



Australian Government

**Australian Government response to the Climate Change
Authority's Review of the National Wind Farm
Commissioner**

October 2018

Introduction

The Government welcomes the findings of the Climate Change Authority's (the Authority) review of the role of the National Wind Farm Commissioner (the Commissioner).

The independent Authority found that overall the role of the Commissioner had exceeded expectations and had a positive impact when dealing with community concerns about wind farms.

The Authority conducted a public consultation as part of this review and received 66 submissions (14 of which were confidential).

The Authority delivered its final review report on 31 May 2018 which included 11 detailed recommendations. The Government's response to the recommendations is set out below.

Some recommendations refer to improvements to be implemented by the National Wind Farm Commissioner. The Government will write to the Commissioner requesting that the suggested improvements are implemented by the office. It will be for the Commissioner's office to implement the relevant recommendations as it deems appropriate.

Recommendation 1

The National Wind Farm Commissioner include advice on meeting participation in the Office's complaints handling policy to further clarify how support people and industry representatives can attend conciliation meetings after consultation with those participating.

Response: The Government *accepts* this recommendation.

The Government will ask the National Wind Farm Commissioner to update the complaints handling policy and the Commissioner's "*A Guide to Conciliation Meetings*" to reflect its current practice and address this recommendation.

Recommendation 2

The National Wind Farm Commissioner engage with state and local governments to explore ways to improve community awareness of the complaints handling role.

Response: The Government *accepts* this recommendation. Implementation is underway.

The Government will ask the National Wind Farm Commissioner to consider additional strategies to improve awareness in each jurisdiction.

Recommendation 3

The National Wind Farm Commissioner inform people when their complaint is closed and provide a reason for closure. The Commissioner should advise stakeholders the Office can re-open their complaint if material new information becomes available. The Commissioner should further advise stakeholders they can seek a review of the Commissioner's handling of their complaint through the Commonwealth Ombudsman.

Response: The Government *accepts* this recommendation. Implementation is underway.

The Government supports open and transparent communication with stakeholders. Ensuring complainants are kept informed on the progress of their complaints, including closure, is an important part of this transparency.

The Government will ask the Commissioner to update the Commissioner's complaints handling policy and procedures in line with this recommendation, including clearer advice on how a complainant may request a review of their complaint (and, if applicable, the proposed resolution of the matter) by the Commissioner and how a complainant may seek a review of the Commissioner's office handling of their complaint by the Commonwealth Ombudsman's office.

Recommendation 4

The National Wind Farm Commissioner develop key performance indicators (KPIs) to indicate timeframes associated with the complaints handling process and report against the KPIs in annual reports, noting that more complex cases will require more time and resources to resolve.

Response: The Government *accepts* this recommendation. Implementation is underway.

The Government will ask the National Wind Farm Commissioner to include these KPIs in the complaints handling process.

The Government will ask the Commissioner to update the complaints handling policy and reporting frameworks in line with this recommendation and the updated Terms of Reference where appropriate.

Recommendation 5

The National Wind Farm Commissioner include in the complaints handling policy guidance on how stakeholders can provide feedback on the complaints handling process.

Response: The Government *accepts* this recommendation.

Working with stakeholders is a key part of the Commissioner's role. The Government recognises it would be valuable for the Commissioner to receive feedback which may assist in streamlining and improving processes and outcomes of the office.

The Government will ask the Commissioner to update the complaints handling policy in line with this recommendation and to identify appropriate avenues for stakeholders to provide more structured feedback on the complaints handling process.

Recommendation 6

The National Wind Farm Commissioner's recommendations on best practice for wind farms should be given greater prominence in a summary document on the Office's website to make them more accessible to stakeholders.

Response: The Government *accepts* this recommendation.

The Government supports ensuring information is easily accessible. The office of the National Wind Farm Commissioner has undertaken the work identified in this recommendation and the recommendations have now been placed in a separate document prominently on the Commissioner's website.

Recommendation 7

The role of the National Wind Farm Commissioner should continue for another three years until 2021 when the Government should re-evaluate the ongoing need for the role.

Response: The Government *accepts* this recommendation.

The Government will update the Terms of Reference for the Commissioner to reflect the continuation of the role until 31 October 2021.

Recommendation 8

The National Wind Farm Commissioner's scope be expanded to cover large scale solar and storage such as large scale batteries as well as wind farms.

Response: The Government *accepts* this recommendation.

The National Wind Farm Commissioner was established by the Government in line with the Government's commitment to respond to community concerns about wind farms.

While the government is not currently aware of a systemic problem with the development of large scale solar or battery facilities, the Commissioner could usefully play an important role in

assisting the industry to be proactive and effective in community engagement related to such projects as well as assisting in resolving matters where there is significant community concern.

The Government will update the Terms of Reference for the Commissioner as needed to reflect the expanded scope.

Recommendation 9

The National Wind Farm Commissioner lead work with the states and territories, including broader consultation, to develop voluntary harmonised guidelines for community consultation, complaints handling and standards e.g. for noise and set back distances.

Response: The Government *accepts* this recommendation.

The National Wind Farm Commissioner currently engages with state and local governments as needed to discuss a wide variety of topics. The Government supports that work continuing. It is a matter for the states and territories to harmonise the guidelines.

Recommendation 10

The Australian Government consider the need for a modest increase in resourcing for the Office of the National Wind Farm Commissioner, in light of the recommendation to expand the Commissioner's role and noting developments in community responses to the wind, solar and large scale battery industries.

Response: The Government *accepts* this recommendation.

The Government will provide appropriate resourcing for the role.

Recommendation 11

The National Wind Farm Commissioner's role should continue to be funded by the Australian Government and re-evaluated in 2021.

Response: The Government *accepts* this recommendation.

See recommendation 7.