

## **Re: Federal Government's proposed area for offshore renewables in Commonwealth Waters off the Gippsland coast: Committee for Gippsland Submission**

The Committee for Gippsland (C4G) is pleased to be able to provide this submission into the Notice of proposal to declare Gippsland offshore wind area.

### **About Committee for Gippsland**

C4G is a positive and influential voice for Gippsland helping to create a thriving and sustainable future for the region.

As the region's lead representative voice to government, C4G brings together groups representing various business and industry views and interests to collaborate on regional priorities and outcomes that bring broader benefit to Gippsland communities.

Membership of the C4G includes a diversity of members from across the region including well established industry sectors such as energy, agriculture and health, through to new and emerging businesses as well as those organisations that provide support services, education and professional advice.

In 2022 the C4G launched the [Gippsland Clean Energy Future: Through investment and growth](#) after 12 months of consultation with industry, community and regional leaders.

C4G welcomes the Hon Chris Bowen, Minister for Climate Change and Energy to the Gippsland region to engage with industry and the community on the role offshore wind will play in our region, and how new investment can be supported to ensure positive long-term benefits for the community.

### **About Gippsland**

Gippsland is a diverse and resource driven region. It is 4.2 million hectares in size, with a population of 283,039 people. By 2026, this is forecast to grow to over 300,000 people. With an average travel time of around 90 minutes from Melbourne, Gippsland is serviced by freeway and V/Line rail. It is one of Victoria's eight key regional growth areas, along with Ballarat, Geelong and Bendigo.

The region produces 60 per cent of Victoria's electricity, 70 per cent of Victoria's gas (40 per cent of Eastern Australia's domestic gas), around 23 per cent of Australia's milk output, and about 26 per cent of Victoria's beef production.

Mining and agriculture are key industries and drivers of a vibrant supply chain however, historically energy production has been a large driver of economic activity in Gippsland due to the high concentration of power generators in the region.

The region is positioning itself to transition away from coal-based power production and embracing new clean energy technologies. Local investment continues in solar and battery storage and the region's wind competitive advantage is likely to secure Australia's first offshore windfarm.

Gippsland has a reasonably well diversified economy with health care and social assistance, education, tourism, and public administration being the largest emerging areas of economic activity which may be an outcome of government spending in response to power generation closures.

The region also has a vibrant tourism industry, from small bed and breakfasts and wineries to the largest inland lakes system in the southern hemisphere. It also includes Phillip Island and the Phillip Island Nature Park, which are not only a national icon, but an international draw card attracting millions of international visitors to Victoria each year.

### **Gippsland as an offshore wind destination**

Gippsland, as the region with the most progressed offshore wind project, has the potential to lead Australia in harnessing some of the best conditions in Australia for offshore wind energy generation.

Gippsland also has a proud history of power generation in Victoria and has the skills, expertise and social licence to continue generating power in the state.

As Yallourn and now AGL Loy Yang A having announced their closure dates, the opportunity to embrace, support and enable new energy opportunities is now more important than ever. While Gippsland is the ideal location for Australia's first offshore wind farm, community, government and industry need to work together to ensure there is no unwarranted impediment to the development of this industry.

### **Community engagement**

It is vital that both government and industry work together to ensure a high standard of community engagement is maintained in discussing the opportunities in developing offshore wind in the region.

Good engagement and consultation are vital in ensuring communities and industry are able to embrace the opportunities for offshore wind but also feel heard during the planning and developing stages.

It has been pleasing to see federal and state government commence engagement with the region over the past months which have enabled important conversations with community while also helping broaden the understanding of the projects and the opportunity they present for the region, and Victoria more broadly.

### **Coordinating investment**

The Gippsland region requires further investment from state and federal government to ensure the best possible outcomes when it comes to the coordination of new energy projects in the region. Whether it is planning for transmission networks, deep community engagement, understanding and developing the local supply chain, improved involvement with local Indigenous and community members or mapping the skills pathway for careers in offshore wind, coordination is key to positive outcomes.

Governments at all levels can play a greater role in coordinating the work required to ensure offshore wind is able to be delivered in an efficient and effective timeline. Industry wants to be engaged and connected with this coordination work.

### **Developing a skilled workforce and supporting the supply chain**

Mobilising a skilled workforce will be central to developing the Gippsland offshore wind sector and ensuring that secondary school students understand pathways into careers within the renewable energy space, as well as older workers looking to reskill is vital. Gippsland is fortunate to have vocational and tertiary education institutions that are leading the way in developing new energy education and training opportunities locally.

Industry across the Gippsland supply chain need clear signals from the government to be confident in how and when they seek to reposition themselves in connecting with new supply chain opportunities. Government involvement in supporting the new supply chain will help industry make the necessary investments to enter the new supply chain while creating new employment opportunities for Gippsland locals.

In conclusion, C4G is supportive of the offshore wind sector in Gippsland and the opportunities it will bring to the region as a centre of excellence for the developing offshore wind zone.