to renewable energy, the proliferation of disinformation campaigns must not be used to dismiss genuine social and ecological concerns about individual projects.

Addressing this challenge requires a clear understanding of the different types of information challenges. **Misinformation** refers to inaccurate information shared without harmful intent, while **disinformation** is deliberately crafted to mislead and provoke fear, mistrust, or division². **Malinformation**, though less commonly discussed, involves the misuse of truthful information to cause harm - such as revealing private facts or distorting context of people or organisations. As the boundaries between these categories increasingly blur, especially between misinformation and disinformation, it is critical to focus on the intentional spread of falsehoods and develop coordinated, evidence-based strategies to safeguard public discourse and support a resilient energy transition. Greater efforts across government, industry, media, and civil society are required to promote transparency, build public resilience, and ensure informed participation in the transition to a cleaner energy future.

Disinformation on the environmental impacts of the energy transition

Given WWF-Australia's role as a leading environmental organisation that works across climate and nature, our submission is focussed on disinformation relating to the environmental impacts of the energy transition. Disinformation surrounding the environmental impacts of energy infrastructure - such as large-scale wind and solar farms, transmission lines, and battery installations - is widespread and increasingly disruptive. It undermines the ability to engage in informed, evidence-

¹ World Economic Forum (2025): <https://www.weforum.org/press/2025/01/global-risks-report-2025-conflict-environment-and-disinformation-top-threats/#:~:text=Misinformation%20and%20disinformation%20lead%20the,biodiversity%20loss%20and%20ecosystem%20collapse>.

² UNDP (2025): <https://www.undp.org/eurasia/dis/misinformation>

based discussions about how these projects affect ecosystems and how they can be thoughtfully designed to avoid or mitigate harm. This distortion of public discourse hampers constructive debate and erodes trust in legitimate planning and regulatory processes.

Environmental concerns have become a leading reason for community opposition to renewable energy projects³. While some concerns are founded on genuine environmental impacts, we have observed a growing range of claims that exaggerate or fabricate environmental impacts, particularly in regional areas. These claims, which are often connected to deliberate disinformation campaigns, have eroded public trust, polarised communities, and slowed the rollout of clean energy infrastructure.

All energy infrastructure, even renewable energy, poses risks to nature that need careful management. WWF-Australia has been reviewing renewable projects currently referred under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act for environmental assessment. A preliminary review of projects dating back to the beginning of 2024 shows a high diversity in the types of potential impacts from different projects. These range from impacts on threatened species, threatened ecological communities and migratory species. What this review also shows is that there are many projects that have little to no environmental impact, many projects that require mitigation measures to further reduce their impact and a handful of projects that are poorly sited and designed leading to significant impacts. As such it is critical to recognise that environmental impacts vary project by project and are highly contextual.

In the lead up to the 2025 Federal Election, WWF-Australia began collating common claims about environmental impacts of the energy transition. Typically, these claims are often founded on some basis of truth but are extrapolated or exaggerated. They are then promoted across communities in regional Australia leading to overhyped concern about the environmental impacts of utility scale renewables, regardless of actual impact.

30–40% of monthly messages received through WWF-Australia’s social media accounts now relate to renewables, with increasing intensity and misinformation, especially on Facebook. Common themes include:

- Alleged hypocrisy from WWF and perceptions that WWF avoids criticising renewables to maintain alignment with a broader climate agenda (and in some rare cases claims that we are funded by renewable developers, which is not true)
- Unsupported claims of mass habitat destruction caused by renewable energy
- Allegations of native species being culled for renewable projects.

In this submission we have highlighted a series of prominent and widespread claims about environmental impacts and how they stack up against the available evidence. The Columbia Law school has identified 33 global myths about renewable energy, particularly solar, wind and batteries⁴. Many of these myths that have originated in other countries are now gaining traction and spreading throughout Australian communities.

³ CSIRO (2024): <https://www.csiro.au/en/news/All/News/2024/April/CSIRO-survey-reveals-Australians-attitudes-toward-the-renewable-energy-transition>

⁴ Columbia Law School (2024): https://scholarship.law.columbia.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1218&context=sabin_climate_change

1. Claim one: Renewables are killing koalas

A persistent and emotive disinformation narrative has emerged in recent years suggesting that renewable energy project developers - particularly wind farms - are euthanising koalas or even 'clubbing koalas to death'. This claim has gained traction through social media, political commentary, and fringe media outlets, often amplified by actors with vested interests in fossil fuels or anti-renewables agendas.

The claim arose from a section of the Clarke Creek Wind Farm's Biodiversity Management Plan referencing euthanasia protocols for injured wildlife as a measure of last resort⁵. The protocol was then taken out of context and exaggerated across social media and other media outlets. These statements were widely circulated and misrepresented the intent and context of standard wildlife management protocols, which are common across many infrastructure projects - including fossil fuel developments.

An RMIT ABC Fact Check investigation on the 10th November 2023 found that:

- The management plan was approved under the former Coalition government.
- No koalas had been injured at Clarke Creek.
- Similar euthanasia clauses exist in other projects, including Arrow Energy's 2018 Surat Gas Project.

This demonstrates that the euthanasia protocols are not unique to renewables and are part of broader environmental compliance standards and had not been undertaken in the case of Clarke Creek windfarm⁶.

Despite this, and following the ABC fact check article, on the 4th December 2023, the Daily Mail published an emotive story claiming windfarms were responsible for "*the massacre of Australian wildlife*" alongside a symbol/icon of a man swinging a club at a koala⁷. The koala claim is still circulating regularly on local social media groups opposing renewables and is featuring in mainstream media interviews including with Federal politicians in 2025⁸ ⁹.

The case illustrates several common disinformation tactics:

⁵ Landry (2023): <https://michellelandry.com.au/clarke-creek-wind-farm-euthanasia-clause-shocks-nation/>

⁶ ABC Fact Check (2023); <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-11-10/fact-check-euthanasing-koalas-clarke-creek-queensland-wind-farm/103085452>

⁷ Daily Mail (2023): <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12750011/Wind-turbines-Queensland-NSW-killing-rare-Aussie-wildlife-wind-farm-operators-trained-kill-koalas-humanely-Labor-commits-zero-emissions-2050.html>

⁸ *The Chronicle* (2025): [https://www.thechronicle.com.au/news/toowoomba/national-leader-david-littleproud-claims-wind-farm-workers-club-injured-koalas/news-story/726c062290a484b16b4886fd03fd0218\[1\]\(https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-11-10/fact-check-euthanasing-koalas-clarke-creek-queensland-wind-farm/103085452\)](https://www.thechronicle.com.au/news/toowoomba/national-leader-david-littleproud-claims-wind-farm-workers-club-injured-koalas/news-story/726c062290a484b16b4886fd03fd0218[1](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-11-10/fact-check-euthanasing-koalas-clarke-creek-queensland-wind-farm/103085452)).

⁹ 2GB (2025): <https://www.2gb.com/pure-insanity-david-littleproud-slams-chris-bowens-latest-renewables-push>

- **Emotive framing:** Using iconic species like koalas to provoke outrage.
- **Selective amplification:** Highlighting isolated clauses without context.
- **Political weaponisation:** Targeting NGOs and public institutions to undermine credibility and sow distrust
- **Building plausibility:** the claim is considered plausible based on the real impact of habitat clearing that could negatively impact upon the koala population

The Clarke Creek windfarm of which this claim originated does have environmental impacts including habitat clearing, as identified in the conditions imposed through its EPBC approval granted in 2018 under the Coalition government. This includes conditions for clearing of no more than a) 1513 ha of habitat suitable for the Koala b) 17.83 ha of suitable habitat for the Greater Glider and Squatter Pigeon c) 45.22 ha of the Semi-evergreen Vine Thicket¹⁰. A genuine, evidence-based debate about environmental impacts of this project could lead to broader discussions about EPBC reforms and better guidance for siting projects as well as the need for stronger national environmental standards and definitions of what constitutes unacceptable impacts.

Claim 2: Renewables Will Take Up One-Third of Prime Agricultural Land

A widely circulated claim suggests that renewable energy infrastructure - particularly solar and wind -will consume one-third of Australia's prime agricultural land. This narrative has been used to stoke opposition to renewables in regional communities and to portray climate action as a threat to food security and rural livelihoods.

The claim originates from a December 2023 report by the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA)¹¹. The report examined 4 scenarios of large-scale land and wind requirements to meet projected energy demand that would replace fossil fuels entirely, with estimates ranging from 57-181 million hectares. This equated to 4 scenarios that ranged from 7% to 23% of Australia's landmass, with the upper end representing the equivalent of one third to one half of Australia's agricultural land.

The figures in this report were then continually amplified by prominent public figures, promoting the claim that renewables could "take over" one third of prime farmland, particularly solar¹². The claim was then reiterated across News Corp outlets in particular, including opinion columns and radio segments.

This case illustrates the following disinformation tactics:

- **Inflated statistics** using modelling bias

¹⁰ EPBC portal: <https://epbcpublicportal.environment.gov.au/all-referrals/project-referral-summary/project-decision/?id=fd9ddf84-6486-e811-817f-005056ba00a7>

¹¹ Institute of Public Affairs (2023): <https://ipa.org.au/publications-ipa/media-releases/ipa-research-one-third-of-prime-agricultural-land-sacrificed-for-net-zero-pipe-dream>

¹² Rinehart (2024): <https://www.hancockagriculture.com.au/mrs-rineharts-afr-business-person-of-the-year-award-acceptance-speech-and-qa/>

- **Polarisation:** Appeal to rural identity, framing renewables as an urban elite imposition whilst not giving sufficient voice to farmers and agricultural industry groups which see renewable energy as an opportunity if rural communities are engaged correctly¹³¹⁴.
- **Selective amplification** by influential voices that oppose renewable development.

The “one-third of farmland” claim is a clear example of disinformation designed to delay Australia’s energy transition. It misrepresents land use data, ignores co-use models, and exploits rural anxieties. This leads to a deepening of polarisation in regional communities, especially in Renewable Energy Zones and those with existing concerns about land use conflicts with agriculture. This then prevents genuine engagement with communities on siting and mitigation options including coexistence opportunities.

To power our own energy needs with renewables it’s estimated Australia would only require 1,200km² - 2,000km² or 0.0002% of Australia’s landmass¹⁵. By contrast, agriculture already uses more than 55% of Australia or 3,500 times the amount of land needed to power Australia’s domestic energy supply with renewables¹⁶. Australia already has over 790,000kms of power lines and the shift to 100% renewables is estimated to only require 10,000km more to be built¹⁷. Additionally, most of this infrastructure can be co-located with other types of land uses including conservation and agriculture.

Claim 3: Renewables are clearing vast tracts of Australia’s pristine natural environment

Similar to the above claim regarding footprint of renewables impacting prime agricultural land, a growing disinformation narrative suggests that the rollout of renewable energy infrastructure is responsible for widespread habitat destruction across Australia. This claim is often used to undermine public support for the energy transition and to portray renewables as a leading cause of habitat destruction, despite evidence to the contrary. Although some renewable projects require the clearing of habitat, this claim seeks to extrapolate and exaggerate the degree to which renewables are drivers of habitat loss compared to other industries and infrastructure developments.

The narrative has existed for some time globally, and fossil fuel–aligned organisations have played a central role in spreading disinformation that underplays the role of renewable energy¹⁸. Groups such as the Heartland Institute, the Institute for Energy Research, and the American Legislative Exchange Council have promoted narratives suggesting that solar and wind farms cause widespread ecological harm¹⁹. These claims often lack scientific grounding and are part of a

¹³ Good Meat (2023): <https://www.goodmeat.com.au/environmental-sustainability/red-meat-and-renewable-energy/#:~:text=The%20red%20meat%20industry%20continues,support%20Australia's%20net%20zero%20ambitions.>

¹⁴ Farmers for Climate Action (2024): <https://farmersforclimateaction.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/DIGITAL-Billions-in-the-Bush-November-2024.pdf>

¹⁵ Blakers (2024): <https://iced.s.anu.edu.au/news-events/news/no-threat-farm-land-just-1200-square-kilometres-can-fulfil-australia%E2%80%99s-solar-and>

¹⁶ Climate Council. 2024. “Deforestation and Climate Change,” 2024. <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/deforestation/>.

¹⁷ AEMO (2024): <https://aemo.com.au/energy-systems/major-publications/integrated-system-plan-isp/2024-integrated-system-plan-isp>

¹⁸ Gentile and Gupta (2025): <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1364032125000322>

¹⁹ Energy and Policy Institute (2024): <https://energyandpolicy.org/fossil-fuel-funding-opposition-renewable-energy/>

broader strategy to undermine public and political support for clean energy²⁰. This disinformation campaign has roots in the 1997 Cato Institute paper *Renewable Energy: Not Cheap, Not 'Green'*, which was funded by Koch-affiliated interests and helped establish a long-running narrative that framed renewables as environmentally destructive²¹.

These claims have increased over the past two years in Australia, largely in response to incidents of genuine environmental impacts from certain wind farms mostly operating in Queensland. Although WWF-Australia is concerned about projects that clear high value conservation habitat, the disinformation aspect of this issue employs the following tactics:

- **Inflated statistics:** Exaggerating the land footprint of renewables by ignoring co-use models and comparing cumulative figures without context.
- **Emotive framing:** Using imagery of koalas and gliders to provoke outrage.
- **Selective reporting:** Highlighting clearing associated with renewables while ignoring the vastly larger footprint of agriculture and mining.
- **Wedging:** by taking an issue such as land clearing this disinformation seeks to drive a wedge between climate and environment groups.

WWF-Australia has conducted extensive analysis on land clearing across Australia, highlighting both the scale and sectoral drivers of deforestation. Queensland remains the land clearing capital of Australia, with 332,000 hectares in 2022-23, up slightly from 323,700 hectares in 2021²² ²³. A separate WWF analysis across Australia found that 1.19 million hectares of known or likely threatened species habitat was cleared between 2004 and 2017, with 87.4% of this attributed to unauthorised agricultural development that did not receive any EPBC approvals or other state based environmental approvals²⁴. The mining sector were approved to clear 228,325 hectares between 2011 and 2024 under the EPBC Act. By contrast, analysis from ACF show that 32,681 hectares in total were approved for land clearing under the EPBC Act for the category of energy generation (renewables) between 2011 and 2024²⁵. So although renewable energy development contributes to land clearing, the proportional impacts are a fraction of that of other industries.

WWF-Australia is working to support siting of renewable energy infrastructure away from high conservation value lands through a range of measures targeting government and industry. Most recently WWF has published through the Coalition Linking Energy And Nature (CLEANAction) and the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) a set of nature positive energy principles to guide siting decisions²⁶. Similarly, we are strongly advocating for reforms to the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* to provide stronger regulatory guidance and guardrails to protect habitats of high conservation value.

Disinformation about the ecological impacts of renewable energy development seeks to frame renewables as just as bad or even worse for nature than fossil fuels. WWF's joint analysis with Boston Consulting Group compared two future scenarios globally: one

²⁰ Kaufman (2023): <https://kleinmanenergy.upenn.edu/commentary/blog/unmasking-dark-money-how-fossil-fuel-interests-can-undermine-clean-energy-progress/>

²¹ CATO (1997): <https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/renewable-energy-not-cheap-not-green>

²² QLD Gov (2025): <https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/land/management/vegetation/slats-analysis>

²³ WWF (2022): <https://wwf.org.au/news/2022/queensland-remains-the-land-clearing-capital-of-australia/>

²⁴ WWF (2020): <https://wwf.org.au/news/2020/threatened-species-lose-1-million-ha-of-habitat-to-unauthorised-agricultural-development/>

²⁵ ACF investigations team, pers.comm – data derived from analysis of projects within the EPBC Portal from 2011-2024; <https://epbcpublicportal.environment.gov.au/>

²⁶ IRENA (2023) <https://coalition.irena.org/Publications>

powered by fossil fuels and one by renewables²⁷. The results were unequivocal. Across 30 environmental and social indicators, the clean energy transition was 2 to 16 times better for nature and society than a fossil-fuelled future. The variation is dependent on the types of renewable energy noting that certain technologies such as bioenergy can have greater impacts on nature than others. Even accounting for mining impacts needed for critical minerals, the renewable pathway would result in 30% less land disturbance by 2050.

Claim 4: Offshore wind kills whales

A persistent and emotive disinformation narrative is that offshore wind farms are responsible for whale deaths. This claim has gained traction in Australia and internationally, often amplified by fossil fuel interests²⁸ conservative lobby groups,²⁹ and social media influencers. Despite its popularity, the claim lacks scientific evidence and distracts from the real threats facing marine life.

The narrative has been traced to a coordinated disinformation campaign led by the Atlas Network, a US based coalition of over 550 think tanks funded by fossil fuel interests. Research by Jeremy Walker shows that this campaign has been exported to Australia, targeting the Illawarra Renewable Energy Zone and other offshore wind proposals³⁰.

There is currently no peer-reviewed scientific evidence linking offshore wind farms to whale deaths. The origin of the claim stemmed from an unusual mortality event of north Atlantic right whales in 2017, which was determined to be largely caused by vessel strikes and fishing entanglements³¹. According to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA): “No whale mortality has been attributed to offshore wind activities... there are no known connections between any of this offshore wind activity and any whale stranding regardless of species³².”

While there is no evidence that offshore wind is killing whales, it is important to note that as with any industrial development, offshore wind can still pose impacts on marine mammals including whales. Risks can and must be carefully managed through siting and design decisions and mitigation strategies, including avoiding marine protected areas, timing construction to avoid whale migration seasons and using acoustic monitoring and noise-reduction technologies like bubble curtains.

²⁷ WWF (2023) https://wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/?9967866/Building-a-Nature-Positive-Energy-Transformation

²⁸ Walker (2025): https://figshare.uts.edu.au/articles/report/Who_says_offshore_wind_kills_whales_and_why_Funded_by_Big_Oil_and_Coal_the_co-ordinated_disinformation_and_astroturfing_against_offshore_wind_development_is_a_trans-national_project_of_the_Atlas_Network_Submission_no_297_/28621169

²⁹ Advance Australia (2023): https://www.advanceaustralia.org.au/offshore_wind_farms_are_killing_whales_crabs_and_birds_how_green

³⁰ Walker (2025): https://figshare.uts.edu.au/articles/report/Who_says_offshore_wind_kills_whales_and_why_Funded_by_Big_Oil_and_Coal_the_co-ordinated_disinformation_and_astroturfing_against_offshore_wind_development_is_a_trans-national_project_of_the_Atlas_Network_Submission_no_297_/28621169

³¹ NOAA (2025): <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-life-distress/2017-2025-north-atlantic-right-whale-unusual-mortality-event>

³² NOAA (2023): <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/marine-life-distress/frequent-questions-offshore-wind-and-whales>

As this claim evolved over time and was repeatedly debunked, other claims began to emerge online such as that Australian offshore wind did not require proper environmental assessments, or that Australia does not know enough about its marine environment to allow this type of new industry to take place. Australian offshore wind projects are required to undertake environmental management plans and environmental impact assessment under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999) signed off by the Offshore Infrastructure Regulator³³. Where projects intersect with state waters they must also abide by state based environmental assessment processes. All of these include measures for considering the precautionary principle, data collection and adaptive management.

The greatest threats to whales are climate change, ship strikes, entanglement in fishing gear, and underwater noise largely from fossil fuel exploration³⁴³⁵³⁶. This does not mean offshore wind is benign, but its impacts need to be considered in context and when properly planned, poses far less harm than fossil fuel infrastructure. WWF has sought to address these claims directly³⁷, and also is working globally on ways to mitigate impacts from offshore wind construction, operation and decommissioning³⁸.

This narrative uses several disinformation strategies:

- **Emotive framing:** Leveraging public affection for whales to provoke outrage.
- **Networked disinformation:** intentional spread of false or misleading information through interconnected actors (e.g. influencers, bots, media outlets, or grassroots groups).
- **Selective amplification:** Highlighting unverified claims while ignoring peer-reviewed science.

These tactics are often used to mask other concerns like visual amenity or place identity, or to delay the replacement of fossil fuels. However, it is important to recognise that concern over offshore wind can also stem from genuine anxiety about environmental impacts on the marine environment. Research has also shown that people will not support energy infrastructure without a sense that there are adequate environmental safeguards in place, and social support is improved through adequate marine spatial planning³⁹⁴⁰.

Claim 5 – Renewable energy is generating ‘mountains of waste’

Another persistent disinformation narrative claims that wind and solar energy are creating “mountains of waste,” undermining their environmental credentials. This narrative often

³³ Offshore Infrastructure Regulator (2025): <https://www.oir.gov.au/sites/default/files/Offshore%20Renewable%20environmental%20approvals%20-%2008.11.23.pdf>

³⁴ Maynecke et al. (2023): <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.adp1950>

³⁵ Nisi et al. (2024): <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.adp1950>

³⁶ Thomsen & Popper (2024): <https://pubs.aip.org/asa/jasa/article/155/6/3568/3295656/Refocusing-aquatic-noise-Shifting-from-single-to>

³⁷ WWF (2025): <https://wwf.org.au/blogs/fact-check-the-truth-about-whales-and-wind-farms/>

³⁸ WWF (2023): https://wwfint.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/wwf-offshore-renewable-energy-position_2023.pdf

³⁹ Larkin (2023) <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00049182.2023.2276144>

⁴⁰ Griffiths et al. (2025): <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0301421525001284>

exaggerates the scale and toxicity of renewable energy waste, suggesting that the clean energy transition is simply replacing one ecological crisis with another. Images of discarded wind turbine blades have been used to imply widespread dumping and mismanagement including allegations of turbines being dumped in a forest in Queensland⁴¹. While end-of-life waste is a real challenge, these claims often lack context and ignore the significant progress being made in recycling and circular economy solutions.

In reality, most renewable energy technologies are already highly recyclable. Approximately 90% of a wind turbine and 95% of a solar panel can be recycled, including valuable materials like steel, aluminium, copper, and cast iron⁴². The remaining components, such as composite turbine blades and certain panel materials, do require further research and innovation to repurpose effectively. Encouragingly, this work is already underway. For example, Acciona is exploring ways to transform decommissioned wind turbine blades into new materials and products in Australia⁴³, and the Circular PV Alliance is advancing solar panel recycling technologies⁴⁴.

It's critical that the shift to renewables also supports efforts to reduce waste and build a circular economy, where products and materials are reused and repurposed rather than discarded. Governments are beginning to respond but more needs to be done. Both New South Wales and Queensland have undertaken solar recycling pilot programs, and there is growing momentum to scale these initiatives into a national product stewardship scheme⁴⁵. Importantly, when compared to other waste streams, solar panel waste between 2016 and 2050 is projected to be 99.6% less than the volume of coal ash produced by fossil fuel power stations and municipal solid waste⁴⁶. This comparison is often omitted in disinformation narratives, which fail to acknowledge that the fossil fuel industry continues to produce vastly more toxic and unmanageable waste.

These disinformation claims often ignore the broader context: renewable energy technologies are still evolving, and so are the systems for managing their waste. Governments and industry are investing in recycling infrastructure and circular economy solutions, while fossil fuel waste continues to be produced at far greater volumes with fewer long-term solutions. The “mountains of waste” narrative, when stripped of context, serves more as a tool of delay and doubt than a genuine environmental critique and employs the following tactics:

- **Alarmist visuals:** Uses dramatic imagery (e.g. turbine blades in forests) to provoke fear and mislead about scale.
- **Omission of context:** Ignores high recyclability rates and ongoing innovation in waste solutions.
- **Selective comparisons:** Fails to mention that solar waste is far smaller than coal ash or household waste.

⁴¹ <https://reneweconomy.com.au/turbine-graveyard-debunked-anatomy-of-a-media-anti-wind-scare-campaign/>

⁴² CEC (2024): <https://cleanenergycouncil.org.au/news-resources/clean-energy-australia-report>

⁴³ ACCIONA (2025) <https://www.acciona.com.au/updates/news/acciona-launches-turbine-made-initiative-for-recycling-windturbine-blades/www.acciona.com.au/updates/news/acciona-launchesturbine-made-initiative-for-recycling-wind-turbine-blades/>

⁴⁴ Circular PV Alliance (2023) <https://www.circularpv.com.au>

⁴⁵ SEC (2025): https://smartenergy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Joint-Statement-2025_PRINT-WITH-NO-BLEED-1-1.pdf

⁴⁶ Mirletz et al. (2023) <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41567-023-02230-0>

- **Undermining progress:** Downplays government and industry efforts to build circular economy systems.

Section 2: Solutions and ways forward

Disinformation in the energy sector—particularly around renewables—has become a powerful force in shaping public opinion, stalling projects, and deepening community divisions. Amanda Ripley’s distinction between *high conflict* and *good conflict* offers a valuable lens for understanding and responding to this challenge⁴⁷. High conflict thrives on identity-driven narratives and misinformation, often turning complex energy debates into zero-sum battles (eg. renewables vs no renewables). To counter this, it is important to move towards good conflict - spaces where disagreement is welcomed but managed constructively. Effective strategies include pre-emptive communication, forewarning messages (or “prebunking”), and transparency around vested interests, especially in adversarial information environments. Engaging trusted local voices, using clear and relatable messaging, and exposing tactics like native advertising (eg. sponsored content that appears as independent) and greenwashing are also critical. Together, these approaches help inoculate communities against disinformation and create the conditions for informed, inclusive dialogue about the energy transition.

The following case studies offer examples of potential ways forward, noting the need for diversity of approaches and place-based solutions:

CASE STUDY: The Waubra community and disinformation

Disinformation around renewable energy has persisted for years, often fuelling division and mistrust. Yet, some communities have successfully navigated these challenges, offering valuable lessons in resilience and recovery.

Waubra stands out as a well-documented example of a town that endured intense astroturfing (groups posing as ‘grassroots’ local community organisations or appearing to represent local communities) and disinformation during the development of its wind farm and ultimately reclaimed its narrative through collective action and transparency.

Waubra Wind Farm, located in Western Victoria, was commissioned in 2009 and consists of 128 turbines. It quickly became a focal point in the national debate over wind energy, largely due to the emergence of the Waubra Foundation, an anti-wind lobby group that promoted the controversial and scientifically unsupported concept of “wind turbine syndrome”⁴⁸. Despite being named after the town, the Waubra Foundation had no direct ties to the community, with its directors residing far from Waubra and having links to the oil and gas industry. The group’s claims linked the town to illness and fear, creating a stigma that deeply affected residents⁴⁹.

Key Events and Community Response

1. Disinformation Emerges

The Waubra Foundation promoted “wind turbine syndrome,” linking turbines to health

⁴⁷ <https://www.amandaripley.com/high-conflict>

⁴⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waubra_Foundation

⁴⁹ https://www.re-alliance.org.au/waubra_community_starts_new_chapter

problems. These claims lacked scientific backing and were widely dismissed by health authorities.

2. **Local Pushback**

In 2013, 316 residents signed a petition asking the Foundation to stop using the town's name, asserting that most locals supported the wind farm and valued its economic benefits.

3. **Reclaiming the Narrative**

Locals shared their experiences in the video series "*Waubra: The Way The Wind Blows*", countering misinformation with personal stories of positive impacts⁵⁰.

4. **Community Engagement**

Wind farm operator Acciona supported local initiatives and emphasised transparency through school visits and open communication, helping rebuild trust.

5. **Regulatory Action**

In 2014, the ACNC revoked the Waubra Foundation's charity status, citing lack of evidence and potential harm from its claims.

Waubra's residents successfully reclaimed their town's identity and reshaped public perception through grassroots action, storytelling, and collaboration with credible institutions. The legacy of the project continues to deliver strong benefits to the community, with Waubra Community Fund Executive Officer David Clark describing "The Waubra Wind Farm pays \$100,000 a year that the community fund has and spends on projects just within this area. For a small community like us, that's just gold."⁵¹

Case Study: Our Renewable Future – Building Awareness Through Optimism and Clarity

A common tactic identified in reducing renewable energy support is to treat it as a wedge issue, that aims to split supporters and political constituencies⁵². Early this year, WWF-Australia joined forces with the Australian Conservation Foundation to develop the "Our Renewable Future" campaign⁵³. This plan originated from the growing awareness that both organisations' supporter bases were being wedged on the issue of environmental impacts of the energy transition. The plan aimed to reframe the conversation from a defensive and polarised position by offering a clear, hopeful, and actionable vision for a clean energy future that benefits nature and people.

Rather than focusing solely on what's broken, the campaign highlighted what's possible. It presented renewables not just as a climate solution, but as a pathway to restoring biodiversity, lowering energy costs, and strengthening communities. Through accessible messaging, visual storytelling, and a strong emphasis on nature-positive development, the campaign helped

⁵⁰ Chapman (2013): <https://theconversation.com/wind-turbine-syndrome-farm-hosts-tell-very-different-story-18241>

⁵¹ RE-Alliance (2025): https://www.re-alliance.org.au/david_clark

⁵² Clean Power (2024): <https://cleanpower.org/wp-content/uploads/gateway/2024/08/Counter-Clean-Energy-Misinformation.pdf>

⁵³ WWF (2025): <https://wwf.org.au/news/2025/nature-and-climate-advocates-unite-behind-plan-for-a-renewable-future/>

Australians understand how renewable energy can coexist with - and even enhance - the natural environment.

The plan encouraged our 2.8 million combined supporters to get behind a shared vision for an energy future that is good for people and nature, by encouraging policies that prioritise biodiversity, community benefit, and transparency. It also backed in calls for the creation of Local Energy Hubs to counter disinformation and build local capacity for informed decision-making.

Campaign Republic recognised *Our Renewable Future* as a positive example of how to build a sense of possibility and agency, because it:

“didn’t just tell people what to fear—it showed them what to fight for... It doesn’t sugar-coat the situation, but it pairs critique with compelling solutions. It invites people to imagine Australia as a global clean energy leader. And crucially, it presents a pathway forward. The focus is not just on what needs to stop, but what we could build together. That kind of vision-led messaging is what turns awareness into belief and belief into action.”⁵⁴

By framing renewable energy as a hopeful, nature-positive solution rather than a battleground, the plan invites supporters into a story of progress, not just protest.

Section 3: WWF Recommendations

1. Supporting communities with the right information

Disinformation often fills the void left by poor communication. The federal government should:

- **Actively communicate the benefits and rationale** of the energy transition, including how biodiversity impacts are being managed.
- **Fund public education campaigns** to build climate and energy literacy, especially in regional communities.
- **Support independent fact-checking initiatives** and amplify trusted voices in science, conservation, and community leadership.
- **Fund a network of independent Local Energy Hubs** and support communities with independent place based trusted advice on the energy transition⁵⁵

2. Making the benefits equitable and real

Strong community benefit sharing principles are essential for reducing opposition to renewable energy projects, particularly in regional areas where the impacts are most directly felt. When communities see tangible, long-term benefits - such as local job creation and rural income diversification, infrastructure investment, or funding for schools and health services - they are more likely to support projects and engage constructively⁵⁶. The First Nations Clean Energy Network, for example, provides valuable guidance on the levers, capacities, and capabilities required to

⁵⁴ Campaign Republic (2025): <https://www.campaign-republic.com/cr-insights/why-progressive-campaigns-need-to-stop-focusing-only-on-whats-broken>

⁵⁵ Local Energy Hubs (2025): <https://www.localenergyhubs.org.au/>

⁵⁶ Re-alliance (2024): https://www.re-alliance.org.au/community_support_the_conversation

negotiate equitable benefits for renewable energy projects in different states and territories⁵⁷. However, the current landscape of benefit sharing is inconsistent, with wide variation in how developers approach community engagement and what benefits are offered. This lack of clarity can breed mistrust and fuel disinformation and at its worst drive further polarisation and division within a community.

Clear, enforceable, and fit-for-purpose guidelines would help ensure fairness, improve transparency, and build trust - making communities active partners in the energy transition rather than passive recipients of its impacts. This includes building the capacity of local communities to understand what good benefit sharing models look like and how they can advocate for the best outcomes for their communities priorities.

3. Strengthen environmental law and planning frameworks

Disinformation thrives in settings where communities feel regulations are not adequately protecting or addressing their concerns. Public support for energy infrastructure is dependent upon strong environmental safeguards⁵⁸. Reform of the EPBC Act, as recommended by the Samuel Review, to ensure it is fit for purpose in the context of large-scale clean energy infrastructure will help to address many of the issues being seen in the roll out of renewables. Strong national environmental standards backed by improved data quality and an independent Environmental Protection Agency will help to improve the consistency, transparency and overall environmental outcome of project decisions. These reforms would reduce the space for disinformation by providing clarity, transparency, and stronger safeguards.

4. Incentivise nature positive development

Misleading narratives - often amplified through social media and political campaigns - have distorted public understanding by exaggerating or misrepresenting the environmental impact of renewables. To address growing public concern - often fuelled by disinformation - about the environmental impacts of renewable energy, Australia must embrace a nature-positive approach to development. This means going beyond regulatory compliance and mitigation of impacts to actively restore and regenerate ecosystems through renewable energy projects⁵⁹. By embedding biodiversity restoration, landscape regeneration, and inclusive conservation partnerships into renewable energy projects onsite and within a region, developers can deliver tangible, place-based outcomes that visibly improve local ecosystems. These initiatives not only address genuine environmental concerns but also build trust, community pride, and long-term social licence. Treating environmental benefits as a core pillar of community benefit sharing helps to shift the narrative from harm to healing, demonstrating that renewables can actively regenerate nature rather than degrade it.

5. Monitor and Regulate Disinformation Networks

To counter disinformation networks targeting renewable energy, the Australian Federal Government should adopt a multi-pronged strategy that combines transparency, education, and collaboration. This includes mandating digital platforms to disclose algorithmic processes and label automated content, investing in media and climate literacy programs, and supporting independent

⁵⁷ First Nations Clean Energy Network (2025):

https://www.firstnationscleanenergy.org.au/policy_opportunities_and_barriers

⁵⁸ Larkin (2024): <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00049182.2023.2276144>

⁵⁹ [WWF \(2023\)](#)

journalism to rebuild public trust. Drawing on global best practices, the government should also foster cross-sector networks to detect and respond to emerging threats, and use strategic, values-based communication to proactively counter false narratives.

6. Empower Local and Regional Planning Bodies

Regional bodies, local governments and community organisations are well-placed to:

- **Facilitate integrated planning processes** that consider environmental, social, and economic outcomes.
- **Convene stakeholders** to build consensus and trust.
- **Negotiate community benefits** and ensure local voices are heard in project siting and design.

This decentralised approach can reduce polarisation and build resilience against disinformation.



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WWF-Australia
GPO Box 528, Sydney NSW 2001
Tel: +1800 032 551 | hello@wwf.org.au | wwf.org.au

For more information

Rob Law

Senior Manager Energy Transitions

rlaw@wwf.org.au

Nat Burke

Head of Regenerative Climate

nburke@wwf.org.au