

# **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE**

## **Inquiry into Community Consultation Practices**

Melbourne – Friday 22 August 2025

### **MEMBERS**

Ryan Batchelor – Chair

David Ettershank – Deputy Chair

Melina Bath

Gaelle Broad

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Wendy Lovell

Sarah Mansfield

Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

Sheena Watt

**WITNESS** (*via videoconference*)

Dr Kendra Clegg, Chair, Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Partnership.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back to the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee's Inquiry into Community Consultation Practices. We are now joined by our witness from the Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Partnership. Welcome.

All evidence that we take is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during the hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of the Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

Welcome. My name is Ryan Batchelor. I am the Chair of the committee and a Member for the Southern Metropolitan Region. I will ask members of the committee to introduce themselves. Wendy?

**Wendy LOVELL:** Hi, I am Wendy Lovell. I am a Member for Northern Victoria Region.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** Hello, I am Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, a Member for the Northern Victoria Region.

**Melina BATH:** Good afternoon. Melina Bath, Eastern Victoria Region.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Hi, I am Gaelle Broad. I am also a Member for Northern Victoria Region.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Jacinta Ermacora, Member for Western Victoria Region. Hello.

**Kendra CLEGG:** Hello.

**The CHAIR:** For the record, if you could you just state your name and the organisation you are appearing on behalf of, please.

**Kendra CLEGG:** Kendra Clegg, Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Partnership.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks very much, Kendra, for coming along today. A pretty straightforward structure to this: we will invite you to make an opening statement and then we will get into questions. Over to you.

**Kendra CLEGG:** Thank you. Thanks so much for this opportunity to provide input from the perspective of the Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Partnership. As mentioned, my name is Kendra Clegg, and I am Chair of the partnership, which is a volunteer community role. Thanks also for enabling me to access this session online. I join you from the lands of the Wotjobaluk people in Murtoa, near Horsham.

Like the other regional partnerships throughout Victoria, we are deeply invested in shaping the future of this region, with a focus on six priority areas that have targeted focuses and measurements for outputs over the next 12 months. Through these priorities and the work we do, we are aware of how communication occurs and we are also conscious of the feedback through the various networks we receive on what is being asked of community at various levels. So when this opportunity came up to provide feedback or input on community consultation practices, we jumped at that opportunity to share our thoughts as a way to contribute and to reduce collective feelings of consultation fatigue – that is, through those seemingly repetitive or disconnected approaches and what we feel is a growing sentiment of disempowerment. Despite active engagement from our community's part, we feel that the community has continued to share that 'Things are done to us rather than led by us.' We feel that community consultation is increasingly seen as a step to compliance, rather than a genuine relationship being established to take us to a collective outcome.

Our communities are largely enthusiastic and active participants in consultations for all tiers of government and related services, and there is a real, genuine willingness to be engaged. The challenge is that sense of saturation of engagement and overengagement with a lack of follow-up or evidence of what the residents' time has

contributed to, or the consultation occurs through groups like ours, a regional partnership, which we do not really see as a form of community consultation because we are not a community information conduit.

The main concerns that the regional partnership brought to you about the community consultation processes were the multiple consultations with minimal feedback, which I have touched on; ensuring that when we have community consultation it is in context and it is relevant to the region or to the areas that we are focused on; and over-reliance on external consultants, which draws on that lack of local knowledge or limits that meaningful engagement, or lack of trust. We also have concerns about digital barriers, given that we have an above-average regional cohort of aged demographics, and also generic designs, which I touched on earlier, and that opt-in approach that community consultation often has, which disadvantages our under-represented voices in our community of the Wimmera Southern Mallee region. How am I going for time? Can I keep going?

**The CHAIR:** You keep going. Take as long as you need.

**Kendra CLEGG:** Great. The Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Partnership believes that broad community consultation is achievable by being coordinated, respectful and empowering. We feel that there are opportunities through having place-based and inclusive design and having coordinated place-based approaches and mandated feedback loops as well as tracking outcomes that build that accountability through something like a simple dashboard that shows the progress on the consultation moving from consultation to action.

Just to bring that together, we feel that one of our strengths in the Wimmera Southern Mallee is our people. We are genuinely community-minded, and to that end there is a strong willingness and a high willingness to engage on all levels and in all avenues, but to support this continuation of community engagement, minimise that growing sense of fatigue and avoid what we feel is a growing disengagement, we are really keen to encourage that community consultation into the future is respectful, coordinated and responsive and it values a person's time, knowledge and the local and regional context.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Kendra. We really appreciate that statement. I will kick off the questioning. Earlier today we had evidence from academics and experts about what best practice looks like, what international standards should be, how we should do things, what the theory tells us and what the evidence tells us. One of the things that came up earlier today was that we should be moving more towards place-based approaches to consultation. I note that the first thing in your recommendations and your submission is for a regional consultation coordination model.

**Kendra CLEGG:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** So you have a little bit got the theory meeting the practice head on. What would that look like in your mind? What problems that currently exist are you seeking to overcome, and what benefits do you think would arise from having such a regional coordination model for consultation practices?

**Kendra CLEGG:** My apologies, I missed that last sentence.

**The CHAIR:** What benefits do you think would come from having such a coordinated model?

**Kendra CLEGG:** I touched on the challenges in terms of the fly-in, fly-out model of external consultants. If you are one individual in a community, the stream of inputs that that individual receives, often on the same topic and diverse topics, is really challenging. As I said, the person wants to contribute, but you have only got so much time in a day. By being coordinated at a regional level, it ensures that the mechanism understands what channels are being inputted on each topic. If you want to explore how a community is going to respond to renewable energy or do consultation on the renewable energy – I am going to use the wrong word here – pathway, then it enables a channel to process that and understand all the different points of contact and then put out what is relevant and local to that context and to the community, and then it is able to provide feedback on how that consultation is occurring.

I think it also brings authority and credibility when you have a regional or a locally based coordination mechanism that understands its people and understands the demographics – when I say the people – and how to engage. It is no longer opt-in, and you can actually be quantitative in your approach – so you are representational – of how you are engaging with people. Therefore it is actually more true and realistic

feedback on what you are trying to seek through the consultation process. All communities also feel respected and heard in that model.

In terms of good practice, we do have examples of this, and over time in the Wimmera and Southern Mallee we have had good examples of this. One is things like government hubs or central hubs where information and coordination occurs.

**The CHAIR:** What would that look like if you are living in a local town and you want to know what was going on? How do you see that working at a practical level?

**Kendra CLEGG:** It would have a front end that is accessible by the public during office hours, and that person is able to be like a conduit or a connector to whatever the questions are. But that is the front end. Then the back end would be where the real work is done on coordinating what the messages are in community consultation and what is required.

I do want to just provide another quick example – sorry, I am jumping quickly.

**The CHAIR:** No, that is good.

**Kendra CLEGG:** We do have the independent body here, the Wimmera Southern Mallee Development association. We have also seen that time and time again this body has provided really good practice in engaging and leading community consultation. They are able to understand quickly. They back it up with tapping into Federation University for social research, as an example, to understand the issue, and then they get the collective community members or representatives together to determine: is this a suitable outcome? Then they are able to design a project that is actually relevant to the geographic area and the demographics of the area so therefore it has meaningful outcomes. So I feel that those independent bodies are actually an incredibly useful tool as well.

**The CHAIR:** We are hearing from Wimmera Southern Mallee Development next, so no doubt we will ask them. The other thing that we have heard a lot about is feedback loops. Again, you raised in your submission – and it has been raised by experts earlier – that people have got to understand why their consultation processes matter, why the engagement matters and what impact it has had. At a practical level, what do you see better feedback loops looking like? Where have you found deficiencies in the current practice?

**Kendra CLEGG:** Efficiencies?

**The CHAIR:** Deficiencies.

**Kendra CLEGG:** One that comes to mind from the regional partnership, as an example: we were invited to participate in the treaty – again, my language is not going to nail the names – and this was in about November last year. It was a really great opportunity to engage with the government on the future, and it was a call to arms to get community leaders to stand up and advocate for outcomes of the treaty. We all stood up and we all pledged, ‘We’re behind this and we want this to occur. We know that we can influence our communities.’ All we asked were tailored communication products. The communications team were in this treaty consultation – I think it was called the regional treaty roadshow or something like that – now almost a year ago, and I publicly stood up and asked if we could have tailored messaging relevant to our area. We are very unique and we are very challenged – I am sure many areas are – but our challenges we can articulate, and if you work with us we can assist to support with the language so that it is tailored to our area. The communications team – I think it was Terry Garwood, said, ‘Yes, we’ll get in contact with you, and we’ll send you the communication packages through the regional partnership.’ To this day we have not received any communications, so it makes it really challenging, because we want to stand up and we want to lead and we want to support, but if we do not get the loop back we do not even know what channel to go down to follow up through. That is one – there are so many. But the other one, when we talk about, I guess, the heightened topic of the day for the Wimmera Southern Mallee, which is renewables, transmissions and mining, is the ability to track tangible outcomes. There has been a lot of input provided over the last few years, but there is no traction or feeling of what that means, so then people who were engaged become disengaged and people who felt that they were getting somewhere also become disengaged. Sorry if I went down a rabbit hole.

**The CHAIR:** No. That is excellent. Ms Bath, do you want to –

**Melina BATH:** Thank you. Thank you very much, Kendra. You mentioned in one of your comments that you are not a community consultation conduit. Can you expand on that?

**Kendra CLEGG:** The regional partnership is really about targeting economic opportunities for the future. We come together collectively to determine ways forward and how we can navigate economic development and opportunity. I am happy to be corrected, but we do not see our role as being the community communication conduit. So, having an increasing amount of government agencies or services come and want to present to the regional partnership about their programs and policies – the number of requests have been increasing over the past year or two – we have had to actually limit the amount of time that we can give to these services, because we want to discuss our future investment in our region, we want to move it forward, and these presentations actually take time to listen to and we do not feel contribute to the direction of our six priorities. Some of our members are voicing concern that these presentations on policies and programs are a way to tick a box that that is community consultation, because it stops with us. We actually do not go out into community. We do not have a media element to what we do. We do not go out into community and spruik policies and programs that were presented to us, if that makes sense. We are not an avenue to communicate to community.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you. In no way do I want to verbal you, but you have been talking about, for example, treaty and your understanding of treaty and the discussion. Where does the line when you are an advocacy group for economic pathways finish, and where does philosophy or a vision? How do you balance that for your community, noting that there will be a diversity of views in your community?

**Kendra CLEGG:** I really love that question. Thank you so much. Because right there is our challenge as a regional partnership. The demographics of our area have some of the lowest socio-economic indicators. It is the really harsh reality of what we deal with, and we want to move into the future and we want to be an economic powerhouse, but to do that we need to lift our bottom line. In ensuring that we move forward, we need to make sure our community – everyone – comes with us, and everyone is our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, our traditional owners that are here. We need to be partnered and connected with them. We have done huge work through the regional partnership on initiatives for the zero-to-five child program, the By Five program. These initiatives come out of the regional partnership, and I absolutely take on board that these are not about economic futures, but we see them as related. If we cannot support our children, if we cannot bring everyone along on the journey, we are actually not developing, we are actually not going forward, we are only supporting a few. We see the connection there, and one of our five priorities is the care economy, and that is really recognising the importance of delving into this space and making sure that we are targeting our children zero to five, our aged care and the workforce that supports them. I hope that answers that question.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you. That is fabulous. The Closing the Gap targets are really important. That is something that is part of that work is what you are saying?

**Kendra CLEGG:** Well, we see it as relevant, absolutely.

**Melina BATH:** Great. You mentioned bushfires, regional bushfires, in your submission and the impact of major bushfires. Can you explain from a community point of view how that can impact, and have you had any feedback from your community about whether they feel that from the impact of bushfires there is a good conduit for information to government, to emergency services or the like? What is your community saying about the bushfires? How do they feel? Are they being heard or are they not being heard? Just develop that.

**Kendra CLEGG:** Thank you for that question. I would love to comment, but due to a personal conflict of interest, I will not be able to be in a position to, but I would be happy to take it on notice and get feedback, but only to say that the regional partnership does not really focus on that space, but acknowledges that there is that compounding fatigue that comes out of community consultation in that space. But I would be happy to take that on notice.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you very much. In relation to renewable energy – certainly over in that patch – and I am sure other colleagues will touch on this as well because I have limited time left, I think you might have mentioned that this is being done to us rather than being done by us. That is what the community feel. Can you develop how that plays out in the likes of energy and transmission lines? How is that playing out in your community?

**Kendra CLEGG:** Yes, absolutely, and thank you for asking. Thank you for the question. I guess I can wrap it up really quickly by saying that this is arguable, because people will say that the transmission – in the Wimmera Southern Mallee, we find it very hard now within community to separate transmission lines, renewable energy and the mining. They have really come together from a community perspective very tightly. To wrap it up, yes, mining and renewables have been in the process for a long time, and we have seen some really good practice of community engagement through some of these projects. But in the last two years, it feels incredibly rapid from a community perspective, and then that sense of disempowerment has really escalated. I would say that has resulted in a response of anger and therefore caused a bit of an inability to hear anymore or consult anymore. If we are not on the same level, if we are not speaking the same language, then there is an inability to hear that now. So, yes, I would say that – I am not sure if I am hitting your question. Sorry, I go into my own head.

**Melina BATH:** Yes, you did. My time is up, but I think it is also about trust. People have lost trust in that process.

**Kendra CLEGG:** Yes, and I think that comes back to that loop of feedback. There has been lots of consultation. If I go to a very specific example – and I am not going to say the right title of the plan, I do apologise – we, being the regional partnership and local councils, have been providing input into the transmission renewable energy zone plan and the consultation process. We were really comfortable, as a broad sense, from the regional partnership councils, and I was getting feedback from many communities about the plan, the draft that was released I think in May 2025 – and I apologise about my inaccuracy of timelines if that is not true and correct. On Sunday we had an updated version that stated it was based on community consultation with a much broader renewable energy zone shaded out, and that has just had the most unimaginable negative impact or backlash from community who felt they – yes. So the trust is absolutely gone for those communities. From the Wimmera Southern Mallee Development Association and councils, I am not sure, but from the regional partnership perspective, we will continue to do our best to engage and continue to have the conversation. But it is really challenging when communities feel that things are being done to them and their voices are not being heard. Then the disengagement often becomes anger and counterproductive to our development as a community.

**The CHAIR:** Right. Ms Tyrrell.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** Thank you, Chair. If we stick on the subject of feedback, you were saying how important that is. Can you break apart the different types of feedback that the community would like to see and how you expect them to be delivered to make sure that it is efficient and really makes that impact that we want?

**Kendra CLEGG:** Thank you for your question. I appreciate that we do not want to add burden to those who are trying to develop something that is to the benefit of the community, the aim of community consultation. We did unpack that as a regional partnership, what that would look like – we thought perhaps a feedback loop. So, one, acknowledgement that the feedback has been received and what will be done with it. And once that feedback has perhaps moved down the chain, that something has occurred. So how could we do that in an easy way? We thought perhaps a dashboard, where the public, if they are interested to pursue it – so it is not just another email in their inbox that they never see, but it is something that they are interested in – are the ones that log in to an online dashboard that will tell them where their feedback has got to or where the process has got to. Another one that we would say when it comes to things like renewable energy, as an example, is about starting to see the tangible output of what is occurring. So that consultation loop that feels like it is never-ending, where is an end product or something tangible that community can touch, feel and see?

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** That is good. Do you think that in certain different areas of the community we would need to adapt a different type of feedback system? Like, say, especially if there is a lack of internet access in certain areas, we would have to deliver it in a different way.

**Kendra CLEGG:** Yes, thank you for your question. That is really –

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** That is okay. I just want to make sure we get it right.

**Kendra CLEGG:** Yes. We do have the digital access challenges here, and it is not so much related to internet security. I think we are really good for those who are digitally able. We have got a higher-than-average regional age cohort from a regional perspective and I think it is about enabling access and touch for this cohort.

That is where I come back to that regional base, where if we had a place-based coordination space where people could come and have a conversation with a person, that person could perhaps show them on the digital dashboard where things are up to or actually have a conversation. It would be very meaningful. It would be really, really amazing.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** It sounds very practical.

**Kendra CLEGG:** Yes. Thank you.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Ermacora.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Hi, Kendra. I am also online, from Warrnambool. I wish I had a beautiful picture behind me as well. Thanks for your contribution. It is really important to hear the voices from what I call outer-regional communities, which I always say are really different to the experiences of inner-regional communities. I just wonder whether there is this notion that some departmental teams visit inner regional, you know, and do a bit of consultation or even a bit of outreach from inner-regional cities like Bendigo, Ballarat, Geelong, for instance, and sort of tick the regional box. I wonder whether you feel that there is more to it than that that is not being recognised? Perhaps – is there another box?

**Kendra CLEGG:** Thank you for your question, and hopefully I answer this well. From a regional partnership's perspective, we do feel that Ballarat is considered regional and rural and that is the end of the story, whereas there is all the Wimmera Southern Mallee that comes thereafter. But from a regional partnership membership perspective, we have excellent engagement from the government representatives that are always in person at every meeting that we have and are always made available. The Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Partnership secretariat is actually Regional Development Victoria, and they have these Horsham staff that just started about a year ago, our Horsham team, and they are phenomenal. They go all-out, and their connection and networks are amazing. I think that goes back to that place. To answer, yes, I think the Ballarat connection does work, but at the same time there is nothing that can go past what has been achieved by a place-based team, because they get to know the businesses, they get to know our different communities, the community leaders, the councillors, who are our representatives, and they are the ones who can get their voices out and influence.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Kendra, sorry to interrupt. Are you saying that where a department like Regional Development Victoria are actually located out in your community beyond Ballarat, that that model does work more effectively and that perhaps some other government departments do not do that as well?

**Kendra CLEGG:** Yes, absolutely, thank you. Yes, I absolutely would say from a regional partnership's perspective that we do see place-based offices as effective – for example, the Regional Development Victoria Horsham office. What we do not see as effective, if I can draw another example, is – I am going to get the department's name wrong – Resources Victoria. They have good engagement through the regional partnerships, and we have been crying out for more engagement in community, so they have responded to that by putting a staff member into Horsham – excellent. However, that staff member is not accessible to the public, because they are within a government facility that the public cannot walk into to ask questions when they are passing by Horsham. I think part of our fabric, and who we are as a culture, is really about that genuine human-to-human interaction. Nothing comes second to it for the Wimmera Southern Mallee, and I think people find trust really hard to build when they cannot see someone and feel how that person is reacting to their story or what they are saying.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Would you say, even as a potential recommendation for this inquiry, that communities beyond the inner regional communities ought to be structurally included in community consultation?

**Kendra CLEGG:** That would be an incredible outcome, if we could have place-based representation of the government that wants to engage in community consultation. That would be outstanding, yes.

**Jacinta ERMACORA:** Fantastic. I will leave it there, thanks, Chair. Thanks, Kendra.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Mrs Broad.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Thank you, Kendra. Gaelle here. I just wanted to ask you – you mentioned the By Five program. When we are talking about community consultation, I heard Jo Martin, the Executive Officer of By Five, speaking recently at the rural councils forum up at Yarrowonga. My understanding of that initiative is that it did take years to develop; it seemed to be something that had been developed locally back in 2016, and I think then the government announced in 2017 they would work towards something, and it took years of development. It got some funding in 2021 – I think it was \$2.8 million from the Victorian government – but then in this year's budget it got cancelled, with no further funding. Can you just talk to that process, because that is an example of what looks like a long period of community consultation, but are you then consulted about no more funding? How does that work on the ground?

**Kendra CLEGG:** Thank you for your question, and the short answer is no. There was no consultation. We were all holding our breath for the May budget, and we were all, I would say, collectively as a broader community, heartbroken. As I said, when it comes to things like child care and supporting the outcomes of our children from birth through to five years, which are the fundamental ages to create change – and we all know this: our outcomes for our children are equal to that of the Northern Territory. We feel that as Victorians that is not really a standard we want to be part of, so we really want to uplift our children and the families and support networks that support this. The By Five program was the answer to that. It brought so much excellent collaboration from the health sector and education sector together to wrap around our children to bring them up. We have seen those results demonstrated and be effective within that really short timeframe, I believe, of 2016 until today. So when the budget came out with no outcome, we were quite heartbroken. It is really a credit to those that are involved in the By Five program. I am not; I am more on the recipient end with my children. But it is a credit to them. They went to every network possible and rattled every tree so they could continue a skeleton part of that program with the Royal Children's Hospital still engaging with our children today. They are incredible humans, and I think that is just a reflection of what the Wimmera Southern Mallee people are. They are people that truly believe in our communities and really want to see growth and progress.

**Gaelle BROAD:** I guess the early years is one of your priorities in your documentation. How do you feel that engagement – or where is the communication at now with the government about this particular program?

**Kendra CLEGG:** Thank you for your question. If I may delay that question for Wimmera Southern Mallee Development association, because they have taken on the program. The Regional Partnership was part of the beginnings of that process back in 2016. We have continued to advocate because we have seen how effective it is, but the Wimmera Southern Mallee Development association has taken it on as the umbrella to the By Five program.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Perfect. Thank you. I am just interested in your thoughts on the Engage Victoria website. I noticed your submission talks about digital barriers potentially, but have you got any feedback on what needs to improve or change in that? What are your thoughts?

**Kendra CLEGG:** We love the Engage Victoria platform, but it is interesting that it feels like a little bit of an opt in – no, it is an opt in: it does not feel like that. It is an opt in approach. So for those of us that are seeking opportunities to get our voices in and get heard to move forward, we are in there navigating these spaces. I think if it is to truly be an engage platform, it needs to be accessible, it needs to be known. I do not think there is familiarity with the platform. And then we talk about that digital connectivity that I spoke to earlier. We need other avenues and ways of building awareness that this opportunity is there.

**Gaelle BROAD:** And when you talk about the disengaged parts of your community, how do you recommend government engage with them?

**Kendra CLEGG:** If I talk about disengagement from two parts, one is those who are perhaps apathetic and not typically willing because life is busy and it is challenging to engage, to find the time. Having that place-based presence is a real way to find different mediums that are relevant to different cohorts to have the direct impact or communication and engage that way. The other is the disengagement that has come through over-consultation or the feeling that their voices are not heard, so they are providing the input and then not feeling heard. I think that is going to take time. Time and trust are the two elements that will be able to overcome that disengagement.



**Gaelle BROAD:** The renewables have been touched on already, but I guess I hear about footy clubs where there is such division people do not share the same change room. What impact is it having on the communities, and do you have any advice for how to move forward?

**Kendra CLEGG:** On a personal level it definitely impacts me in multiple ways through my children, through school council, through the town committee and many other ways. I definitely see it in the football club. I think through the Regional Partnership we have been advocating for this as well, for increased accessibility to people, to have conversations with people who have the knowledge. For people to be present, to build trust and relationships and rapport with communities, I think, is one of the main ways that we can do it. If there was any way to provide time as well for people to digest and come to terms with it, as well as the most important bit at this stage, which I think is having something tangible that we can touch, feel and see to demonstrate the why.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Lovell.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Thanks, Kendra. How are people appointed to the regional partnership? Is it just council representatives?

**Kendra CLEGG:** The regional partnership is promoted through newspapers. We tap people on shoulders. It is widely advertised every two years for roles in the regional partnership. We have community representatives like me, and there are five of us on the regional partnership that are volunteer roles. Then the really key elements are the CEOs of the five local government areas or the five councils. They are so engaged and always attend; they are incredible. And they lead – I mentioned there were six pillars. The five councillors lead five of those six pillars, of those priorities that we have, so they are really engaged and they are really driving forward. Then we have the Victorian government-relevant representatives for development as well.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Right. Thank you. I understand that your role is to sort of promote the priorities of the region to the government. But in your submission, you talk about how your area is experiencing significant change from agriculture to some more high-impact industries such as renewable energy and mining. I just wondered if your expertise is actually used in any way by the government before these types of projects are imposed on communities in your area?

**Kendra CLEGG:** Yes. Thank you for your question. Just to say, perhaps expertise might be a stretch because we are just community volunteers –

**Wendy LOVELL:** No, you are experts in your communities.

**Kendra CLEGG:** Thank you. The regional partnership's priority areas, one of our six priorities is on the clean energy economy, and that really taps into making sure we have got the right people at the table. We also utilise – I forgot to mention one of the regional partnership members is the Wimmera Southern Mallee Development association that we touched on earlier, and they have been going out and doing some fantastic consultation processes to make sure we have got the right government people at the table. This was even as late as yesterday. They have a renewable energy roundtable quarterly, and that brings all the different renewable projects together to talk about it and to talk about how we can move forward effectively from the local level, so trying to come up with local solutions to how we address these matters. I am not sure if that touches on engaging expertise effectively.

**Wendy LOVELL:** I am more interested in whether the government actually consults you, or whether it is only through your advocacy putting stuff forward to government.

**Kendra CLEGG:** Yes. Thank you. So yes, I should have been clearer. VicGrid is always coming to talk with us. Alistair Parker has been quite regularly to the regional partnership. He is very frank with us and always addresses our questions. Also, whenever we request representation there is a presence, so we get really good support and guidance when we request it. But it is the next step. It is how to get it out into community that we are looking for.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Right. What do you see happening locally on the ground in the way of consultation around these things? Obviously we have had significant numbers from your communities on the front steps of Parliament on a regular basis in recent times about different issues. Are you seeing there is good engagement locally? Obviously there is something wrong if people are here on the steps.

**Kendra CLEGG:** Yes. Thank you for your question and observation. That is definitely why we want to see an opportunity, I guess, to get more place-based and build that trust by having representatives here that are accessible in person to start to build those connections and have that communication with communities. There is so much opportunity to build on our communication with communities. There has definitely been a void if they cannot be there, and so by having a void there is opportunity for misinformation and there is opportunity for growing anger and resentment – as you said, that combination of issues. From us as community leaders, it is really hard to start to pull those apart because they have really come together as one big issue.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Okay. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Kendra, thanks so much for the evidence you have given today and for taking some time to engage with us on this really important topic. We really appreciate the thoughtful way you have contributed and the colour your background has brought to the proceedings of the Parliament today. You will be provided with a copy of the transcript to review shortly, and with that the community will take a short break.

**Witness withdrew.**