

First Nations people must be at the forefront of Australia's renewable energy revolution, say researchers

February 8 2024, by Adam Fish and Heidi Norman



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Australia's [plentiful](#) solar and wind resources and proximity to Asia means it can become a renewable energy superpower. But as the renewable energy rollout continues, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must benefit.

Renewables projects can provide income and jobs to Aboriginal land owners. Access to clean energy can also help First Nations people protect their culture and heritage, and [remain on Country](#).

This is not a new idea. Policies in the United States and Canada, for example, actively seek to ensure the energy transition delivers opportunities to Indigenous people.

The Australian government is developing a [First Nations Clean Energy Strategy](#) and is seeking comment on a [consultation paper](#). Submissions close tomorrow, February 9. If you feel strongly about the issue, we urge you to have your say.

We must get this policy right. Investing meaningfully in First Nations-led clean energy projects makes the transition more likely to succeed. What's more, recognizing the rights and interests of First Nations people is vital to ensuring that injustices of the past are not repeated.

Good for business, and people

Indigenous peoples have recognized land interests covering around [26% of Australia's landmass](#). Research shows Aboriginal land holders want to be part of the energy transition. But they need support and resources.

This could take the form of federal grants to make communities more energy-efficient or less reliant on expensive, polluting diesel generators. Funding could also be spent on workforce training to ensure First Nations people have the skills to take part in the transition. Federal

agencies could be funded to support grants for First Nations feasibility studies of renewable energy industry on their land.

As well as proper investment, governments must also ensure First Nations people are engaged early in the planning of renewable projects and that the practice of free prior and informed consent is followed. And renewable energy operators will also need to ensure they have capability to work with First peoples.

The [First Nations Clean Energy Network](#)—of which one author, Heidi Norman, is part—is a network of First Nations people, community organizations, land councils, unions, academics, industry groups and others. It is working to ensure First Nations communities share the benefits of the clean energy boom.

The network is among a group of organizations calling on the federal government to invest an additional A\$100 billion into the Australian renewables industry. The investment should be designed to benefit all Australians, including First Nations people.

In Australia, the Albanese government has set an emissions-reduction goal of a 43% by 2030, based on 2005 levels. But Australia's renewable energy rollout is not happening fast enough to meet this goal. Climate Change Minister Chris Bowen has [called for](#) faster planning decisions on renewable energy projects.

To achieve the targets, however, the federal government must bring communities along with them—including First Nations people.

As demonstrated by the US and Canada, investing [meaningfully and at scale](#) in First Nations-led clean energy projects is not just equitable, it makes good business sense.

Follow the leaders

The US Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 made A\$520 billion in investments to accelerate the transition to net zero. [Native Americans stand](#) to [receive](#) hundreds of billions of dollars from the laws. This includes funding set aside for Tribal-specific programs.

Canada is even further ahead in this policy space. In fact, analysis [shows](#) First Nations, Métis and Inuit entities are partners or beneficiaries of almost 20% of Canada's electricity-generating infrastructure, almost all of which is producing renewable energy. In one of the most recent investments, the Canadian government in 2022 invested [C\\$300 million](#) to help [First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples](#) launch clean energy projects.

Policymakers in [both countries](#) increasingly realize that a just transition from fossil fuels requires addressing the priorities of First Nations communities. These investments are a starting point for building sustainable, globally competitive economies that work for everyone.

As US and Canada examples [demonstrate](#), the right scale of investment in First Nations-led projects can mean fewer legal delays and a much-needed social license to operate.

Dealing with the climate risk

First Nations people around the world are on the [frontline of climate change](#). It threatens their homelands, food sources, cultural resources and ways of life.

First Nations have also experienced chronic under-investment in their energy infrastructure by governments over generations, both in Australia and [abroad](#).

Investing in First Nations-led [clean energy](#) projects [builds climate resilience](#). This was demonstrated by the federal government's Bushlight program, which ran from 2002 to 2013. It involved renewable energy systems installed in remote communities in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland.

Bushlight's solar power meant that communities were not dependent on the delivery of diesel. So they still had power if roads were closed by flooding or other climate disasters.

Australia must get moving

The Biden government's Inflation Reduction Act prompted a [swift reaction](#) from governments around the world. But after 15 months, Australia is yet to respond or develop equivalent legislation.

We must urgently [develop our response](#) and seize this unique opportunity to become world leaders in the global renewables race. That includes ensuring First Nations participate in and benefit from these developments.

More information: The First Nations Clean Energy Strategy consultation paper can be found [here](#). Feedback can be provided [here](#).

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: First Nations people must be at the forefront of Australia's renewable energy revolution, say researchers (2024, February 8) retrieved 27 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2024-02-nations-people-forefront-australia-renewable.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.